

A New Chapter

Public library services in the 21st century

Data from Northern Ireland 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 five omnibus polls 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 Northern Ireland. 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 Northern Ireland, 1,009 adults aged 16 or over were included in the poll.

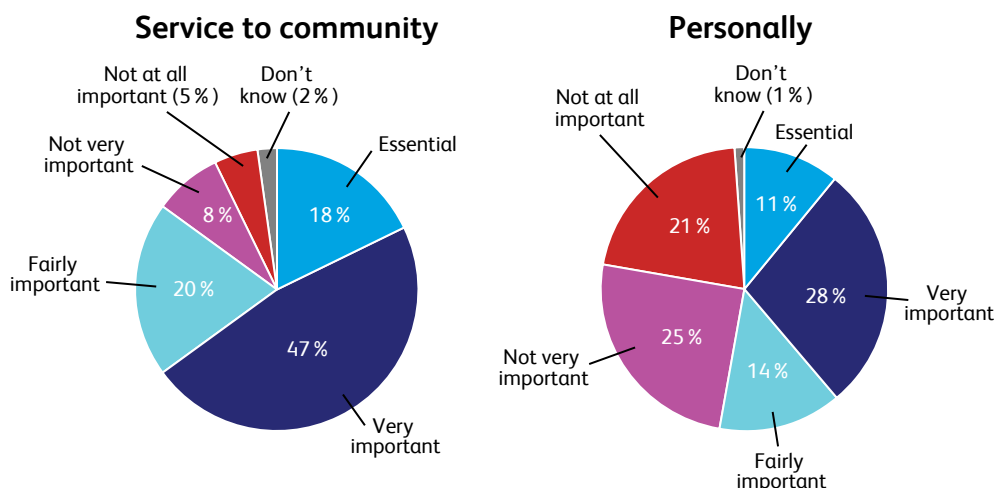
2.1 Importance of public libraries

- Our data shows that almost two thirds (65%) of those in Northern Ireland said that libraries were 'very important' or 'essential' for communities. This was the lowest figure from all jurisdictions, comparing with 74-79% in others .
- Around two fifths (39%) said that they were very important or essential to them personally. This measure was only lower in Wales (38%).
- Half of non-users (50%) thought that public libraries were essential or very important to their community, compared with 88% of users. The figure for users is in line with other jurisdictions, but the figure for non-users is the lowest in all jurisdictions.
- There was little variation by social class in views on the importance of libraries to the community or personally.

2.2 Use of public libraries

- Two fifths of respondents (40%) had used a public library in the previous 12 months. This was lower than any other jurisdiction comparing with 61% for Scotland, 51% for Ireland, 50% for England and 45% for Wales.
- More women than men had used the service (45% compared to 35%) in Northern Ireland.
- People with children used the service significantly more than those without children.
- Only 31% of those without children had used a library in the previous 12 months, the lowest figure in all the jurisdictions, compared with Scotland (59%) or Wales, the second lowest on 42%.
- Library use by those aged between 25 and 34 was higher than for any other age group (51%), and was the second highest in all jurisdictions.
- Use in the 15-24 age bracket was slightly lower (44%) but still higher than the overall average, and higher than might have been expected from earlier research findings which suggested that libraries did not appeal to younger people.

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?



- Use by those over the age of 55 was particularly low (30%) which is out of line with other jurisdictions which range from 62% in Scotland to 41% in Wales.
- There was a strong and statistically significant relationship in Northern Ireland between library use and two other factors: having children; and being a prolific reader.
- Retired people were particularly low users of the service (27%), compared with 61% in Scotland and 53% in Ireland.
- People living in urban areas were more likely (42%) to use the service than people in rural areas (35%).
- Those in social group B (middle managers) (60%) were most likely to have visited a library whereas those in social group E (68%) were least likely.

2.3 Frequency of use

- Overall, 82% of people who indicated that they had visited a library in the last 12 months, had done so at least 3-4 times.
- Just over half (51%) 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 slightly lower than other jurisdictions.
- 52% of frequent users were women, and 49% were men.
- Despite fewer of them being library users, those without children who did use the library were more likely to be frequent users than those with children.

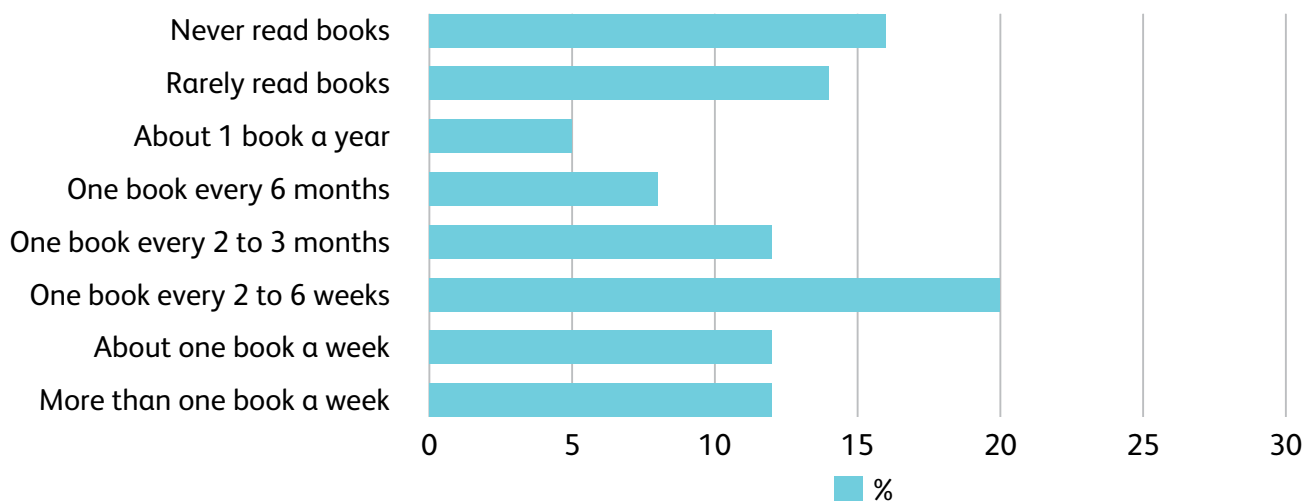
- People working full-time were less likely to be frequent users than people working part-time, not working or people who were retired.
- Those living in rural areas were slightly more likely than those living in urban areas to be frequent users. This contrasts with England and Wales where those in urban areas were more likely to be frequent users.
- In terms of age, the most frequent users are over the age of 55 (61%). Interestingly, this is despite the overall low rate of use by this age group. Among users, there is a relatively high rate of frequent use. This was the highest rate of use in this age group in all jurisdictions.
- Frequency of use was slightly above the average in the 25-34 age group (53%) and slightly lower in the 15-24 age group (45%).
- In Northern Ireland, there was a statistically significant relationship between one factor and frequency of use: being a prolific reader (reading at least one book every six weeks). This was also the case in Ireland. In other jurisdictions, being a frequent user was associated with more factors.

2.4 Reading behaviour

We asked people how many books they read.

- In Northern Ireland 44% are prolific readers, and 30% never or rarely read books. This is the highest rate for those who rarely or never read books, although Wales is comparable with 29%.
- Women (52%) are more likely than men (34%) to be prolific readers, but there is little difference in relation to working status, family situation or age.

Table 2: Reading behaviour in Northern Ireland



Base: All Northern Irish adults 16+ (1,009), 30 September – 14 October 2011

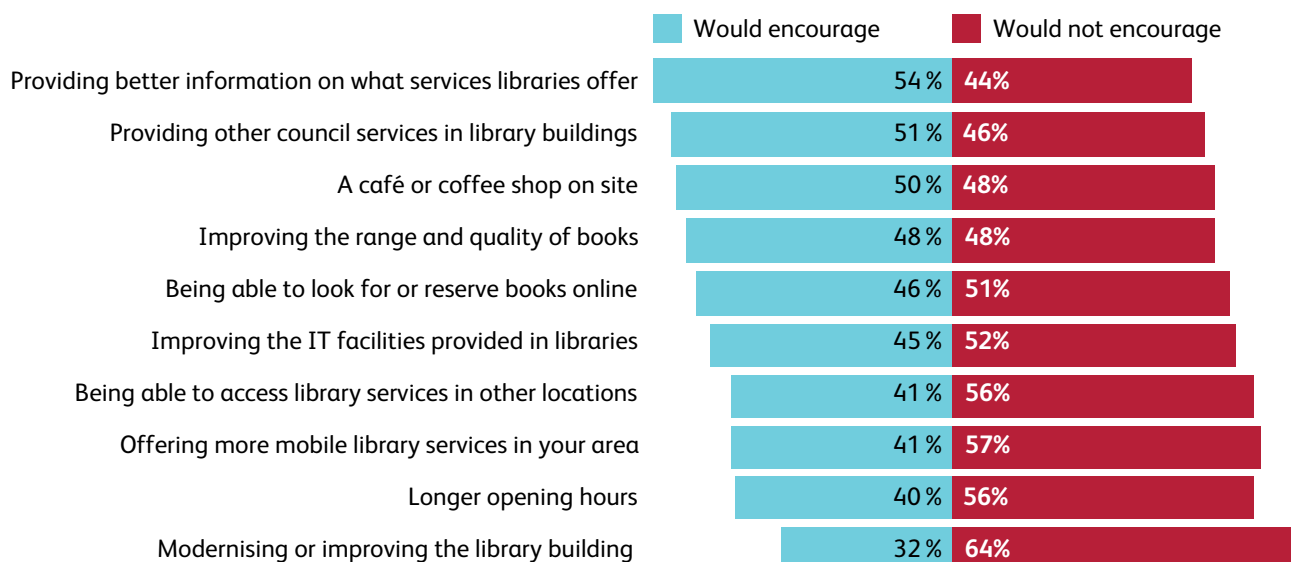
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2.5 Attitudes to possible service improvements

- The factors most likely to encourage people to use the public library service in Northern Ireland were providing better information about the services available; providing other council services in the library; and having a café or coffee shop on site.

- 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.

Table 3: Which particular changes or improvements would affect library use

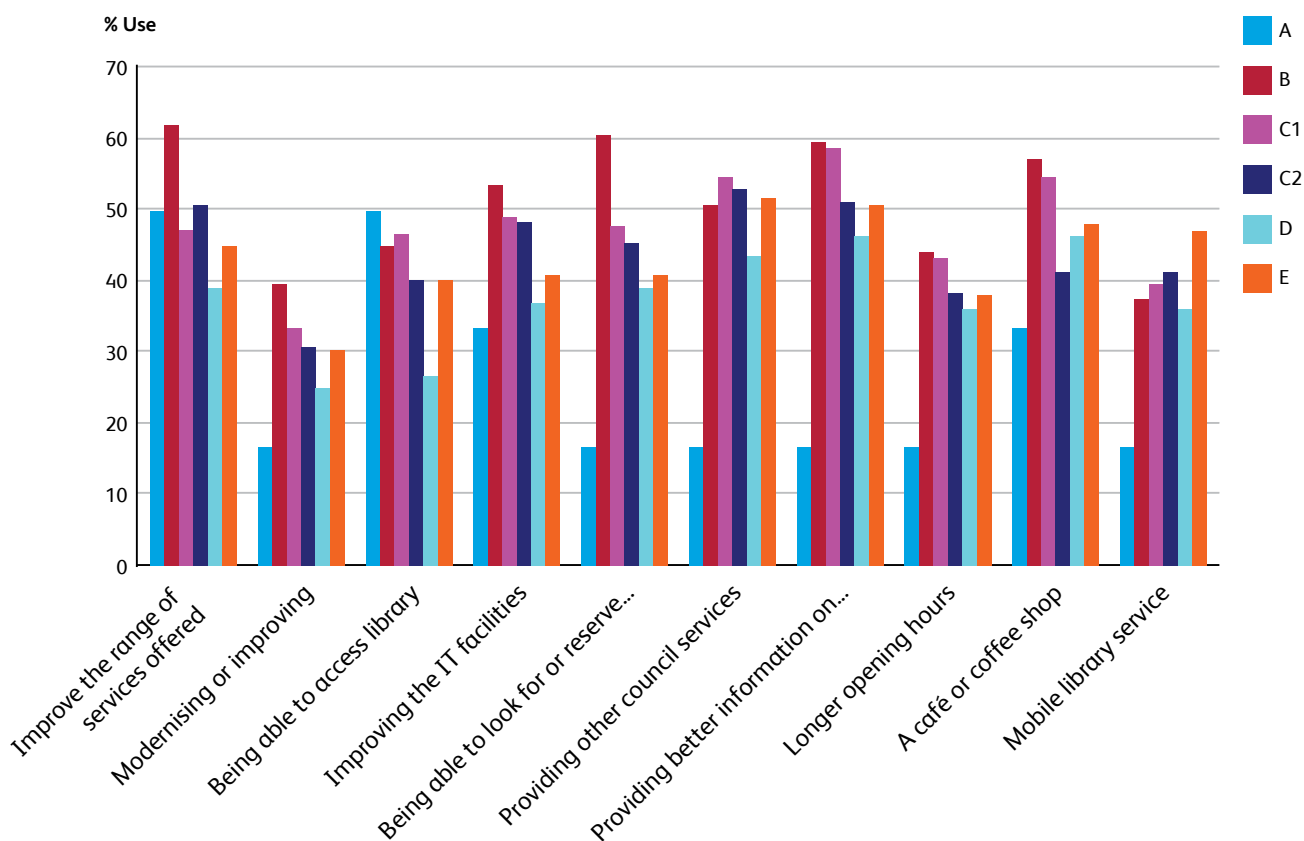


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- People in Northern Ireland were the most enthusiastic about having more mobile services, with 41% being in favour of this. In other jurisdictions the numbers supporting this were between 24 and 34%.
- Overall, this data suggests that the most popular suggested changes would make a difference to around half of those surveyed.
- Although modernising or improving the library building was the least popular factor (32%), most evidence shows that new or improved library buildings do lead to a significant increase in use, so people's attitudes may not be a true predictor of their behaviour.
- People in Northern Ireland were the most positive about the impact of having a café or coffee shop, with 68% of users and 38% of non-users in favour of this.
- 26% said that none of these improvements would affect their use (5% of users and 40% of non-users).
- 62% of those in social group B said that they would visit libraries more often if they 'improved the range and quality of books'
- 51% of those in social group E would be encouraged to use libraries if they 'provided other council services'.

Table 4: 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

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