Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD comments on the Libraries Taskforce document Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 - 2021

Introduction

The Communications Consumer Panel and the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People (ACOD) welcome this opportunity to comment on the Libraries Taskforce document Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 – 2021.

The Panel works to protect and promote people's interests in the communications sector. We are an independent body set up under the Communications Act 2003. The Panel carries out research, provides advice and encourages Ofcom, governments, the EU, industry and others to look at issues through the eyes of consumers, citizens and microbusinesses. The Panel pays particular attention to the needs of older people and people with disabilities, the needs of people in rural areas and people on low incomes, and the needs of micro businesses, which have many of the same problems as individual consumers. There are four members of the Panel who represent the interests of consumers in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales respectively. They liaise with the key stakeholders in the Nations to understand the perspectives of consumers in all parts of the UK and input these perspectives to the Panel's consideration of issues.

There is also cross-membership with Ofcom's Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People (ACOD). This means that Members, in their ACOD capacity, also provide advice to Ofcom on issues relating to older and disabled people including television, radio and other content on services regulated by Ofcom as well as about issues concerning the postal sector.

Comments

The Independent Library Report for England called for a national strategy which could articulate what public libraries in England are and why they are a force for good for us all. At the request of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce has developed a draft Ambition document for public libraries in England. The purpose of the document is to provide a focus for collaborative action, and a clear articulation of the Government's and the Taskforce's vision and support for public libraries in England. It also provides a confirmation of how libraries support and add value to a range of local and national policy priorities and link to practical examples of existing good practice.

3 June 2016

Our Members were delighted to have given oral evidence to the independent Panel led by William Sieghart and we welcome this opportunity to comment on the draft Ambition document which aims to set out how stakeholders will work together to deliver a sustainable, high quality public library network which continues to meet people's changing needs and expectations.

We would fully support the independent libraries Panel's statement that "The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community. It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning." William Sieghart & Panel, Independent Library Report for England

Similarly, we would agree with the challenge to libraries identified by the Carnegie UK Trust "The challenge which public libraries face is to continue to be the kind of places which Andrew Carnegie wanted when he funded libraries:

- places that give people a chance, a second chance and even a third chance
- places that improve the communities they are based in
- places that respond to the needs of local people, giving them the opportunity to live fuller lives, make more of what they have, discover new worlds and aspire to greater things" Speaking Volumes, Carnegie UK Trust

The seven purposes outlined in the consultation document encompass what libraries should be for, and we applaud their clear articulation. We believe that there is a strong case Purpose 2 – Digital Literacy – underpinning the other six. Without digital literacy – leading to digital engagement and participation – the potential for realising the purposes collectively will in our view be diminished. And the other purposes – general literacy, health and wellbeing, economic growth, culture and creativity, communities, learning – will be supported, enhanced and have a wider reach through digital literacy.

Digital Engagement

Levels of Digital Engagement

While the advantages of online connectivity apply to all groups in the community, they are especially relevant to disabled people, those on a low income and older people - many of whom may be less mobile than younger people. And yet we know that the take-up and participation in the digital world is unequal and levels of use of the internet vary significantly across the population. Older and disabled people, and those in low-income households, are much less likely to use the internet at home.

Ofcom's 2015 Communications Market Report (CMR)[1] highlighted that home internet access among UK adults stood at 85% in Q1 2015. The impact of using communications technology should not be underestimated - seven in ten (69%) internet users say that technology has changed the way they communicate and six in ten (59%) say these new

---

[1] http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/cmr/cmr14/UK_4.pdf

3 June 2016

communications methods have made life easier. Levels of agreement for all statements are higher among 16-24 year olds and lower among those aged 55+.

The Panel and ACOD believe that all consumers should be able to benefit from the opportunities and enjoyment that communications services can bring. According to Ofcom's latest Adult Media Use and Attitudes Report[2], thirteen per cent of adults are non-users of the internet. Just under six in ten (58%) of all non-users are aged 65 and over, and more than two in five (42%) are in DE households. A third (33%) of non-users has asked someone else to use the internet on their behalf in the past 12 months.

Ofcom's recently published research[3] on disabled consumers' access to, and use of, communication devices and services has also highlighted that access was generally lower among consumers with a disability than among those without. While internet access has increased among disabled people since Ofcom's 2013 report, it remains significantly lower for those consumers with a disability (65%) than for non-disabled consumers (88%). Further analysis found that not all disabled consumers with access to communication devices and services were making personal use of them. A fifth of disabled consumers said their disability prevented their use of at least some communication devices and services, with differences seen among consumers with different disability types.

Ofcom's Media Use and Attitudes report states that non-users aged 16-64 are more likely than those aged 65+ to say they have made a proxy use of the internet. One in ten (9%) of non-users say they will start to go online in the next year, while 80% say they will not become an internet user and 10% are unsure. When asked what they considered the main advantages of being online 49% of non-users say that, for them, there are no advantages in being online.

Out-of-home internet access still remains important for certain groups of people. The 2011 OXIS Report, *Next Generation Users: The Internet in Britain* showed that access via mobile devices, at another person's home or at libraries tended to be more important for people with lower incomes, whereas work and home access were more common among the higher-income groups.[4]

The more recent OXIS Report in 2013, *Cultures of the Internet: The Internet in Britain,* found that 10% of all internet users said they use a public library to access the internet. This level of internet usage, across all user-groups, suggests that libraries remain an important route for online access.[5]

---

[2] http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/research-publications/adults/media-lit-2016/

[3] http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/other/cross-media/disabled-consumers-ownership-comms-services/Disabled-consumers-use-of-communications-services/

[4] http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/sites/oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/files/content/files/publications/oxis2011_report.pdf

[5] http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/sites/oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/files/content/files/publications/OxIS_2013.pdf

3 June 2016

We note that the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) argues that the presence of libraries in residential areas is of importance particularly for more vulnerable users as they are often less able to travel, and more likely not to be able to afford IT.

Whilst solutions may be complex, the issue itself is straightforward: 23% of UK adults still don't possess the basic digital skills[6] necessary to take advantage of technology. As Go ON UK (now doteveryone) noted, it is not just individuals that are missing out on the benefits of being online. 23% of small businesses don't have basic digital skills. Without these basic skills, these SMEs (and, we would suggest, micro businesses especially) are missing out on their share of the UK's annual website sales of £193 billion. Not only that, but they also risk losing potential business because they can't be found online, may be missing an opportunity to deliver a better, more efficient service to their customers, and may not be maximising their competitiveness. In the charity sector the challenge is even greater - over half of all UK charities are lacking basic digital skills.

Why digital engagement matters

As long ago as April 2009, the European Commission noted that "the internet has become a basic utility for homes and businesses in the same way as electricity or water"[7]. In 2010, the Digital Agenda built on this, stating: "As more daily tasks are carried out online…using the internet has become an integral part of daily life for many Europeans." Referring to those Europeans not online, and the professional ICT skills shortage, the Commission stated that: "these failings are excluding many citizens from the digital society and economy and are holding back the positive impact that ICT can have on productivity growth."[8]

The Panel has long highlighted that digital engagement is a key component of modern society. The lack of engagement amongst some groups – because of poor access, affordability, a lack of skills, confidence or motivation - impacts not only on them directly, but also on the overall strength of the economy, impacting the broader population. The Tinder Foundation, alongside Go ON UK, has published a report *The economic impact of Basic Digital Skills and inclusion in the UK*[9] that sets out the huge financial and social benefits of everyone in the UK having the digital skills they need to survive in our digital world. The report estimates that over the ten year period between 2016 and 2025, 4.9 million of those who do not possess Basic Digital Skills will get online without additional help, but the remaining 7.9 million (15% of the adult population) will need support to gain Basic Digital Skills at an estimated cost of between £45 and £334 per person. The report sets out the six main channels through which benefits are realised to individuals and to the Government of equipping 100% of the population with Basic Digital Skills:

[6] http://www.go-on.co.uk/issue/

[7] http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=4838
[8] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-10-200_en.htm?locale=en
[9] http://www.tinderfoundation.org/our-thinking/research-publications/economic-impact-basic-digital-skills-and-inclusion-uk

3 June 2016

- ➢ Earnings benefits
  - ➢ Employability benefits
  - ➢ Retail transaction benefits
  - ➢ Communication
  - ➢ Time savings
  - ➢ NHS cost savings

We now live in an era in which we are seeing many Government services become "digital by default" and where being online is becoming more and more a necessity of life and less and less of an optional extra. An increasing number of commercial services are only available online - or delivered offline in a way that effectively penalises users, through high cost or lower quality. Those people still functionally offline will be at an increasing disadvantage and risk being left behind in terms of ease, convenience, inclusion, speed and cost.

Ed Vaizey, Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, has highlighted the fact that "Every part of the UK economy and our lives has been digitised – from how we shop and entertain ourselves to the way we travel to work and manage our health." We have urged Government to consider how intimidating this may be for those who can't - or simply choose not to - go fully 'digital'. While the Panel has been working with the Government Digital Service to support the development of the assisted digital offer, it is our belief that unless fundamental action is taken, the digital divide risks becoming an ever greater digital gulf as the distance increases between those who are online and those who remain firmly anchored in the offline world. The potential consequences of this exclusion are serious: for individuals, especially those who are more vulnerable; for society; for business; and for the UK economy. Digital literacy, especially on security and privacy matters, is going to be critical. The Panel has commissioned research to update its previous work[10] on consumers' and citizens' understanding of, and attitudes in these areas, which we will publish later this year.

We believe consumers and citizens who are not - or in some cases not yet - digitally engaged, should not be unduly disadvantaged by progress for the majority. Along with assisted digital support, there should still be an analogue provision that works, so that people can still use public services effectively and are able to find out about healthcare, jobs, courses and ways to improve their own lives. We have also urged government to consider the rights and abilities of the proportion of UK adults who are not functionally literate or are learning English as a non-native language. Consumers who live in hard-to-reach rural locations – and, we would add, inner city locations – need to be given support to access reliable, high quality broadband and mobile networks, so that these communities can benefit and participate effectively. It is vital that all consumers and citizens are able to feel empowered in the way they interact with the state and that none are left marginalised. Libraries have a key role to play in supporting these citizens – not only through the provision of support for those who are not online or less confident, but also by providing physical connectivity.
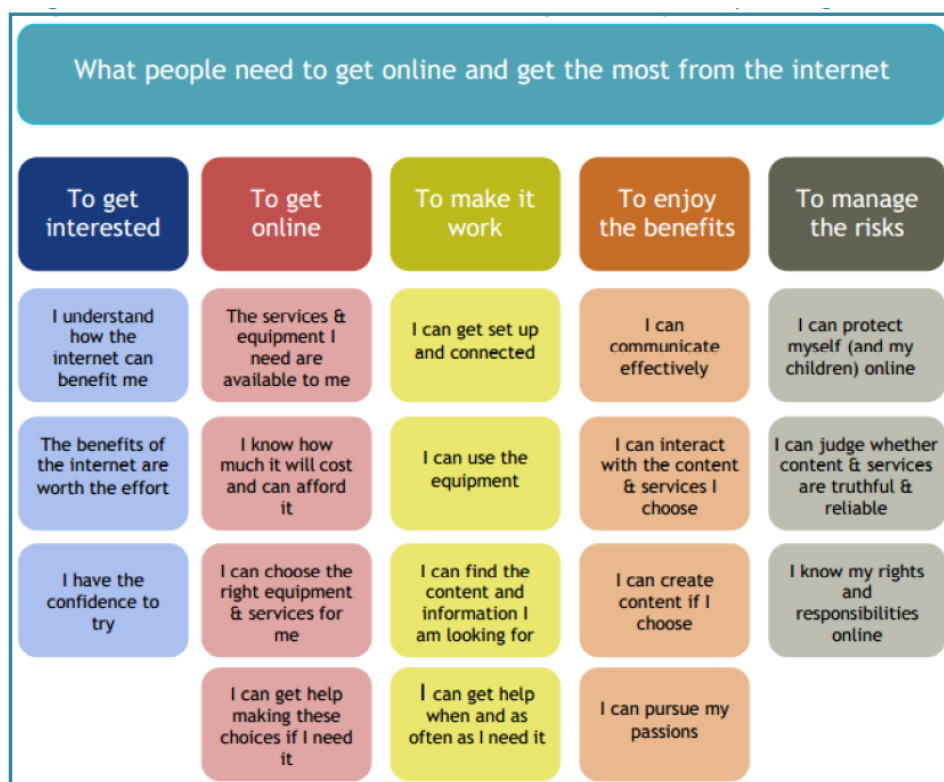
---

[10] Online Personal Data: the Consumer Perspective
http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/online-personal-data/online-personal-data-1

3 June 2016

Consumer Framework for Digital Participation and Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement

In 2010, to help Government and others increase the number of people using the internet, the Panel developed the Consumer Framework for Digital Participation[11]. The Framework sets out the citizen and consumer needs that underpin digital participation. It starts with the consumer experience and breaks down the journey that people make in getting online and then enjoying the benefits. It specifically addresses the issue of what consumers themselves have said they need to get online. Targeted at government and industry, the Framework – which still holds good today - brings together all the different elements that are needed to provide the help and support for people to get online and get the most benefit from the internet.

The Consumer Framework for Digital Participation

What people need to get online and get the most from the internet				
To get interested	**To get online**	**To make it work**	**To enjoy the benefits**	**To manage the risks**
I understand how the internet can benefit me	The services & equipment I need are available to me	I can get set up and connected	I can communicate effectively	I can protect myself (and my children) online
The benefits of the internet are worth the effort	I know how much it will cost and can afford it	I can use the equipment	I can interact with the content & services I choose	I can judge whether content & services are truthful & reliable
I have the confidence to try	I can choose the right equipment & services for me	I can find the content and information I am looking for	I can create content if I choose	I know my rights and responsibilities online
	I can get help making these choices if I need it	I can get help when and as often as I need it	I can pursue my passions	

The Framework was a key element of the National Plan for Digital Participation and was used by the Digital Participation Consortium to help target and prioritise its work. The intention was that, by putting consumers first, the Framework would enable policymakers and service deliverers to:

---

[11] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/downloads/what-we-do/previous-projects/access-and-inclusion/FINAL%20DP%20SUMMARY.pdf

- **Highlight the particular needs of different groups:** different groups of people need different things to help them get online and get the most out of the internet.
- **Identify gaps and overlaps in current provision:** there are lots of different digital participation projects and initiatives being delivered by many different organisations across the country.
- **Target new provision:** identifying the particular needs of different groups and gaps in current provision, to enable new activity to be targeted in a way that achieves the maximum impact with the available resources.
- **Assess progress:** the Framework can be used to assess progress and evaluate activity and initiatives against how well they meet consumers' needs.

Subsequent research by the Panel in 2011/12, Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement[12], consolidated stakeholders' experiences and learning in supporting online participation among people who are less digitally engaged, and gathered information about supporting people to take the next steps online. The study confirmed that some people's online journeys are long and complex. Starting the journey does not, in itself, guarantee that people will become confident internet users, able to function and interact with services online. Some will continue to need support to overcome challenges and go on to maximise the benefits of being online. We discuss this research in greater detail later in our response.

The elements of the Framework categorised as 'to make it work' and 'to enjoy the benefits' appeared to represent the tipping point for many of those we spoke to in our research. But these elements currently appear to attract less attention and resource than the initial push to get people online. If a user's journey is not supported adequately, so that it is sustained and developed, the initial investment in training may go to waste. The Panel has encouraged Government and providers to continue to use the Consumer Framework for Digital Participation to assess progress made and address gaps.

Building on both the Consumer Framework and informed by our 'Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement' research, the Panel identified a number of areas for strategic focus and made a series of recommendations for Government, policy makers and those delivering on the ground. In the Panel's view:

- the challenge to increase participation is underestimated;
- meeting the challenge is underfunded; and
- people who remain unable to access online services will suffer increasing detriment if the challenge isn't met.

Bridging the Gap: Libraries and digital engagement

We believe that a key role of public libraries is to highlight and even showcase the opportunities offered by digital technology and ensure that those within the community

---

[12] http://www.communicationsconsumerpanel.org.uk/bridging-the-gap-sustaining-online-engagement/bridging-the-gap-sustaining-online-engagement-2

3 June 2016

who are currently unable to go online or are not confident about going online are fully supported. The support that libraries can offer micro-businesses is also key.

In our 2012 *Bridging the Gap: Sustaining Online Engagement* research, the evidence from the consumer interviews suggested strongly that libraries are not widely considered by non internet users as a starting point for online training. The problem appears to be rooted in a misconception by consumers, rather than a lack of awareness.

People who are less digitally engaged, and who may not be predisposed to wanting to learn, say that libraries, along with other community based services, are too formal. Some of the least confident believe that the library environment is unsuitable for them and is even intimidating. The library can be perceived to be more suited to the needs of more advanced users and those with a stronger educational background.

Quotes from respondents in relation to library use included:

"You need to be very quiet. I couldn't take my kids with me" (Consumer, female, 46)

"Computers are there for people who know how to use them" (Consumer, male, 64)

And a stakeholder said:

"I've never understood why libraries were not part of the Digital Britain report"

It follows from this that internet-related services offered by libraries appear to be relatively poorly promoted. Indeed, many stakeholders believed that libraries are underutilised across the UK. Some expressed quite strong views in this regard given the locality, range and quality of resources that are in place and made available to consumers such as:

> ➢ well-trained, dedicated staff (many with digital training);
> ➢ secure online access;
> ➢ informal help and advice;
> ➢ a good range of structured courses and taster sessions ; and
> ➢ good reach into local communities.

The report also highlighted a good example of best practice from a city centre library that typically failed to attract people not disposed to go online. It is particularly well resourced in terms of internet access and training courses designed to support absolute beginners through to those who have a more developed need to learn a particular skill or capability.

The library runs a series of co-location initiatives, giving over part of its space to a wide range of local entities, e.g. charities, health organisations and community initiatives working with minorities of various kinds. These entities run non-IT-related events which incidentally expose a variety of people to what the library has to offer.

Bringing people into the library environment who might otherwise be unwilling to go there works well to challenge misconceptions, giving library staff an opportunity to encourage

take-up of online and computer-related training. This kind of holistic, wide ranging, thinking is important to bear in mind when considering the future potential of libraries in delivering the benefits of digital participation to a much wider audience.

We also commissioned research amongst people who are currently not online, and living in an area of extreme deprivation, in order to explore whether there are any key barriers other than financial deprivation. We selected Glasgow for this research because it has a high level of offline households. Ofcom's 2011 Communications Market Report for Scotland found that take-up is particularly low in Greater Glasgow at 50%, compared to elsewhere in the UK.

Our research found that Glasgow was particularly well served by local libraries that offer free internet access, with 33 local libraries in the City area. Most in the consumer sample said that there was a library within walking distance of where they lived or worked. However, most said they had not considered using the internet services offered by these libraries. Very few people, and particularly the disinclined group, had considered using any formal sources of support. The library was the default option for those who were more predisposed to go online. But notably, two of the more predisposed in the sample had tried to sign up for a course – but were told they would have to wait at least 4-6 months due to demand.

When prompted, there was widespread awareness that libraries had computers. But many of the disinclined thought that the computers were there for established users rather than to support beginners. Others claimed that they did not feel comfortable about the idea of learning in a library environment.

Our research concluded that: "Despite this, given the number of libraries in Glasgow and the fact that there was one within walking distance for everyone in the sample, libraries would appear to offer an excellent starting point. Misconceptions need to be overcome; the associations with "dusty books" and "clever people" using computers tend to be very off-putting."

Digital Engagement support

We strongly support the establishment and/or consolidation of comprehensive digital help and free access at locations people might regularly use, e.g. libraries, schools and colleges open to local citizens after school hours and post offices under a unified programme of Government digital help for citizens. We believe, too, that there should be a free helpline for users of Government digital services to provide technical as well as specific service support.

We would encourage more consideration of the opportunities to further consolidate and extend the availability of support at points of need, for example by strengthening the relationship between Job Centres and Benefits Offices and the providers of expert help such as UK Online Centres - so that those most in need, and potentially those who are currently most digitally unengaged and hard to reach, can: (a) get assistance with what they're there for, and; (b) receive encouragement to learn skills to help them in future, so

3 June 2016

that they can better "do it themselves" , resulting in greater confidence and steps on the path to overcoming general digital reluctance.

Ofcom's 2014 Communications Market Report[13] highlighted how, as a result of growing up in the digital age, 12-15 year olds are developing fundamentally different communication habits than older generations. It is vital that educationalists – both formal and informal - are aware of, and engaged with, this trend and what it means for how children are taught. However it is also important to bear in mind that: a) being able to use devices technically does not always equate to having an appropriate level of cognitive skill to safely, securely and successfully manage online engagement in all its forms, and; b) it is likely that not all young people will remain fully digitally engaged throughout their lives.

We hope that the actions outlined in the Ambition document will help to further support digital engagement as awareness and understanding of the respective organisations' roles increases. The Social Value Act 2012 provides a basis to encourage investment/shared investment into schemes to make them sustainable and links should also be established to the work of local democracy groups. The transformation of the UK into a leading digital nation with digitally able citizens cannot be achieved without serious commitment – and investment to support it.

It is crucial that libraries have well trained staff – a positive interaction for users of libraries could make all the difference, so library employees themselves need to have appropriate levels of expertise, confidence and enthusiasm. We were therefore pleased to see that a Skills Strategy to develop the library workforce of the future will be developed, and we would urge that due focus be placed on digital skills and knowledge.

We welcome the aspiration for excellence supported by a voluntary accreditation scheme – so long as it does not unwittingly bring with it undue bureaucracy.

We welcome, too, the range of groups and stakeholders for whom the Ambition statement is primarily intended. However, we wondered whether there might be merit in explicitly extending this to include private companies – especially communications providers (some of whom are already involved with libraries) – who might be able to support the ambitions in some shape or form.

Conclusion

Overall, as shown by the evidence and research highlighted in this response, the Panel believes that there remains a significant digital gap to be bridged. Connectivity and digital engagement (or lack thereof) occupy that gap and libraries can play a vital part in building and maintaining the bridge. We therefore support fully the Ambitions set out in the document.

---

[13] http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/communications-market-reports/cmr14/uk/

3 June 2016

The rapidly changing nature of the delivery of both commercial and Government services means that enabling people to interact confidently with these services on-line is more crucial than ever. We believe that libraries have a vital role to play, in conjunction with other locally based agencies, in providing online access, in addition to supporting and encouraging people who are not fully digitally engaged. They have the potential to deliver a well-supported, safe and sustained learning environment that excludes no-one. As society changes, this is more important than ever before, so that we ensure that more vulnerable consumers and citizens are empowered and are not left behind. It would be counter-intuitive not to fully utilise an established infrastructure with trusted and trained staff in this context.

3 June 2016