

## BRIEFING NOTE

# Lords Debate on the Cultural, Civic and Educational Significance of Local Libraries and Independent Bookshops in the UK

Provided by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

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*The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is the UK's library and information association, representing a professional workforce of approximately 87,000 people. We are pleased to provide this briefing in preparation for the debate on the 13<sup>th</sup> October on the Cultural, Civic and Educational significance of local libraries and independent bookshops in the UK.*

### Executive Summary

The UK stands on the precipice of the most significant literacy and skills crisis in the post-war era. We rank at the bottom of teenage literacy league-tables amongst 23 developed nations. Yet our senior citizens have some of the highest literacy levels in the developed world.

In order to compete in the global economy the UK's success hinges on a workforce with advanced skills. Yet we are failing to develop basic literacy skills amongst young people.

Public libraries provide everyone with equal opportunities to develop a love of reading, access books, and learn new skills. They directly improve the life-chances of the communities they serve by providing cost-effective services. Since 2010, however, the public library network has been largely neglected. The number of libraries has fallen by over 6% and the number of qualified librarians has reduced by a quarter. Expenditure on public libraries in England fell by £69.1m in three years and the number of books has reduced by 20.5m in five years.

We ask the House of Lords to intervene in order to mitigate the impact of the impending literacy and skills crisis, and ensure every UK citizen has the opportunity to read, develop their skills and confidence and improve their life chances.

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## The positive impact of books, reading and literacy

There is a clear and evidenced relationship between access to books and reading support and positive outcomes later in life. Save the Children's *Read On, Get On* campaign highlights the vital importance of literacy for development:

*"Reading is the key to unlocking every child's full potential and opens up a world of possibilities. A good education is of course about much more than just reading. But being able to read well is the foundation on which so much else depends: children first 'learn to read' and then they 'read to learn'."*

- Save the Children *Read On, Get On* report<sup>1</sup>

Responding to the findings, CILIP commented,

*"Access to opportunities to read and develop their literacy in libraries, supported by professional librarians, is the key to ensuring equality of opportunity and mobility. Children who are not supported to develop their reading skills – particularly those in deprived areas - fall behind their peers by as early as 5-7 years and evidence suggests that the skills gap becomes increasingly difficult to close."*

- Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP

Children need to grow up in a world of books and reading if they are to become happy, productive, well-integrated citizens who make a positive contribution to society. Successive research highlights the positive effect of books on attainment, health and wellbeing and empathy. Maximising these benefits depends on a co-ordinated effort by policymakers, parents, booksellers, publishers and the library sector to deliver high-quality books and reading support for every child, whatever their economic circumstances and wherever they live.

## Literacy and the skills crisis

*"Better skills are not only the lifeblood of the UK economy – as fundamental to British business as improving our infrastructure, technology and transport links – they are also critical to improving young people's life chances, of enabling them to be a success in life and work."*

- Rod Bristow, President, Pearson's UK

In 2010, the Coalition Government published the *Skills for Sustainable Growth Strategy*<sup>2</sup>, setting out the Government's commitment to the development of a future-facing workforce equipped with advanced skills to meet the current and future needs of industry and the economy.

Despite these ambitions, the UK stands on the precipice of the most significant crisis in literacy and skills in the post-war era. The 2015 *CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey*<sup>3</sup> highlighted some of the key concerns:

- More than half of UK firms fear that growth will be held back by skills shortages
- There is an urgent need to promote literacy and communications skills in formal education

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Read\\_On\\_Get\\_On.pdf](https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Read_On_Get_On.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> HM Government *Skills for Sustainable Growth Strategy* (2010)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cbi.org.uk/news/skills-emergency-could-starve-growth-cbi-pearson-survey/>

- 68% of businesses expect their demand for advanced skills and literacy to grow in the next few years

The link between literacy, reading and the creation of a skilled workforce is clear. Yet the latest 2015 OECD PISA Rankings<sup>4</sup> place the UK at the bottom of 23 developed nations for teenage literacy (16-19). It is notable that UK senior citizens exhibit amongst the highest levels of literacy in the developed world – demonstrating the marked decline in literacy provision and access to reading over the past 4 decades.

The literacy crisis is illustrated in figures from the Reading Agency<sup>5</sup>:

- Research in 2012 found that 17% of 15 year olds do not have a minimum level of literacy
- Out of 24 OECD countries, England is the only one in which 16-24 year olds have lower levels of literacy than 55-65 year olds
- 16% of adults (around 5.8 million people) in England and Northern Ireland score at the lowest level of proficiency in literacy (at or below Level 1)

The period of the decline in literacy and reading skills intersects exactly with the period during which public and school library provision shrank.

## The role of libraries and librarians

Librarians provide a range of services and support which help people improve their literacy and develop their skills and confidence. According to the *Value of Trained Information Professionals* research<sup>6</sup> published by CILIP, librarians deliver value in the following areas:

- A Return on Investment for the local economy of £5 for every £1 invested in library services<sup>7</sup>
- Helping people improve their education and learning
- Supporting better health and wellbeing, including relieving pressure on local health services
- Enhancing people sense of place and belonging to a community
- Improved attitudes to reading and improved reading ability

Libraries offer a wide range of very significant and cost-effective benefits for their communities, including:

- A UK-wide network of trusted and accessible places, embedded into the heart of the community
- A skilled and committed workforce of 50-60,000 information professionals supported by volunteers
- Over 68m hours of free, supported Internet access via 30,000 networked computers and 99% free WiFi coverage
- Access to quality information and reading materials, including local information

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/aboutpisa/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cilip.org.uk/about/projects-reviews/value-trained-information-professionals>

<sup>7</sup> <http://cilip.org.uk/about/projects-reviews/value-trained-information-professionals>

- Mediated access to a wide range of council services
- An vibrant cultural and creative programme in collaboration with Creative Industry partners

The UK's existing public library network represents the most important, trusted, accessible and networked infrastructure for learning and education outside the school system.

## The neglect of UK libraries

Despite the positive impact of libraries and librarians on literacy, skills and attainment, the UK's national library network has suffered from severe neglect as a result of successive programmes of Government policy.

The European benchmark for library service provision is one service point for 13,000 people. In the UK, this has fallen to around 1:20,000 and some Local Authorities are implementing spending cuts which would reduce this to as little as one library per 40-50,000 people<sup>8</sup>.

In real terms, the number of public libraries has fallen by at least 6.25% since 2010. However, this figure does not account for the reduction in service hours and quality.

The number of qualified librarians employed in libraries has reduced by 25% (8,000 jobs lost) since 2010.

The total net expenditure by Local Authorities in England on public library services fell by £69.1m between 2012-13<sup>9</sup> and 2014-15<sup>10</sup>. There were 20.5 million fewer books in English, Welsh and Scottish public libraries in 2015 compared to 2010.<sup>11</sup>

This programme of neglect of the library network has had a profoundly damaging effect on the average person's ability to access books and other reading materials.

## Opportunities to tackle the crisis

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) have collaborated to commission a *Leadership for Libraries Taskforce* with the aim of tackling and reversing the programme of neglect of public libraries and developing a realistic roadmap for their future development.

The *Leadership for Libraries Taskforce* has produced an overall strategy document, the *Ambition for Public Libraries in England*, which is currently with Rob Wilson MP, Minister for Civil Society for review and comment.

However, CILIP believes the current *Ambition* lacks a number of specific elements which mean that it is unlikely to make a material impact on the ability of libraries to help avert the skills and literacy crisis:

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<sup>8</sup> Analysis by CILIP of [Eblida EU library statistics](#)

<sup>9</sup> DCMS, (September 2012), *Taking Part 2012/13 quarter 1 report: statistical release*

<sup>10</sup> DCMS, (January 2016), *Taking Part 2015/16 quarter 2 report*

<sup>11</sup> CIPFA statistics for various years quoted in House of Commons Briefing paper no. 5875 Woodhouse, J. & Dempsey, N., (April, 2016). *Public libraries*

- There is no development body mandated to implement the findings of the report and ensure the long-term development of public library services
- There is no financial element to the report, nor any mechanism for mitigating the impact of further Local Authority spending cuts during the lifetime of this Parliament
- There is no overall programme for the stewardship of the public library network, nor any specific roadmap for implementing a review and associated change

CILIP believes that there is an opportunity for the House of Lords to make a positive and constructive intervention in order to mitigate the impact of the impending skills and literacy crisis, and to ensure that every UK citizen has the opportunity to read, develop their skills and confidence and improve their life chances

We would ask the House to consider:

- Urging the Government to make provision in the Autumn Statement for the emergency relief from closure of public libraries in Local Authorities that are implementing budget cuts during the remainder of this Parliament
- Mandating the Government through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to revisit the draft *Ambition for Public Libraries in England* and to strengthen it through the establishment of a clearly-mandated and appropriately resourced development function for public libraries
- Encouraging the Government to restore the *Advisory Council on Libraries* (which CILIP is willing to convene on their behalf) to provide ongoing expert advice on libraries, books and reading programmes
- Supporting CILIP in the re-establishment of the *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Libraries* to provide an ongoing platform for engagement with Parliamentarians on issues relating to libraries, literacy, books and reading

## Suggested questions

We suggest considering asking Her Majesty's Government the following questions:

- What plans they have to mitigate the impact of the impending literacy and skills crisis through investment in the public library network
- What steps they are taking to ensure the cultural, civic and educational significance of public libraries is fully recognised
- What assurances they can provide that the *Ambition for Public Libraries in England* will support the long-term development, modernisation and funding of the public library network
- What plans they have to ensure they receive expert advice on public libraries

## Contact

For further details or questions about this briefing contact Mark Taylor at CILIP: [mark.taylor@cilip.org.uk](mailto:mark.taylor@cilip.org.uk) or 020 7255 0654.

## Annex A: Public library statistics

- There are currently 3,917 libraries (Including 316 mobile libraries) in Great Britain
- 265 million visits are made to public libraries in Great Britain each year
- There are 8.9 million active borrowers using public libraries in Great Britain
- There are 18, 028 FTE staff working 35m hours in GB libraries and 41, 402 volunteers working almost 1.5m hours

CIPFA, (December 2015). *Public library statistics 2015-16 Estimates & 2014-15 Actuals*.

- Libraries contribute to a range of agendas including digital literacy, public health, business start-ups and employment, reading and literacy and deliver Government services such as Universal Credit.
- Libraries are uniquely placed in their communities, providing opportunities for all. The Business & IP Centre Network of Libraries saw that of the people that started a new business 47% were women, 26% black, Asian and minority ethnic, and 25% were unemployed or made redundant.<sup>12</sup>
- Arts Council England research estimates that libraries save the NHS in England £27.5 million as the library regularly results in a 1.4% increase in people reporting good general health.<sup>13</sup>

## Annex B: Legislation

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 is the law that makes public libraries a statutory service. It requires local authorities in England and Wales to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service.

Local councils have to abide by this Act which makes public library services a statutory duty for local authorities.

Councils must:

- Provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to use it.
- Promote the service (section 7 920 (b))
- Lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area (section 8 (3)(b))

What such a comprehensive and efficient service might look like is set out in section 7 (2 (a), (b) and (c))

A library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability of:

- Securing books and other printed matter and other materials sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements of both adults and children by either keeping these items themselves or having arrangements with other library authorities to obtain them.
- Encouraging full use of the service by adults and children, providing advice as to its use and making available the resources so people can use them.

The Government or more specifically, the Secretary of State oversees councils' role in complying with the Act. The Secretary of State has a duty to:

- Superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bl.uk/britishlibrary/~media/bl/global/business%20and%20ip%20centre/documents/270-001%20british%20library%20enterprising%20libraries%20infographic-with%20trims.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/hearts-and-minds>