

The LIBRARY *Campaigner*

Supporting friends and users of libraries



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

To advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of libraries through the activities of friends and users groups.



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Registered charity (England & Wales) No. 1102634

The Library Campaign maintains a **free list** of local **Friends and User groups**, with their contact details, on our website.

If you know of a new (or old!) group that is not on our list, please notify:

librarycampaign@live.co.uk

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FRIENDS GROUPS LIAISON AND CO-ORDINATOR: Vacant

– if interested, please contact the Secretary

To add the name of a group to our database: **librarycampaign@live.co.uk**

The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings: Unison, Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP), Association of University Teachers, University of the Third Age.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Officers and the Executive Committee meet regularly every two months, 1–4pm usually on a Saturday, usually in central London. Campaign members are always very welcome to attend. If you want to come to a meeting contact the Secretary to receive an agenda. We would like to hold more of these meetings in the regions, both to encourage members to come and to help those committee members who have a long journey to London. We have recently met in Lewes, Birmingham and Rotherham. If a local group would like to invite us to meet in their area, we would be delighted to come.

2012 MEETINGS: Saturday 6 October, Saturday 17 November

MEMBERSHIP FORM

I wish to join The Library Campaign and enclose a Cheque/PO for £..... for one year's membership.

Name.....Tel:..... Email

Address.....Post code.....

GIFT AID: I confirm that I am a UK tax payer and pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax at least equal to the tax to be reclaimed in the tax year. I would like my/ our subscription (plus any donation) to be treated as Gift Aid.

Signed..... Date.....

MEMBERSHIP RATES

Individual £15.00 • Concessionary Rate £10.00 • Local Organisation £20.00 • Trade Union Branches £30.00

Local Authorities £200.00 • Company/National Trade Unions £100.00 • Others please write for details

Please make cheques payable to: **The Library Campaign**. It saves a lot of time and money if you pay by Bankers Order.

If you are able to do this please fill in the form and return it to us.

BANKERS ORDER FORM

To The Manager.....(Name and address of your bank)

Please pay The Library Campaign

(HSBC, Salford University Branch, The Crescent, Salford M5 4PB. 40-40-39, a/c 61277405) the sum of £..... every

year starting on (date) until further notice

Signed..... Account No

Name..... Address

..... Post code

(BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE)

Please return to: **The Library Campaign, 22 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0TB.** Registered Charity (England & Wales) No. 1102634



CONFERENCE 2012

Saturday 10 November, central London

IT'S BACK! IT'S BIGGER!

The second national conference for public library users and campaigners – now backed by a network of national organisations and campaigners alongside The Library Campaign: Campaign for the Book, CILIP, Unison, Women's Institute, Elizabeth Ash and Mar Dixon.



Come, network, find out where things stand, discuss where we go next

Places are limited – Advance booking is essential

Places allocated on a strictly first come, first served basis, on receipt of payment
Cost: £20 including tea & coffee breaks, sandwich lunch

Plenary session **WELCOME:** Phil Bradley, President of CILIP

PUBLIC LIBRARIES – STATE OF THE NATION

Alan Gibbons sums up a hectic, significant year for public libraries and campaigners

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Expect more cuts and loss of public service control, says Unison

WORKSHOPS (choose two)

- 1. Privatisation & Outsourcing – a foregone conclusion?**
Unison/Association for Public Service Excellence
- 2. Using Volunteers:** Public librarian Ian Anstice helps identify the pros and cons in this controversial area
- 3. Legal Challenges – what we know now:**
Public Interest Lawyers explain the implications of the cases completed so far
- 4. Mobilising Local Support:** Proven ideas from local Women's Institutes
- 5. Influencing the Decision-makers:** How to reach the politicians, officers and councillors who take the decisions

SUMMING UP Sharing views from the workshops, and ideas for action in 2012–13

KEYNOTE SPEAKER – To be announced

INFORMATION/BOOKING

Please download online booking form if possible (but a copy will be sent to Library Campaign members). See www.librarycampaign.com for details.

Return with cheque/postal order, payable to **The Library Campaign**, to SUFL Conference bookings, c/o Elizabeth Ash, 39 Mayfield Road, Sanderstead, SOUTH CROYDON CR2 0BG

Information/telephone booking: TheLibraryCampaign@gmail.com; 020 8651 9552

Confirmation of booking will be sent, along with details of the venue and your booked workshops.

SUPPORT SCHOOL LIBRARIES!

At 2pm, **Monday 29 October 2012** (half term) a group of school librarians is **lobbying Parliament for school libraries to be statutory** (i.e. compulsory). Putting them on the Ofsted inspection schedule would protect them.

This is a lobby, not a demonstration.

It is supported by librarians' organisations CILIP and SLA.

Contact your MP to lobby them on the day, or just come along to show solidarity.

To keep in touch, visit:

<http://heartoftheschool.edublogs.org/2012/07/04/mass-lobby-of-parliament-on-october-29th>.

This can also connect you to their email information list and Facebook page or Twitter (@schliblobby).

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- 15 How to improve literacy – and much else:** Alan Templeton demonstrates the central role of libraries in literacy, social mobility – and economic success.

SUPPORT BETTER ECONOMICS!

On **Saturday 20 October** the TUC (Trade Unions Congress) is organising a **mass march and rally** in London **'for a future that works'**.
Lots of info on: www.tuc.org.uk

The TUC says: 'Austerity isn't working. Our country faces long-term economic problems. But our political leaders have failed to face up to them. Even on their own terms, government policies are failing. To close the deficit we need a healthy, growing economy that generates tax income. But austerity has led to a vicious circle of decline. Instead of just letting the banks go back to business and bonuses as usual, we need policies that promote new and old industries.'

Ex-Secretary's slot!

To everyone's regret, Andrew Coburn has stepped down as a much-valued Secretary and a member of the Executive. We asked him to write a 'valedictory' column ...

I AM not sure whether to talk about my time as Secretary or look to the future. So I shall do both.

I was a founder member of the Campaign way back in 1984. I took up the Secretary's role when the Campaign was going through one of its periodic crises of having few activists. It helped that we could employ a director. Jill Wight took up this role at more or less the same time as I started.

At that time (early '90s) the Conservative government cuts in public expenditure had reached a sort of plateau. There were places closing libraries (or threatening to do so) or making cuts such as not buying fiction for a year (or was it more?).

But we had a number of active Campaign groups, then as now, usually formed from an attempt to attack their branch. And we were able to keep the flag flying by holding conferences – and even having a national network TV programme starring Victoria Wood.

Then, of course, came the sunlit uplands of the New Labour government. This coincided with the People's Network proposals to get computer terminals into every library, at no cost to library authorities. Everything seemed lovely.

The MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council) was invented. It seemed to have more resources than its predecessors, plus a link to museums and archives, which seemed sensible. The MLA produced *Framework for the Future*, which gave a lot of librarians something to focus around.

But these things never last. The People's Network was funded from Lottery money and there was no guarantee of sustainability. At some point, money to replace the technology would have to be found. And the developing range of things you can do on the internet has stretched resources further – especially as there are still plenty of people who don't have a PC, laptop or smartphone of their own. I have tried to resist saying 'I told you so', ever

since the first library service started charging for access to IT.

Despite *Framework*, the MLA was never really able to get the ear of government to allow it do some of the things it might have done. It also failed to gain the trust of the library authorities.

Then came the recession. There were signs that things were not going well, even before the Wirral announced it wanted to close half its libraries. But this was the first big sign of things to come.

Because the Wirral was only one service, the then government felt able to commission an inquiry (led by Sue Charteris). If the authority had not made a last minute u-turn, we might have seen the first ministerial intervention.

Now, of course, there have been many similar proposals. So we should have seen that intervention anyhow. But this government has hung its hat on its 'localism' agenda. Its position is: 'It's a local decision, and we are delighted to see that local people have come together to support the service' [as volunteers].

Cuts

Whichever government had won the last election, we would have seen public sector spending cuts. Probably the current round are worse than Labour's would have been. More important, Ministers are saying that this is going to get worse before it gets better.

Even library services which have been able to avoid drastic cuts are having to find savings. I suspect that many are engaged in what is now known as 'hollowing out' the service. But soon even that won't be possible any more. There are efficiencies to be made in support and supply (etc) – but these are not limitless.

So the Campaign and campaigners have kept the issues alive – and let's not forget organisations such as Voices for the Library (VftL), Campaign for the Book (formed, let us not forget, as much by the threat to library services to and in schools as to the public library service), as well as



individuals such as Shirley Burnham, Desmond Clarke, Tim Coates and others.

We will need to do more of this. Now that the Campaign is a registered charity, we are more restricted in what we can do. But those other organisations are not. We have recently formed a useful alliance with VftL, Campaign for the Book, UNISON, the Women's Institute and CILIP (Chartered Institute for Library & Information Professionals) and some individual campaigners. It is called Speak Up For Libraries.

Those who know me even a little will know that alongside the Campaign I am active as a trade unionist. In that capacity I cannot help but warn that while we campaign for libraries and advocate their place in society we must be aware that they are currently part of much larger organisations – local authorities.

Because the public spending cuts will be deeper yet, libraries will stand or fall with the authority as a whole. We can ensure that the politicians and chief officers recognise the importance of libraries and the need to preserve them.

But we must also campaign on the wider issues. So I will end by encouraging everyone who can to attend both the Speak Up For Libraries conference on 10 November (see page 3), where we can explore the library related issues, but also the TUC March for A Future That Works on 20 October in London (and Glasgow).

I shall be at both, and at other Campaign events for some time to come (I trust). I am delighted that the Executive has begun to find ways of working which take up the stuff I used to do without loading it on to one person, and have thus begun to plan for the future.

Chair's Report

Laura Swaffield
Campaign Chair



NEVER HAVE I known so much activity around public libraries! Users and frontline staff have led the way. Their campaigning work has often far outstripped that of the official bodies tasked with caring for libraries.

Similarly, campaigners' efforts have created lots of media coverage (sometimes well-informed!). Librarians on websites – not the official bodies – are the usual go-to sources for news, discussion of the issues – and reasons why we need public libraries.

The Library Campaign is delighted to have such **allies**, alongside the more established CILIP, Unison and Women's Institute. We are certainly making noises – and winning the debates – better than ever. But ... so what?

Again and again, the trail stops dead at **Ed Vaizey**. This minister for libraries does support some development work (see pp.8–10). But he refuses to get involved with the real and urgent problems of any local service, anywhere. Campaigners have to raise around £30,000 just to ask him to help, via a judicial review. So far, none has got a result from Ed. Library policy is being created on the hoof, judge by judge.

Of course, Ed's a politician. He has to support his party's vicious cuts. He has to trumpet that some library services are fine, so it doesn't matter that others are awful.

But must he support (by default) councils that think **closing small libraries** solves every problem? Even when there's no financial saving at all? That misuse **dodgy 'consultation'**? That ignore strong opposition and detailed counter-arguments?

All this points to **deeper issues**. One is the library world's inability to spread knowledge and good practice from the good to the bad. Or indeed to publicise what's good.

One is national bodies' slowness to sort out common problems like the future of library internet provision, or e-books. One is the cynical reality behind much local authority 'democracy'.

Another is the enduring love affair with big, shiny mega-libraries – at the expense of local libraries that people who need them can actually get to. A frightening one is that cutting any public service is increasingly seen as inherently good.

Running it for profit, even better. Nobody seems to be looking at these key issues.

We wait to see what's on offer at national level from **Arts Council England** – now looking after libraries. So far nobody is quite clear what its role will be, including ACE itself. It is doing lots of research, much of it covering already well-trodden ground. So far there's very little input from library users (see p.6). The Library Campaign is working on that.

Meanwhile in the real world, each local council seeks its own way to cope with budgets that just can't do the job. (Some even work with – not against – their residents.) The result is **fragmentation**, uncertainty.

For instance, is **volunteering** good or bad? It depends. Some libraries use volunteers well, to supplement – not replace – trained staff.

Elsewhere, communities are offered no other option, if they are to keep their libraries at all. Often, practice is somewhere in the middle, different in every single branch.

Much time and money is wasted devising ways to support all these different practices, and keep them going.

There was more confusion this year when librarians' association CILIP reviewed its policy on volunteers. Many felt it had gone too far in allowing for today's bitter realities. Sensibly, CILIP revised the policy to reflect this feedback.

But the Society of Chief Librarians then issued an inexplicably naive statement that volunteers are a Good Thing, end of story, no pros or cons. Universal derision followed.

That's just one – though central – issue that highlights the current muddle and denial. The true picture will emerge slowly, as cuts get worse.

Many threatened closures are now starting to happen in good earnest.

Where libraries are spared, 'hollowing out' will take time to do visible damage, as users are driven away by minimal opening hours, untrained staff, poor quality stock, shabbier buildings. Some innovations will work, others won't.

But things are moving. A flurry of assorted reports are due soon. The legal position is clearer. Much knowledge has been shared and built on by campaigners nationwide. Compared to last year, the public library movement is more united, more experienced, more determined.

Our **10 November conference** (p.3) will be your chance to draw breath, see where we have got to – and discuss what to do next.

Secretary's Report

Elizabeth Ash
Campaign Secretary



I'M REALLY pleased to have been elected to the executive of The Library Campaign. This is a strong, passionate committee, many of whom are long-standing members, re-elected over many years, giving continuity and vision to the charity.

Andrew Coburn, the previous Secretary, stood down at the AGM in May, but continues his support as an ordinary member. The extensive roles he carried out were so much more than just the role of Secretary.

We have successfully managed to carve up these roles among the committee and other members – a total of six people!

Online In addition to the general role of Secretary I have taken on a few other duties, such as helping to update the website and to promote our presence on Twitter.

If you have suggestions for the website do let us know. And please don't forget, if you are on Twitter, to follow The Library Campaign at @LibraryCampaign.

Get involved! It can be quite a daunting prospect to join a strong committee. But their keenness to welcome new blood has made it so easy.

Meetings are held every two months, in central London. All members of The Library Campaign can attend. I'd encourage you to do so. You will be made very welcome. It is the ideal way to get involved, support the charity and learn all the current news. If you would like to find out more, please give me a call or email me.

Membership I would also encourage you to promote membership to others. The more members we involve, the more we can achieve as a charity. A strong membership helps The Library Campaign to better represent the views of library campaigners and Friends groups.

Listings After we lost a large chunk of data (and consequently much of the hard work put in by Andrew Coburn) I have also taken on the task of reconstructing the links to library campaigns and user groups listed on our website.

If anyone could send me details of groups local to them (or any others, for that matter!) I'd really appreciate it. Similarly if you spot errors, please do point them out. Please send to: librarycampaign@live.co.uk

The library of the future!

A workshop held by Arts Council England in May was part of its 'Envisioning' research on public libraries. Patricia Richardson was there...

THIS CONSULTATION was a gathering of library professionals, managers, technocrats, corporate interests and a tiny sprinkling of fairy dust – users and campaigners. An in-house fest.

The purpose, for the third decade running, was to tear up the library service by its roots and examine them before, perhaps, replanting. We were reinventing the wheel, re-living ground hog day, seeing déjà vu all over again, action re-play. Why?

Each time the public clearly explains what it wants from its library service. The People's Network provided the jumping off point for the digital revolution and digital information. Financing has never been easy. But, it seems to me, the public has been side-lined.

Self-interested individuals, corporations and other bodies have taken over, with a hotline to politicians and public officers, happy for the public to pay. This has led to a democratic deficit and little accountability in public service provision.

I think managers are frightened as the control is gone. They become followers. The public just take what they are given. In the end people forget what a good service was.

First we had to look 10 years down the line. (I shall be 76, an even older member of an 'old' group. Categorisation is not only tedious, but can be insulting. We are not a task to be completed or a box ticked!)

The intro was rather jargon-laden, but that is par for the course these days. We were then exposed to a Powerpoint presentation of a litany of facts from various Ipsos-Mori polls and other carefully-chosen research.

Some was hard to read, but I did detect rather small sample surveys on some charts ...

My group had only a handful of people, including another outsider (or odd one out), like myself. He knew his stuff, said nothing that was not of value, outlined solutions and clearly had the interests of library services, users and potential users at heart.

Having completed the set task, of making lists, we were then addressed by

the group leader. He did not shout at us or try to corral us. He treated us like sensible adults. Hallelujah!

However, we had another set task, involving the dreaded coloured Post-its. (Surprisingly, nobody used the word 'brainstorming'.) This format has been around for years, with no new innovations. Our thoughts were posted on the wall and sorted by the Ipsos-Mori/Shared Intelligence staff into main groups – our targets for the afternoon.



My best bit was a wander around Swiss Cottage Library. It was very pleasant to be in: quiet, youngsters working away, tons of books about everything, digital availability... and the reference sections, a true box of delights! And yet, I was told by a user who remembered the old library that it had been even better in the past. Lewisham's Central Library cannot compare.

There was an opportunity to chat to the lead member for libraries in Brent, and discover how well everything was going on his patch! That day's paper reported a coup in Brent's Labour party, which had deposed its leader of the council. The new leader was having second thoughts about the contentious (to say the least) library closure policy. Quite natural, really, as users/campaigners had blockaded the loss of their essential service, even throwing themselves to the ground. But is anyone listening, hearing or seeing while in power? It truly is 'them' and 'us'.

'Libraries as a public space' was my first chosen group. Such was its popularity that we split into two. The leader was good at managing a group. He encouraged everyone but did not manipulate. However, it is very difficult to identify the results. There was little cohesion.

A common thread was that we could not predict 10 years ahead, as technology moves so fast. Without full input on the success (or not) of the economy, availability of energy at reasonable prices, the impact of a fast growing population (etc) it was all a stab in the dark. (I asked my group what they would have predicted for the library service 10 years ago ...).

My concern about the fragmentation of the library service and increasingly diminished services country-wide was not echoed by managers.

Between groups it was whispered there had been some kind of confrontation with my own authority over the probity of issues/visits figures it has produced. Its own officer had called the figures into question, but this was not done when they appeared in the local press.

The ramifications are quite serious. Where does CIPFA stand on this?

My second group was 'The Core Product'. This group was 'managed', and we were led. It was time-wasting to go over this topic again. It has been done regularly and often. Digital information and technology need to be addressed, but in the context of the 1964 Public Libraries Act and Public Lending Right, both still in force. There was concern that the library service was always behind the curve (not uncommon to government).

A visit from Ed Vaizey was promised, but did not happen. Yet again, where was he? We were promised that the final three comments would be relayed to him.

So? The only comment worth relaying, we said, was the importance of users, listening to users and acting on their views. Meanwhile Mr Vaizey ignores the disruption, disintegration, distortion, postcode lottery and fragmentation of a service that could once have been relied on countrywide.

The End, again!

Patricia Richardson (Users & Friends of Manor House Library, Libraries for Life for Londoners, Library Campaign).

March on!



13 March 2012 saw a lobby of Parliament that was impressive, united and articulate, says Laura Swaffield

AT LAST year's Library Campaign conference in London, people called for a demonstration. This was delivered in March – with not just us but the Women's Institute, Alan Gibbons (Campaign for the Book), campaigner websites VftL (Voices for the Library) and Public Library News, individual campaigners Mar Dixon and Elizabeth Ash, librarians' association CILIP and the trade union Unison (who did most of the huge task of organising it).

We even had displays by those invaluable resources Booktrust, The Reading Agency and The Itinerant Poetry Librarian, as well as CILIP, Unison and the WI.

Quite a line-up. And did it work? As an event, yes. It began with presenting the WI's petition (over 75,000 signatures) at Downing Street. Then the rally in London's massive Central Hall – crowded. Videos, a long parade of well-received speakers – and two music acts! Then a stream of delegations across the road to lobby individual MPs.

As a bonus we had not foreseen when we set the date – the select committee on public library closures had a session that very morning. So we could watch minister Ed Vaizey live on our big screen!

There was excellent press cover. The event gave a fillip to coverage in local papers from Barnet to Bolton. We were on radio and TV across the channels. Alongside natural sympathisers such as the *Guardian*, *Independent*, *Bookseller* and *Morning Star*, we were prominent in the *Telegraph*, *Spectator*, *International Business Times*, *Huffington Post* and more...

Did it work to change Ed's apathy? No. We watched his familiar 'Crisis? What crisis?' act (see pages 8–10). The best thing was that two Brent campaigners contrived to sit very visibly behind him in bright red SAVE OUR LIBRARIES T-shirts. Brilliant!

The alliance of organisations is now working together as Speak Up for Libraries. Next event – 10 November (see page 3).



Famous writers who spoke: Kate Mosse, Philip Ardagh, Alan Gibbons.



At No.10: Ruth Bond, WI; Dave Prentis, Unison; Laura Swaffield, The Library Campaign; Annie Mauger, CILIP; Alan Gibbons, Campaign for the Book.

Ian Clark VftL

IN MANY cases, campaigners are fighting for their local libraries against authorities who do not understand the purpose of libraries, and do not understand how libraries and trained staff benefit library users, the local community, local economy and the UK as a whole.

Many have been put into a position where they are effectively acting as superintendent of their own service, despite this being the responsibility of Jeremy Hunt and Ed Vaizey.



London's Central Hall – crowded.

Dan Jarvis MP

IT'S A generation since Dr Richard Beeching published a report which led to the closure of a third of the UK rail network, in what was subsequently seen as an act of monumental short-sightedness.

Today, two libraries a week are being shut or shuffled off to volunteers, with around 600 currently under threat, and hidden cutbacks in hours, staff and books undermining them from within.

But the greatest similarity to the 1960s is the lack of vision and the waste of opportunity. Ed Vaizey risks being remembered as the Dr Beeching of the libraries – a man who presided over the decline of what should have been one of our greatest assets.

View from Planet Ed



One of the few visible signs that libraries minister Ed Vaizey does anything about libraries is his speech to The Future of Library Services conference every June. Here's the latest ...

... and also some things he didn't say ...

THIS IS a great opportunity to talk about the thriving library service that we have in England.

- A library service made up of more than 3,300 libraries;
- A library service in which councils invest £900m a year;
- A library service which continues to innovate and develop;
- A library service that continues to open libraries and refurbish library buildings.

That's nice. But when Ed took power in May 2010 'nearly £900m' was £892,445,369; a year later it was down to £872,026,203 – and then the cuts started! As for the number of libraries, in 2009–10 there were 3,501, which fell to 3,469 in 2010–11 (according to CIPFA – Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy). So if Ed thinks there are just 3,300 now – it's a disaster.

Then in 2011–12 alone, 121 libraries were lost – either closed or handed to 'the community' (estimate by Ian Anstice of www.publiclibrariesnews.com). The same source counts 275 libraries (234 buildings and 41 mobiles) currently under threat or already closed/lost to council control since 1 April 2012.

Innovations and new libraries? According to the SCL (Society of Chief Librarians), 39 refurbished or new libraries will open this year. Doesn't quite make up for all the closures, does it?

For example: Sowerth's new library in Canada Water is a state-of-the-art facility for the community, and just one of several new libraries in the borough; Oldham's impressive Fitton Hill Library & Neighbourhood Centre has just opened; Worcestershire is opening The Hive – the first-ever joint public and academic library in the country.

Add to that significant refurbishment programmes – from Nottinghamshire to Newham – and you get a taste of the good news out there. And Birmingham is planning to open the biggest library in Europe next year, costing almost £200m.

Thanks to stories like this, we learned from today's Taking Part survey that library visits remain stable – they are not declining. I know that the library service is

facing challenges. But I want to get the good news out, and present a more balanced picture.

Yes, it's true. The June 2012 edition of this regular DCMS survey said: '38.8% of adults had used a library in the past 12 months, a significant decrease from 48.2% in 2005–6, but showing little change from 2009–10.' And this is a survey that leaves out all library use for study purposes. Considering the deep cuts began in 2010–11, that's something. What's more, use of library websites actually doubled (to 16.2%) in 2011–12, cuts or no cuts.

Here's what Ed did not mention. The same survey notes: 'Between 2005–6 and 2011–12, the proportion of people visiting a museum or gallery significantly increased (from 42.3% to 48.9%). There has also been a significant increase over the past year of 2.6% points (46.3% to 48.9%).'

Not huge but very nice. How did it happen? The survey notes: 'There has been major investment in regional museums ... to grow their visitor numbers and attract new audiences.' Now, what might have happened if they'd invested in libraries...?

As I often point out, libraries are emphatically a local authority service, and are fully funded by local government and run by local government.

True. Ed stresses this fact every time anyone asks him to do something serious about public libraries. But it's not the whole truth. His Department should set policy, lead and develop the service – and has legal responsibilities where services fail. He is widely criticised for shirking these.

Nevertheless, they can benefit from having a national development agency to push innovation and best practice.

Our decision to give responsibility for libraries to Arts Council England (ACE) will provide exactly that service. The move unites cultural policy with library policy for the first time, as was envisaged in the 1950s debates that led to the Public Libraries & Museums Act of 1964.

Shame it has a budget of £3m pa for libraries, compared to the previous £13m! Shame the budget for museums is vastly bigger!

It builds on the work ACE already does – funding important organisations that support libraries, such as Booktrust, The Reading Agency and Writing West Midlands, to name just a few.

Jury still out. We await ACE's final plans for libraries' future, due soon. Meanwhile there is concern that 'culture' is only part of what libraries could and should do. Yet so far that's got nearly all the attention (and the money).

This also includes financial support. The government and ACE have already invested more than £500,000 to support development work by library authorities.

Today I am delighted to announce that ACE will be allocating £6m from its Grants for the Arts programme over the next two years for library authorities to lead projects working with artists, arts organisations and other cultural organisations on arts and cultural activity through libraries.

This fund will aim to stimulate ambitious, innovative partnerships. It will help raise the ambition and expectation of libraries, and represents a significant commitment by ACE to their new role.

£500,000 plus £6m looks nice. Until you realise that ACE currently gives museums at least £43m – every year! As noted above, this has transformed their visitor numbers.

What's more, the ACE funds for libraries are not for desperately-needed core library work (let alone restoring buildings). They are for work in the arts. Some grant recipients so far (total £230,000, awarded February 2012) have managed to convince ACE that reading-related projects are art. So far, little is known about the much bigger £6m tranche announced by Ed for September. But it's for 'partnerships with arts organisations', so not for core needs.

As well as supporting libraries with funding for programmes, it's also important that we identify library authorities that may need specific help to address particular issues.

Today I am therefore also pleased to announce an initiative with CIPFA to identify areas where individual authorities might be able to improve.

CIPFA's new 'comparative profile reports' have been developed to

benchmark local council services against comparable authorities, or 'nearest neighbours', as CIPFA calls them.

My Department will be commissioning reports on all library authorities in England, which will be available in December this year.

My Department will use the reports to look for ways in which we can help local authorities. I must emphasise that this is not an attempt to sanction local authorities, and certainly not a return to top-down, inflexible library standards.

The Public Service Standards (RIP) were in fact universally supported by both librarians and library users. They led to a noticeable improvement in opening hours, bookstock and all the things people actually want. The only real dissenters were some local authorities. The Local Government Association continues to use every chance to oppose any 'national' leadership on libraries.

But if we see wildly diverging opening hours between two similar authorities with similar budgets and infrastructure, there will be an opportunity to ask questions and look at how opening hours could be improved.

Or if one authority is spending twice as much on book stock as another, but providing a similar number of books, we can ask if there are ways to improve efficiency.

These reports will be publicly available, allowing MPs, councillors and other interested members of the public the chance to see how their local service measures up, and to ask well-informed questions – and also make well-informed suggestions for improvement.

This looks promising. Public libraries collect scores of statistics each year for big CIPFA surveys, but they have never been properly analysed. Yet so much could be learned from them. These new CIPFA 'comparative profile reports' could, as Ed almost says, help to cure libraries' chronic inability to learn from experience.

It's not a new concept – groups of library authorities have been 'benchmarking' each other for decades. What's nice is that Ed will 'commission' the first round. This implies not just that he'll foot the bill, but that services won't be able to say 'no'.

Also very nice that these will be published for all to see. It will be interesting to see how many councils continue after the first year. It's a subscription service (i.e. it costs money). And not all councils are keen for their residents to get the facts about what they spend, or the quality of their service.

Library buildings are, and remain, important. And in the digital age,

paradoxically, a bricks and mortar service is still extremely valuable.

The People's Network, put in place by Chris Smith, made a big difference to libraries. Millions of people now use their library to access the internet. I heard recently that the SCL (Society of Chief Librarians) target to get 500,000 people online for the first time by the end of 2012 was actually passed in April this year.

Genuinely something to celebrate! Public libraries – with their expert staff, where they still exist – continue to be the major resource for getting people online. If they haven't been closed.

Now we need to go further. In the age of the smartphone and tablet, wi-fi is becoming an essential aspect of everyday life. It is an ambition of mine for wi-fi to be in every library in England by 2015. So I've asked my officials to explore how best to achieve this, working with colleagues across government.

Wi-fi is a no-brainer. Instal it and library footfall is likely to double. Many services, however, can't afford the necessary improvements to IT infrastructure. If Ed's 'officials' can help with this, excellent! But will they? Meanwhile, there is no sign yet that the DCMS is doing anything to sort out the shambles of e-book lending for libraries (see pages 11 and 14). That's much more difficult – and very important.

Government support for libraries can be more effective if it works across Departments. We are now working with the Department for Education to provide automatic library membership for primary school pupils, to encourage them to use their local library – a wonderful idea put forward by children's author Michael Rosen.

There must be few services that don't do this already. It's a natural part of any Bookstart package, government-funded for all pre-schoolers. But for how long? The government tried to withdraw all its funding last year. After a huge outcry, they 'compromised' by halving it. Now Bookstart is in ACE's portfolio. One to watch.

In September we will pilot different approaches to test the most effective ways of supporting children and their families to use their libraries and read more widely.

And libraries have been a key part of the Cabinet Office's Race Online 2012 initiative to get the digitally excluded online. Libraries' staff and volunteers saw 2.5m people getting online, which is a very real demonstration of the role they play in tackling the digital divide.

Arts Council and SCL are currently working with the Post Office to support the government's programme to get more people using government services online.

This approach will be piloted in Birmingham this autumn.

Little currently known about these two projects. We hope to tell you more soon!

And the Cabinet Office has recently awarded £127,000 from the Social Action Fund to The Reading Agency, to support teenage volunteers in libraries.

So more Departments are getting the message that libraries can help them deliver their services more effectively – whether it's education, digital literacy or volunteering.

Libraries have always benefited from the work of volunteers. Volunteers, particularly those who have retired but want to remain active in their community, have also benefited.

I would also like to pay tribute to the growing number of young people who support the Summer Reading Challenge. Last year there were over 3,000 young volunteers. We are expecting a significant increase this year. This is a really good example of where volunteers add value, and also gain really valuable work experience.

Volunteers are crucial to the library service. But let me state again, as I have so often, they are not a substitute for the expertise of professional librarians, as well as other people trained in specific aspects of the library service.

Ed can say all the right things. We all know that some volunteers can bring extra experience and do extra things that staff haven't time for. But unless he takes some interest in the details of local services, professionals are not protected. CIPFA reports a whopping 13.4% drop in professional staff between 2009-10 and 2010-11 – before the cuts really started to bite. Staff in total declined by 'only' 4.7%. So it's obvious that the professional service we want is being rapidly hollowed out.

I am also pleased to see community-supported libraries coming into play, particularly where a local authority is planning to close a building.

Community-run libraries are contributing to a diverse picture of libraries located within village halls, pubs, shops, churches, day care centres, tourist information centres and enterprise hubs.

Little comment needed here. Certainly a small library service might in theory be housed in a much larger building such as a village hall. But the picture Ed draws here – a few books in the pub or church, what fun! – is not a library.

Community-managed and community-supported libraries will never replace the extensive network of council-run libraries we enjoy.

In places like Oxfordshire and Lewisham, councils wanted mass closures but were thwarted by huge public opposition. So, instead, multiple ex-libraries have been dumped on to communities to sink or swim. We all know they don't 'replace' a proper service. But they are being made to.

But they do provide an important additional element of provision, and an important alternative model which can add to the rich variety of services already available.

A bit too much 'variety' here. Bang goes the national network (order any book ever printed) that is the unique selling point of the local library. Bang go the last shreds of any attempt to have a basic common standard. Bang goes any proper accountability to local people. In comes chaos, as scores of individual libraries try to work out their legal status and responsibilities, how to run and staff themselves, and make scores of different arrangements (or none) with their local councils for training, advice, stock and stock management.

It is precisely because of this that my Department is currently working with ACE, LGA (Local Government Association), Defra (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Government) to create a new information resource for authorities considering establishing community supported or community managed libraries in their areas. It is important that local authorities and community groups work together to ensure that library assets transferred to communities are sustainable in the long term.

It's good to know there is guidance coming. The only official report so far said that there are hardly any community libraries and there are lots of things (unspecified) that need working out. Note, however, that the promised new 'resource' is aimed firmly at councils trying to dump their libraries – not at the poor devils who will be trying to keep them going.

Let me take this opportunity to state, once again, that libraries are and will remain a statutory service. The challenge for local authorities, therefore, is the provision of that statutory service in a tight financial climate.

This will not please the LGA, which continues to try to get this crucial duty repealed. However, in practice it makes little difference. Why? Because Ed refuses to do anything with his statutory powers.

No matter how much evidence he is sent, or how many thousands of people plead for help. Even when his civil servants meet campaigners (Ed never

does, to keep himself 'impartial') they have waited months even to get a letter in return. It is difficult to imagine a worse situation, or a more passive minister.

ACE's Envisioning research will help councils think about what their service should look like in the future.

As a highlight of best practice, LGA has launched an invaluable publication *Local Solutions for Future Local Library Services** which – as the name suggests – is packed full of useful case studies, some of which I've referred to today. It picks up on areas where libraries can improve the delivery of the service – and offers tangible solutions. (*www.local.gov.uk/publications)

I have made it clear, from the moment I became a minister, that no library authority should contemplate closing libraries unless they have conducted a proper review of their library service. While some have put forward controversial proposals since 2010, all of them have conducted a library review.

This has been Ed's sole response to the ground-breaking Charteris report, written after the only official inquiry into a library service (Wirral). Yes, he wrote a letter (twice) to local authorities saying that they should have some kind of plan. He has done nothing about any plans people don't like. And he has ignored all the report's other recommendations, such as the duty to ensure access to all and in particular to vulnerable groups such as children.

I have no doubt that the efforts of library campaigners have also brought about welcome changes in some of the more extreme proposals put forward.

Grrrrrr! There is little evidence for this. Knowing Ed will let them do what they like, the 'extreme' councils have either ignored protests – or 'saved' libraries by offering them to volunteers to run.

Desperate groups have raised (or failed to raise) large sums of money to try to use the law to protect their libraries. They have no choice as Ed will do nothing. Success has been very limited, and won at the cost of enormous effort and trouble. Most councils have just made token changes – and usually get away with it.

In one instance, Ed has done nothing, even when directed by a judge. Brent continues to fight tooth and nail to close libraries even where communities are keen to take them on. The judge in their case specifically referred the issue of service quality to DCMS. Action? None.

Nevertheless, I am always mindful that libraries are a local service, paid for by local taxpayers. As far as possible, local democracy, not Whitehall diktat, should have an impact on how they are shaped.

A library inquiry is a power of last resort – it has only ever been used once in 50 years. It is not a tool to be used lightly, or for political expediency.

But much can be done without calling an inquiry. Library campaigners want their problems sorted – not a public inquiry. Ed has civil servants (and ACE has officers) who in the past would have been busy advising councils, sometimes telling them their plans are unacceptable. ACE does not seem to have taken on this role from the old MLA it replaces. And DCMS simply does not tell campaigners, or the public, what it is doing.

A figure of 600 library closures is regularly quoted in the media. But it is very wide of the mark. A truer picture of building closures would be about a tenth of that.

This is a bit of a cheat. The figure of 600 came from librarians' association CILIP. It is an estimate of libraries in potential danger (by closure or otherwise), and covers Wales and N Ireland as well as England. Numbers of actual buildings, already closed, in England alone, would of course be less. Anyway, is even 60 closures somehow acceptable?

But even while there have been closures, sometimes services merge or move to community management. It's important that we are able to have an intelligent debate about this. And it's also important to remember that many libraries are also opening.

Er, yes... 39!

I remain resolutely optimistic about library services. I have never, even in opposition, depicted the library service as being in crisis. I look to a future where:

- ACE acts as a development agency for libraries;
- Libraries can access funds and support from ACE;
- Poorly performing authorities are identified and helped to improve;
- Key initiatives are taken forward by central government, such as wi-fi or automatic enrolment for schoolchildren;
- Government and local authorities understand what a vital resource libraries are, across a whole range of activities.

But we must always remember that libraries are a local service – free to serve their local community, to innovate and adapt to local needs.

I hope you will join me in continuing to spread the good news, and to highlight the excellent service provided to so many people throughout England.

The e-book challenge

E-books are in; small local libraries are out. Right? Not so fast, says Alan Templeton.

ONE OFT-REPEATED excuse for closing small libraries is that they are no longer needed, because library users will increasingly be using e-books rather than printed books (p-books).

There is undeniably a shift towards the use of e-books. But, although the percentage increase in the value of the e-book market is very high, it is a percentage of a small proportion of the overall book market value (e-books have only 6% of the total UK market¹).

In contrast to this rather downbeat assessment, the Bowker Market Research's Global eBook Monitor,² a survey undertaken in early 2012, paints a picture of e-book downloads having already become an important factor in both paid-for and free book acquisition in the UK.

This apparent contradiction may be explained, to some extent, by the different dates on which these surveys were taken. In a fast changing situation, timing is very important.

At present, you can prove anything you like by a careful choice of survey.

However, the Bowker survey does highlight one aspect of the download market that is often ignored by retailers, publishers, librarians and politicians – free downloads exceed paid-for downloads by a significant margin.

Of course, free downloads contribute nothing to the value of the e-book market. But they must be an important factor in determining both book trade and public library strategies. Using value alone to determine how the market is changing will always give a misleading picture – and lead to wrong decisions.

When free e-book downloads are mentioned, the book trade's automatic reaction is to label them as pirated items. It does not want to know about operations such as Project Gutenberg³ which, quite legitimately, provides a free download service.

This knee-jerk reaction is the same as that of the recorded music industry, when it was under pressure from changing technology.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that piracy is a problem – because the

consumer's perceived value of a product is considerably less than the price the producer wishes to charge.

The music industry responded to changing circumstances by simply trying to protect its existing business model. It was largely unsuccessful. Now that it has begun to adapt, music piracy is decreasing.⁴

Publishers have yet to learn this painful lesson. As they thrash around trying to find a viable model for e-book publishing which protects their very high overhead costs, public libraries suffer collateral damage.



It is certain that, like the music industry, the book trade will eventually come to terms with the new technology.

What is less certain is whether there will then be widespread, viable public library services to provide outlets for its products.

A survey by the Pew Research Center,⁵ of 2,986 Americans aged 16+, conducted between November 2011 and February 2012, found that 'overall, most American librarians thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for libraries, and all but a few thought that the evolution of e-book reading devices and digital content has been a good thing for reading in general'.

However, 'patrons and librarians were fairly uncertain about the exact way that libraries would function in the future ...

There was a combination of apprehension and excitement in their answers without a clear consensus about the structure and shape of the institution'.

Where the US goes, the UK will follow 18–24 months later. It is therefore unfortunate that the US does not have any clear idea about how increasing e-book use will affect the country's public libraries or how to respond to the problem/opportunity.

The 'apprehension and excitement' reported by Pew is a natural outcome of pessimists and optimists looking at the same set of circumstances. Both views have an equal possibility of being accurate. It is even possible that they are both fairly accurate.

When such great uncertainty exists, it is obviously not good management to simply assume that one or other outcome will occur.

Yet that is exactly what many local authorities are doing throughout the UK. They are destroying the public library infrastructure by closing small libraries or turning them into poorly financed, vulnerable 'community libraries'.

Essentially, these councils are ensuring the worst case outcome.

The adversarial nature of politics in western democracies tends to force politicians to live in a black and white world. This tendency is strengthened when many of them have little experience of working in the real world, where everything is a shade of grey.

The politicians always wish to embark on big, bold initiatives, even when circumstances suggest these should be avoided.

Strengthen and conserve the library services is surely the sensible decision to make at this time. When the picture is clearer, the big decisions can be made.

In fact, this does appear to be what some councils have decided. Not all councils are bad managers. It is possible, with some thought, to find ways of saving money without destroying what has taken many decades to build.

Turn to page 14 for Part 2.

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Libraries change lives!

‘Libraries change lives, enrich individuals and strengthen communities,’ says CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals). To prove it, here’s some winners that show how it can be done...

CELEBRATING ITS 21st birthday this year, CILIP’s Libraries Change Lives award is open to all UK libraries. It’s an annual showcase that promotes what libraries can do, given a chance. It is run by CILIP and its Community, Diversity & Equality Group.

Linda Constable, chair of the judges, says: ‘It is called Libraries Change Lives for one very simple reason ... because they do! All three projects prove that. This year our fantastic nominees highlight the rich fabric of modern society and the library’s continued importance within it.’

Winner: SKIPTON REWIND CLUB

(North Yorkshire County Council, North Yorkshire Youth Music Action Zone)

THIS OFFERS teenagers the chance to meet library staff and a youth worker to develop their song-writing skills. It also works to encourage children aged 11+ to continue with the public library (curbing the decline that usually occurs when they enter secondary school). Originally planned as a 10-week course, the project has now been running for over 18 months. It has helped provide the youngsters not only with a safe space, but confidence, friendship and transferable skills that have come from planning and hosting their own events.



But they could do so much more!

Libraries and the Arts Council should be more aspirational, says Anne Bennet

ASPIRATIONAL? What I have in mind is what is presented to us, the users. While I can understand a reluctance to embrace the narrow didactic tendencies of some Victorian pioneers, don’t we still need to help and encourage people to function effectively in a modern society?

Engineering and science is an example. We regularly hear of the difficulties we will face because not enough young people study these at a high enough level.

Does this hint that libraries ought to encourage children to see them as exciting gateways to an exciting life? Those old books of Engineering for Boys had a lot going for them (except for the gender thing).

I would make much the same point about language. Libraries must reflect a world where people are entirely free to communicate in a multitude of ways. At the same time, shouldn’t they encourage the idea that those who want to communicate

with the wider world should do so in a way that everyone is likely to understand?

If this reads like a plea for gently encouraging good English – it is. We are the source of a world language, yet all around there is evidence of poor communication skills and a disregard for the value of lucid writing and speaking.

Libraries have made an effort to address the digital divide. But look how scandalous is the UK’s position on various literacy scales. Libraries are high among the places where this should be tackled.

Another aspect of aspiration is having library staff – those that library users meet – with a high expectation that others

Runner-up: THE DIGITAL BAZAAR

(Lambeth Libraries & Archives)



THIS STARTED when a local businesswoman approached the senior librarian with an idea – and he listened! One Saturday morning each month, the community around Tate South Lambeth Library come to explore informally all things digital – the internet, computers, mobile phones, digital cameras, iPads, e-readers etc. Experienced users pick up tips on new devices and programmes, alongside beginners who are using the internet for the first time. They learn partly from the librarians, mainly from each other. As well as stressing the importance of neighbourly sharing, this free event showcases the role of the library service as a major national digital resource. After the successful Lambeth pilot, other local authorities are keen to introduce the Digital Bazaar in their libraries.

Runner-up: REMINISCENCE COLLECTION

(Norfolk Library & Information Service,
Norfolk Museum & Archaeology Service)

Since 2007 the library and museum services have worked closely with a local hospital on creating their Reminiscence Kits. These are a collection of objects, photographs, music and scents to stimulate the senses and remind people with dementia of the things that have happened throughout their lives. The kits, on loan through the library service, have enabled meaningful exchanges to take place between those with dementia and their loved ones.



will find their books (etc) interesting and useful.

So couldn't they, for example, notice when a nearby local history society has a meeting on Pugin and offer a list of what the library has on him? We rightly castigate teachers with low expectations of their pupils. Perhaps we should castigate librarians who have low expectations of potential library users, and indeed of themselves.

Library users should encounter self-confident staff, in real control of what is around them. Not, as is all too often the case, puppets activated by strings leading to remote managerialists.

I see no visible sign that the public library service addresses the gap between what is available in college, university,

specialist and institution libraries and what is in the ordinary public library. I was shocked when my request for *History of Myddle* was not fulfilled after many weeks. The local staff mildly concluded: 'It mustn't be available.' I was lucky enough to know otherwise.

Graduates also will be dismayed by the change from their academic library's service to what is apparently available from their local library. How does the public library link with specialist and academic libraries? And how does it make users aware of the world of knowledge waiting to be taken off a distant shelf, or in an advanced on-line reference resource?

It is easy to think of many more examples. I would like to see libraries

where young and old are encouraged when they think: 'This is what I want to do.' No matter whether that is be a motor mechanic, grow the best roses around, work in a CSI-type laboratory ...

I'd like library users to see that being very good at something that requires hard work is normal – and that the people around them want to do much the same.

Finally, I hope the Arts Council's aspirations include a hard, close look at real libraries and the people in them. When I read of a VIP's rapid tour of some shiny, expensive new creation, before endorsing the local council's assertions about its wonders, I am far too often put in mind of Potemkin's villages. Why doesn't someone spend the time to see whether everything actually works?

The e-book future

Whilst conservation should be today's policy, it is possible to begin looking at the options for the future, says Alan Templeton.

WE DO know that e-book use will alter the needs which have to be met by public library services. In this changing environment, what do we actually know now, with some degree of certainty?

In all the 10 countries covered by the Bowker survey,¹ it was found that 'e-book users can be depicted as a well-educated, full-time employed young reader (most often below 34 years old), living in city/urban areas, who are medium-heavy buyers of printed books'.

This looks very much like a description of the young, urban elite. The people who are usually too busy climbing the greasy pole to visit a public library. So, at present, US public libraries appear to be only marginally affected by e-book use. Therefore, UK public libraries should not yet have felt any noticeable change.

The Bowker survey continues: 'As yet the purchasing of e-books has had a limited effect on the purchasing of p-books, although when it happens, it tends to reduce p-book spending rather than numbers purchased.'

Additional markets

'As there is still a majority of p-book buyers who are not e-book buyers (>70% in each country), the two markets so far have a certain degree of independence.

'Furthermore, it seems that e-books may be creating additional markets for publishers, as a limited % of non p-book buyers are e-book buyers, and this evidence occurs cross country.'

So, not only are we looking at people who rarely visit a library but, when they do, they may well opt to borrow a printed book. The conclusion must be that the present eagerness for dumping public libraries cannot be justified by the growing use of e-books.

The evidence strongly suggests there is not going to be a major decrease in public library use or a great change in the way that people wish to use those libraries, in the short term. We can safely concentrate on the medium /long term effects of the new technology.



One of the great unknowns in the medium/long term is how much the big publishers will be allowed to restrict e-book lending. They have adopted a 19th century attitude and mainly ignored the lessons that were learned from p-book lending.

At present, many publishers wish to ban library e-book lending except via downloading on library premises.

Many commentators have supported this proposal – but many commentators are part of the book trade and are somewhat biased. Bearing in mind the publishers' huge PR muscle, it is quite possible that they will persuade policy makers to adopt the proposal.

Restricting the e-book lending route to library computers is attractive to some library professionals. While many think the idea is absurd in principle and in practice, this download method ensures that library visitor numbers hold up and they still have jobs.

Unfortunately, the scheme will work only if there is an easily accessible public library available to most members of the public. Those who wish to download e-books are not going to travel to do it. An enormous stock of free e-books is available via the internet, and public libraries now have serious competitors.

Local politicians, with little or no interest in the social advantages of public libraries, are destroying the base on which this option rests.

These local politicians always close small libraries and leave large libraries untouched. When e-books come to dominate the book scene (they will eventually), the most efficient library buildings will be the small ones, because the stock of p-books which must be carried will be reduced considerably.

The 'centre of excellence' argument for the large libraries is perfectly valid. But is preserving it of enough value to the public to risk the complete library service?

In many boroughs, the current spate of library dumping is mortgaging the future. It is difficult to predict which library service will survive in the long term. In the better managed boroughs, the e-book challenge can be tackled with more confidence and changes which need to be made can be properly planned.

Indifference?

If the publishers' preferred e-book lending scheme is adopted, will library services be able to cope? From library services in England & Wales, 277,663,877 books were issued in 2009–10.

Assuming that half of these p-book issues are converted to e-book issues, is it possible for the existing public access terminals to enable downloading of these?

In 2009–10, there were 39,651,000 unused hours on these computers. Allowing no time for browsing or set-up, each download would have to be completed in 17 milliseconds to meet the demand.

This is totally impossible. It is clear that a very large IT/telecom investment would be needed to accommodate this demand. This investment is probably not going to be made by local government.

A national programme, like the People's Network, is required. Will government ministers accept their responsibilities to library services or continue with their god-like indifference?

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How to improve literacy – and much else

Alan Templeton argues that economic success needs social mobility, which needs literacy, which means public libraries. And he can prove it.

DOES ANYONE believe that politicians live on the same planet as the rest of us? In June Ed Vaizey, the minister responsible for libraries at the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) talked about the thriving library service that we have in England (see page 8).¹

For a considerable time, the DCMS has been under severe pressure from campaigners to intervene in the countrywide public library crisis. There is no excuse for one of its ministers bending the truth in such a fashion.

Ed Vaizey has carefully avoided compromising his dignity by taking an active interest. However, when he was opposition spokesman on libraries, he was not so coy. He was very eager to declare his commitment to furthering literacy and social mobility via the country's public libraries.

But that was then. Ed Vaizey has scrambled into a nice, comfortable niche. He can now ignore the tiresome common people and their libraries.

Cynical

Unfortunately, the present Labour spokesman, Dan Jarvis, appears to be following the same game-plan. His speeches are noticeably similar to Vaizey's pre-2010: they are principally political party posturing.

Crucially, he has carefully avoided real discussion of the havoc that Labour local councils are inflicting on library services.² Should his party be returned to power, there has to be some doubt that the 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil' attitude of the DCMS will change.

Don Foster, LibDem library spokesman, might be a little more honest in his approach. But it is difficult to tell. He has shown little inclination to discuss public libraries. We are left to speculate why a party spokesperson does not speak. The obvious conclusion is that what he would say is not what the public would want to hear.

Clearly these national politicians, who we expect to serve our best interests, have no idea what those best interests are

(or do not care). The cynical will say it was always so. However, that is not quite correct. There was a time when politicians, both local and national, were (on the whole) united in their determination to make things better for most of us.

The 1945 general election saw a generation of novice MPs, committed to forging a more equal society. They were men and women who had been forced by war service to live closely with people from a wide range of backgrounds – and had found them to be rather like themselves.

Nobody in their right mind wants to return to the late 1940s and early 1950s. The country was bankrupt, both people and infrastructure were worn out. Today's financial difficulties are tiny compared with those of 60 years ago.

Yet it was a time of achievements. Perhaps the greatest was the NHS. But there were other, less visible, initiatives which also had a profound effect on the life of the people.

In the 1940s, a succession of Education Acts laid the foundations for a remarkable improvement in literacy. This was complemented by a strong, improving public library movement.

While schools could plant the seeds of literacy, libraries could water those seeds with readily available books. Practice

makes perfect in literacy, just as with other skills.

Whilst improving literacy will always be a worthwhile objective in itself, the politicians of the day were focused on another target – social mobility. For this, public libraries assumed an all-important role.

It is sometimes suggested that paperbacks have made books affordable to all. In reality, they are affordable to all but the poor. When you are at the bottom of the heap and working for the minimum wage, even now, books look expensive.

In those circumstances, poor families do not buy books. In the post-war years, this aspect of social deprivation was just as obvious. Public libraries were recognised as indispensable to policy delivery.

Of course, a very basic assumption was made by the post-war politicians: that a well-educated person had a greater chance of bettering him/herself than a poorly-educated person and that, to be well-educated, you had to be literate. This was considered blindingly obvious.

However, the blindingly obvious is not always the truth. Would the outcomes of 1940s–50s policies prove or disprove the hypothesis?

The evidence tends to confirm that these policies did have a significant effect on UK literacy. There was rapid improvement in 1960–70 for 17–25 year-olds (precisely the timing and age range which would be expected to show the desired changes).

The bad news is that the improvement was not sustained, and was not large



enough to change the UK's position internationally. The UK remained among the laggards, consistently third from bottom of 14 broadly similar OECD countries. It is the lack of sustained, year-on-year improvement that is the UK's real problem.

It is clear that the politicians lost interest, and allowed a gentle decline to set in. One reason is that by 1970 the 1945 intake of MPs was beginning to leave the stage. The brief, caring period of government was ending. The consensus was shifting.

A less understanding generation of politicians, less committed to social mobility, with a narrower experience range, took up the reins. In this new elite, it was considered only slightly insensitive for a government minister (Sir George Young) to joke: 'Homeless people are the people you step over when you leave the opera'.³

Unequal society

The new priority was the reversal of economic decline. If social justice had to be sacrificed to obtain this, so be it.

Less obviously, the age of the spiv banker and similar individuals was also being created, as checks and balances were progressively removed or altered to aid the economic crusade.

The post-war attack on poor literacy was effective. But did it achieve the ultimate aim of improved social mobility? A 1999 analysis of social mobility in those aged 23–62, by Edinburgh University, strongly suggests it did, in the people best placed to benefit from the policies of the 1940s–50s.

In England, those born around World War 2 had very high upward mobility and very low downward mobility (social mobility at its best). All subsequent birth cohorts suffered decreasing upward mobility and increasing downward mobility. In Scotland and Wales, the same pattern is discernible, but with less consistency. Essentially, the good work of the 1940s–50s was undone.

There is an obvious reason why the post-war literacy policies had such success. The rapid technological changes started in WW2 changed the nature of industrial employment. There was less need for muscle power, and an increasing demand for brain power. So when the literacy policies were downgraded, social mobility was certain to be adversely affected.

UK casual labouring jobs were in continuous decline from 1960. Routine

jobs, of all types, declined from 1980. The growing demand for non-routine, analytic and interactive skills was drawing on a labour pool which was not able to satisfy it.

A rapidly expanding world economy and North Sea oil masked the growing problem. Politicians were content to see a more unequal society, believing it was the inevitable cost of chasing economic growth.

Economic outlook

This was perhaps a valid assumption in Victorian Britain. But not in a world dominated by rapid technological development, where the country with the best educated (socially mobile) population will always win. The neglect of literacy resulted in a poor economic outlook.

If the best-educated country has the greatest chance of prosperity and social mobility, what is the outlook for the UK today? Has there been any improvement over the dismal situation at the beginning of the millennium? In a single word – no.

The UK is now 27th out of 35 OECD countries. Its educational score for 25-to-34s is significantly below the average. Compared to the improvement seen in 1960–70, the UK's position has worsened. Ireland has soared above it, to leave only Italy below.

People in their twenties and thirties are those that will dominate economic activity for the next 30–40 years. Possibly the die has been cast for the medium term, to the detriment of the UK.

But it is not totally certain. It is still possible to influence the medium term outcome. Adult education has been subject to the greatest neglect since the 1970s. It is not an easy way to gain brownie points. Politicians, of all types, do like the easy tasks.

If the UK's social and economic decline is to be arrested soon, it will be necessary to grasp this nettle. Yet, so far, there is no indication that it will receive any attention. It appears that adult education will be left to continue slowly withering away. With it will go the UK's short-term prospects.

In today's world education, social mobility and economic performance are tightly intertwined. Policies aimed at just

one of these are very unlikely to succeed in the long run. A holistic approach is essential.

Nevertheless, education is where the virtuous circle starts. And literacy is where education starts. National politicians are beginning to understand the significance of the relationships, and have started to discuss how to kick-start literacy improvements.

Unfortunately, they have not yet thought through what is required. Literacy is, above all else, about reading proficiency. Schools can provide the basic knowledge, but there is not enough time in the school day to ensure it really sticks. Practice is the only way to fully embed the reading skill.

That means a good supply of books that pupils are willing to read outside school. So a public library has to be easily available to all pupils – not just the lucky ones. This is a fact that has to be faced. It cannot be swept away by a few carefully-chosen words.

Damage

Similarly, there is a great need to remedy the damage done to many people now starting their working lives. The underclass created by failure to promote literacy is condemned to unemployment, very low paid employment or crime.⁴

Public libraries must play a prominent part in any recovery programme. Low pay limits access to reading matter, which limits reading ability, which limits literacy, which limits the opportunity for better employment, which keeps income low – and so on, in a vicious cycle. Libraries can break the cycle.

If the national government does intend to create a just, prosperous country, it will have to recognise that local government is heedlessly removing much of the means of policy delivery. Before the policies have been implemented, they are being sabotaged.

Nearly all the idealists of 1945 are dead now. They would not be very pleased with what we have done with their legacy. It is time we tried a little harder to live up to their example.

If you want to see the four detailed charts on which Alan bases his arguments, contact him at: templeton_alan@hotmail.com

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