Public Libraries Universal Culture Offer

Summary Report

Background

1. In June 2016 SCL announced its intention to create a sixth universal offer focused on culture to "bring the contribution that libraries make to the cultural landscape to the fore and provide a platform for future development of the cultural offer of the public library sector."[1]

2. A research project was carried out between November 2016 and March 2017 to scope current activity taking place in libraries and to articulate how libraries can uniquely support a vibrant cultural life in local communities through a new Universal Culture Offer.

Libraries and culture

3. People can enjoy a quality and diverse cultural experience in every library service in the UK. All library services provide the space for culture and enable creative enrichment. Library staff are catalysts for activity, empowerment and exploration.

4. The Culture Offer recognises public libraries as welcoming places where children and adults can immerse themselves in every form of art: learn from local artists; create their own art; watch theatre, music and dance performances; and learn about art and culture through books and reading. Libraries are often the first place that children and young people experience art and culture, through books, free taster sessions, opportunities to work with artists, and library events.

5. Whether it is a rhyme time session with a group of children and their parents, an arts or crafts session with an emerging artist, a performance or storytelling workshop with an established practitioner or author, a national or regional exhibition touring to local libraries, a hackathon or creative coding session with young people, a live music concert in a city centre library, or a

"Public libraries are already very involved in arts and culture, and this offer will give libraries the resources to expand their partnerships with local culture organisations and provide more ways for customers to get involved. We want to attract new library customers through arts and culture, and help people who don't engage with art to develop a love and appreciation of it."

Neil MacInnes, President, SCL and Strategic Lead, Libraries, Galleries and Culture, Manchester City Council.

94 % of library services who responded to SCL's culture survey said that they provide the space for people to experience cultural activities in their libraries.

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community-led Fun Palace – libraries understand what it takes to facilitate and create a quality and diverse cultural experience, and the lasting impact that has on people's lives and the communities they live in.

6. No other public body has the same reach into and across the UK's diverse local communities, or the networks, economies of scale and flexibility to respond to local needs. There are over 3000 public libraries in England and people make more than 225 million visits per year[2]. The cultural activities and experiences that libraries offer reach people who do not normally participate in arts and culture and help them to develop a love for and appreciate them. Libraries are perfectly placed to help more people access great art and high quality participatory activities, helping to spark a lifelong interest in or pursuit of arts, culture and creativity.

Leeds Library WordPlay Arts Programming Project

"As a result of Leeds Library Arts Council funded arts programme over 6,000 people have:
Drawn on the walls and the floor, painted, sung, created sounds from everyday objects, written stories and poems, delved into imaginative worlds, listened to music, sung songs, talked about art, philosophy, heritage and books. Watched plays and works in progress, rolled on the floor, chilled on cushions, played in the dark, crocheted snowflakes, gone on story walks, been in photos and watched films, rummaged in our archives, admired pottery, hand stitching, sculptures and illustrations, explored Feminism, Race, giving birth and owning pugs, built sheds and tents, a labyrinth and an Imaginarium. Shared ideas, challenged each other, collaborated and marvelled at how all of this has taken place in Leeds Libraries."

There are over 3000 public libraries in England and more than 225 million visits per year to libraries and 98 million visits to library websites[2].

Many libraries are co-located with or work in partnership with museums, art galleries and other cultural destinations.

£6.6 million has been invested in 141 projects through Grants for the Arts Libraries Fund since 2013[2].

7. Public libraries are a gateway to a community or region's wider cultural offer, including museums, galleries, theatres, heritage projects, and the creative industries. Regional Bridge Organisations and local Arts Development Officers and Agencies help libraries make the links to arts and culture organisations, while libraries provide a means for arts and culture organisations to reach local communities and people less likely to access the arts. 81 per cent of library services who responded to SCL's culture survey said that they partnership arrangements in place with the arts, museums and galleries sector. To find your local Bridge organisation visit: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/bridge-organisations

8. Libraries have a strong track record in supporting the development of emerging artists and providing ongoing opportunities for more established artists and authors. Public libraries are becoming more confident at securing external funding and

commissioning creative projects, while arts and culture organisations and artists feel that libraries are becoming more receptive cultural partners.

9. National arts and culture organisations see the benefits of strategic partnering and investing outside of London – the success of the British Library's Living Knowledge programme is an example – and they could work with public libraries to extend their reach and impact into local communities.

Literature review

10. Public libraries are part of the fabric of British life and deliver a wide range of cultural[34], social[5], economic[6] and even environmental[7] benefits for people and local communities across England.
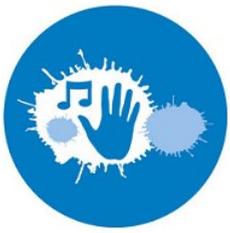
- Participation in culture contributes to community cohesion, reduces social exclusion and isolation, and makes communities feel safer and stronger.
- Those who attend a cultural place or event are more likely to report good health compared to those who do not.
- Businesses in the UK arts and culture industry generated an aggregate turnover of £12.4 billion in 2011.
- Libraries are often the first place that children and young people experience art and culture, through RhymeTime sessions, books, free taster sessions and library events.
- Taking part in drama and library activities improves attainment in literacy.
- Taking part in structured music activities improves attainment in maths, early language, acquisition and early literacy,
- Libraries offer people and communities opportunities for 'betterment' or 'social mobility'.

Libraries enable people to celebrate and showcase their own arts and culture – and learn about the diversity within their communities.

11. Library services who responded to SCL's culture survey[8] prioritised the following benefits and outcomes of their library service's cultural offer: health and wellbeing (including reducing isolation); education and lifelong learning; community engagement and cohesion;

Art of Libraries, Gloucestershire

The overall aim of Art of Libraries is to develop the creative skills of children and young people and develop new working relationships between libraries, arts venues, galleries and museums to sustain the offer when the pilot funding comes to an end. Creative skills have been shown to improve children's educational achievement, health and wellbeing and in later life their employability. It is a prototype project to test a new recipe for cultural education in six "early adopter" libraries. Storytelling and reading will be at the core of this new cultural offer, which will be firmly rooted in each community.

connecting people and communities (social interaction, wellbeing and human connection); a shared sense of place; and enjoyment.

12. Libraries are cultural hubs within communities, as well as gateways to wider cultural activities locally. In and through libraries, people identify with, experience, participate in, create as well as lead culture at a range of different levels; from excellent and inspirational, international, national and regional arts and culture, to brilliant local and community arts and projects inspired by people's place, culture and heritage. Libraries encourage people to explore their own culture, self-expression and creative enrichment. All this happens through a diverse range means and activities.

"Libraries have a sense of 'possibility' and 'discovery' about them. They are places of transformation, both individually and communally. […] Libraries are democratic spaces where knowledge is there to be explored. You can either choose where to go to find something specific, or you can let serendipity lead the way. Libraries allow for social mobility; they are places of possibility, opening doors in later life for many people for whom school didn't work. The librarian is there to make sense of the information overload, to be a front of wisdom, advice and guidance."

~ Darren Henley (2016) 'The Arts Dividend: Why Investment in Culture Pays'

a. *Cultural space* for creativity such as computer labs and study areas, exhibition space, and providing or hiring out space for groups and artists

b. *Cultural resources* including free books, multimedia collections, newspapers and supplements, history and ancestry, access to computers and free Wi Fi, information and signposting to culture and cultural activities, and in many libraries, music lending services (scores and playlist), music downloads and business support for local creative businesses.

c. *Cultural activities* including parent and toddler sessions, group reading, music, arts, crafts, creative writing, and in some libraries performance film-making and photography.

d. *Cultural programmes* consisting of book talks and workshops, artistic exhibitions, film-screenings, dance, plays and drama, and, in some libraries, regular theatre and concert seasons.

e. *Cultural events* for high days, holidays and calendar spikes including World Book Day, Summer Reading Challenge, and, in many libraries, Get Online Week, celebrating Shakespeare, and literature festivals, as well as wider national programmes such as World Mental Health day and World Autism Awareness Day,

Black History Month, Fun Palaces, and Family Arts Festivals.

f. *Cultural leadership and volunteering* for example through Fun Palaces, which empower people and communities to have fun and create and lead cultural activities events and experiences.

g. *Cultural partnerships* such as cultural education partnerships or joint work with the arts and culture sector and local history and heritage organisations. Some libraries are part of music hubs working together with local authorities, schools, other hubs, arts organisations, community or voluntary organisations to respond to local need, provide access to culture for young people, and fulfil the objectives of national plan for Music Education.

Arts Award
The Arts Award's unique qualifications support anyone aged up to 25 to grow as artists and arts leaders, inspiring them to connect with and take part in the wider arts world. Arts Award is growing fast in libraries: between April 2014 and March 2015 almost 2,000 young people achieved Arts Awards through library based projects. More than 100 libraries are Arts Award centres and169 are Arts Award Supporters.
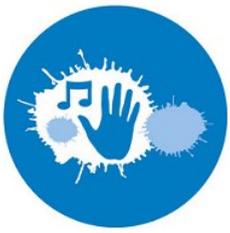
Libraries Live
Manchester Libraries has a cultural programme consisting of popular and classical music concerts, dance classes, opera, film screenings, exhibitions and prolific author events. Over 4,000 audience and participants have engaged with Manchester Library Live at Central Library since 2014.

Sandwell Libraries is in its 4th year of hosting jazz and blues concerts as part of the 32nd Birmingham and Solihull Jazz and Blues festival. In 2016 eight concerts took place over the two-week festival attracting 659 people to libraries. The library service has increased the number of concerts, improved the venues layouts/Jazz club feel ambience and strengthened support from a friends group who are financing more of the events.

13. Libraries act as enablers and catalysts for wider cultural and creative enrichment. Some of the innovative ways libraries are working with partners to facilitate and create cultural activities and events include:

    a. Opening up the library space for culture and creative activities to happen with library staff acting as a supportive, hands-on facilitator-host to artists and organisations.
    b. Creative Commissioning. Working with arts and cultural professionals to cultivate a culture of experimentation, proto-typing, piloting, taking risks and 'trying things out'. Empowering staff to commission culture.
    c. Libraries as cultural hubs and creative making spaces.

    d. Broadcasting. Providing a high profile cultural experience in a central library that is streamed or toured to a network of smaller local libraries.

    e. Touring. A wider regional cultural experience made available for local libraries.

    f. Creative leadership and volunteering. Empowering artists, Friends' groups and other organisations to lead and co-ordinate cultural events and activities.

14. Creative commissioning and a culture of experimentation leads to a quality cultural experience which is sustainable, especially where people and communities are empowered to create and lead cultural events and activities (e.g. Fun Palaces, literature festivals). This type of cultural enrichment should be pursued for its own sake, but it also contributes to a wider range of benefits for people and communities including health and wellbeing and social mobility.

15. Measuring the success of the Public Libraries Universal Culture offer should involve a combination of traditional performance indicators (library visits and issues) with metrics for audience participation (in particular repeat participation as an indicator of success), partnership and collaboration (number of artists supported and groups using the space creatively) and Arts Council England core quality principles and metric statements[9] (including excellence: "it is one of the best examples of its type that I have seen") – that are proportionate to the library service's cultural offer and capacities to deliver.

Celebrating Shakespeare 2016

The festival marked the bard's 400th anniversary with library events and activities over several months. It built on the previous year's successful Shakespeare Week pilot project and was funded by Arts Council England.

More than 11,000 children, young people and adults attended 572 sessions run by 388 libraries - a three-fold increase in engagement on the previous year. Shakespeare Selfie Saturday in April generated more than 6,000 tweets to #shakespeare16 and was shortlisted in two categories of the Public Sector Communications Awards 2016. A total of 47 different artists or groups received 95 commissions to work on arts events in 716 libraries over the Summer and Autumn - attracting 12,024 people.

A context for partnerships

16. Libraries are trusted by the public and have extremely high levels of satisfaction and confidence. However, the number of people using public libraries has decreased over the last decade and there are on-going concerns about the impact of reductions in expenditure on library services. The largest decrease in the proportion of adults

The largest decrease in the proportion of adults who use the library has been among 16 to 24 year olds

who use the library has been among 16 to 24 year olds: 51 per cent of adults aged 16 to 24 used a public library in 2005/06, but only 25.2 per cent did so in the year October 2014 to September 2015[10].

17. There is a risk of a two-tier offer as libraries respond in different ways to reductions in expenditure on library services. However, reductions in funding also provide a greater incentive to engage in new partnerships to find ways to deliver the culture offer. Regional Bridge Organisations and local Arts Development Officers and Agencies can help libraries make the links and connections to arts and culture partners, while libraries provide a connection for arts and culture organisations into the UK's diverse local communities.

18. Arts Council England's investment approach for 2018-22 offers opportunities for libraries to apply directly to the development agency's three main funding streams: the National Portfolio, Grants for Arts and Culture, and strategic funds. Although Grants for the Arts and Culture will no longer be ring-fenced for public libraries, the open access funding stream will see an increase in budget of £10 million per annum to £87.5 million during this investment round. The Heritage Lottery Fund continues to offer a range of open and targeted grant programmes that are relevant for libraries, and is actively encouraging libraries to apply, even if they have been unsuccessful on their first attempt. National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) are well placed to support public libraries and build capacity in the sector.

British Library – Living Knowledge Network.
The British Library has launched the Living Knowledge Network, a nationwide partnership between the Library and 21 major libraries in cities and towns across the UK. The Network will combine local expertise and national organising power to share knowledge, resources and activities.

The Living Knowledge Network aims to strengthen libraries' collective ability to deliver world-class library services to diverse communities, develop joint offerings for library users, and work together on funding applications to share programmes of activity with a combined audience of 13 million. At the heart of the Living Knowledge Network is a simple aspiration – to create value by sharing ideas, and sparking connections between libraries, collections and people across the UK.

Audiences

19. There is an opportunity for public libraries to collaborate with the arts sector to attract new library customers through arts and culture, and for the arts sector to realise benefits by bringing their audiences to libraries. Analysis reveals four broad audience profiles for public libraries[11]:

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a. *People who participate in libraries only.* Slightly more likely to be 75+, non-white and in the lower socio-economic group.
b. *People who participate in both libraries and the arts sector.* Slightly more likely to be female, and in the upper socio economic group.
c. *People who participate in the arts only.* Slightly more likely to be in the 16-24 age bracket, in the upper socio-economic group, white, working and not to have a long-standing illness or disability. A key audience that libraries could work with the arts sector to attract, through a stretch cultural offer.
d. *People who do not participate in the arts or libraries.* Slightly more likely to be in the 75+ age group and not working, in the lower socio-economic group and more likely to have a long-standing illness or disability. An audience that libraries should seek to support through partnership working and targeted projects and programmes.

20. In addition, libraries outside of London could seek to collaborate with the arts and cultural sector to reach what the Audience Agency categorises[12] as 'Dormitory Dependables' and 'Commuterland Culturebuffs', for whom being entertained is important. Libraries in London should ensure their culture offer appeals to a younger audience identified, as 'Metroculturals', for whom visual art is important.

21. In terms of participation in cultural activities, reading for pleasure or buying a novel/book or stories/poetry/plays remains the UK's top activity across the age ranges, followed by original and textile crafts, painting and drawing, playing a musical instrument, photography and dance. In terms of attendance, going to the cinema and attending live music are the top events, followed by attending a play/drama, musical or public exhibition[13]. The Warwick Commission found that there is a "passion for music" in the UK[14].

Brighton and Hove Libraries: Evolving in Conversation
124 artists involved | 1,059 participants | 303,397 audience members

Evolving in Conversation particularly targeted 13 - 34 year olds and adult learners, due to a drop-off in library card holders within this age group. The theme 'How Can Individuals Make Society Change' was explored through free photography, writing and dance workshops and artist commissions, which led to a showcase event at the end of each phase. There was also a professional day for staff, artists and facilitators at each stage to contribute to the development and evaluation of the project.

Evolving in Conversation has brought lots of different people and audiences together to share new experiences and find out more about the libraries. The opportunities for participants to share their skills with others has helped develop confidence and leadership ability. An unemployed gentleman took on a leadership role within one of the groups and has now found employment. Some young people have received Arts Award accreditation through involvement in the project. Young people and adults continue to be engaged with libraries and have created their own groups or attend groups that meet in the library.

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Survey findings

22. A survey was carried out with SCL's library service membership in December 2016 to identify and validate the core and stretch cultural services. The headline findings are as follows:

81 % *of library services who responded to SCL's culture survey said that they had a partnership in place with the arts, museums and galleries sector*

   e. *Space:* 94 per cent of library services provide or hire out space for people to experience cultural activities in their libraries

   f. *Activities:* Over 80 per cent of library services provide the following cultural activities at least monthly or quarterly: group reading activities, music activities, digital, arts and crafts, board games, and creative writing.

   g. *Events:* Over 80 per organised events connected with books such as talks and workshops with authors and writers, at least monthly or quarterly, while over 60 per cent organised the following events yearly or more than once a year: film screenings, events involving digital, video or electronic art, dance performances, theatre performances and concerts.

   h. *Programmes:* Over 80 per cent of library services offered the following specific programmes: Summer Reading Challenge, World Book Day and Night, Get Online Week, and Celebrating Shakespeare. An emerging number of libraries, around 40 per cent, said they were offering Fun Palaces.

   i. *Partnerships:* 81 per cent of library services had some form of cultural partnership in place with the arts, museums and galleries sector, and 82 per cent did so with the heritage sector. An emerging 40 per cent of library services have cultural education partnerships and digital partnerships in place, while 34 per cent have partnerships in place relating to sport and physical activity and 26 per cent reported economic partnerships with creative businesses.

Telephone interviews and regional workshops

23. Telephone interviews were carried out in January 2017 with a geographic sample of survey respondents to gain a more in-depth insight. In February, regional workshops to develop the culture offer were facilitated with local library services and partners in four regions – West Midlands, North East, South East and South West. The table below shows the key themes from this phase of the research.

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No.	Line of enquiry	Theme
1	Audience development	Communications, branding and marketing, and having a clear programme
2	Partnerships	Partnership working with the arts and cultural sector
3	People and skills	A 'creative commissioner' skillset
4	Partnerships	Cultural education (schools, FE, HE, and Adult Learning sectors)
5	Partnerships	Partnership working [general comment about the importance of this]
6	Ways of working	Opening up the library space for culture.
7	Audience development	Responding to local demand and trends, and needs analysis
8	People and skills	Training support (confidence)
9	Outcomes and benefits	Increased reading and literacy
10	Audience development	Children, young people and their families
11	People and skills	Advocacy, profile, public engagement and communications
12	Partnerships	Partnerships with national and regional organisations

24. Comments focussed on the opportunities for collaboration with arts and cultural organisations, working with the Bridge organisations to connect with children and young people, and the importance of an arts 'co-ordinator'/development role to help libraries make the links to galleries, museums and theatres.

25. *Communications and marketing* were key themes in relation to audience development. Comments centred around the need for a clear and consistent quality core programme that is accessible and grounded in libraries unique selling point: books, reading and lifelong learning. Linked to this, stakeholders emphasised the importance of 'getting the basics right'; being tuned in to what people want, their needs and aspirations, as well as 'what's on' locally, and then delivering a programme around that. Making the offer familiar but interesting with something unique and interesting and surprising was also seen as important. After communications and branding, and responding to local demand and trends, the next most common comments in relation to audience development were the importance of supporting children and young people and their families, outreach work, and leveraging partnerships.

26. The importance of *creative commissioning* was another key theme, often made in relation to workforce development and the need to support staff to be able to experiment, pilot ideas and projects, and take risks, as well as providing the broader role of the library as an enabler and facilitator of culture and creativity. Bridge organisation Arts Connection have arrived at a helpful definition of Creative Producers: "Librarians as enlightened commissioners, capable and confident of offering inspiring briefs for artists in the future".

"Library service as the "commissioner-curator". Being able to take risks is key to delivering quality, getting the project up and running and then evolving it, and creating it in a way you can't always predict."

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> **Lit Up, East Riding Libraries**
> Over the last 16 years, East Riding Libraries, through its Wordquake project, has developed a reputation for bringing the best in literature to the East Riding of Yorkshire through their flagship festivals, Beverley Literature Festival and Bridlington Poetry Festival, thanks to the continuing support and commitment of East Riding of Yorkshire Council. The Festival on the Run has seen the library service take pop-up poetry and pop-up theatre out on the road to libraries across the county. The project has put poetry on buses, on prescription and even mashed poetry up with parkour.

27. In addition to specific cultural activities and events, stakeholders emphasised the importance of capturing the practices and ways of working that enable libraries to deliver cultural and creative enrichment. Key among these was *opening up the library space for culture* as part of the core offer and *creative leadership and volunteering* as part of the stretch offer; empowering artists, Friends' groups and other organisations to lead on cultural events and activities.

28. Library services are generally maximising their core budgets by sharing services with other council partners or moving to fully integrated teams and services, e.g. with arts services, museums, galleries, archives and heritage. Alongside that libraries are becoming more confident at applying for external funding. Some library services have developed some aspects of their services as self-financing. The physical space of a library is an important part of its cultural offer. Stakeholders identified the importance of a flexible, attractive and welcoming space, and the benefits of performance and gallery space.

> **The Hive, Worcestershire**
> The Hive is the first integrated public/university library, archaeology service and County archive in Europe. With nearly a million visitors and book issues a year it is maintaining its popularity and has a thriving arts/culture offer. The most recent season's highlights include more author talks, the return of The Royal Photographic Society and a full programme of business workshops and courses.

29. Challenges and barriers reflected the survey findings: capacity, funding, staffing and resources; developing an audience; physical environment of libraries / continuing to provide suitable space; staff skillset and confidence; and marketing and publicity capacity.

Culture offer

30. The accompanying Public Libraries Universal Culture Offer has been developed alongside and in response to the findings from this research project.

31. The Culture Offer complements SCL's existing universal offers for public libraries, in particular the Reading Offer which includes tools to help libraries promote creative reading among its objectives.

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Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed in conversation with the Culture Offer Project Steering Group and the SCL Executive on 22 March 2017, and act as a menu of options.

Positioning the Culture Offer

1. SCL to complete the design, branding, and communication of the Culture Offer publication appropriate to target audiences (the public, partners and funding bodies).

2. Develop a culture outcomes and evaluation framework. SCL and Arts Council England to co-create a shared definition of culture that is formally recognised by ACE classifiers. Define what quality looks like and how we gather data for evidence of impact.

3. Branding and communications. SCL to work with national organisations on a national marketing campaign for public libraries. Linked to Single Digital Presence Strategy.

Workforce

4. Cultural champions. Library services should ensure that *all* staff see themselves as advocates for culture in libraries, while also ensuring there is *a* staff champion role with responsibility for culture in libraries.

5. Support workforce development by providing a toolkit owned and developed by SCL and library service champions to provide support materials and promote good practice. Develop a matrix of national arts and culture organisations and their regional offers, links and partners.

6. Online training package on the creative commissioner skillset (including bid writing skills and support in securing external funding) to promote diversity, quality, ambition and success. Arts development professionals have a strong track record at supporting public libraries in this area and are well placed to develop this support package further. Possible collaboration between SCL and Arts Development UK on this recommendation.

Partnerships and building capacity

7. SCL to develop the relationship with Arts Council England to build capacity in the library sector and ensure that libraries are positioned and supported to participate in funding opportunities and make successful grant applications. Identify the role and position of NPOs in the sector as key partners for libraries. Develop the interface between the Bridge Organisations, Cultural Education Partnerships, and public library services.

8. A possible briefings service for each local authority library service on the needs and opportunities in their local area drawing on work by the Audience Agency and Arts Council England.

9. Raise awareness to SCL network of the opportunities for libraries to reach children and families via partnering with school libraries services and libraries in schools.

10. Creative industries. National advocacy between libraries and the creative industries. Possible partnership between SCL and the Creative Industries Federation.

Regional activity

11. SCL regions to work with a national arts and culture organisations and each deliver a pilot project.

Accreditation

12. Accreditation. Raise awareness of the Arts Award and benefits of the supporter package.

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