



Shared ambitions

Developing the future public
library workforce: Realising
our shared ambitions

Shared Ambitions

**Developing the future public library workforce:
Realising our shared ambitions**

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Developing the future public library workforce: Realising our shared ambitions

Our vision is a diverse, inclusive, and future-ready public library workforce that enables a modern, sustainable, and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community. We believe the workforce should reflect the communities it serves and be equipped to meet a broad spectrum of local needs around information, learning, literacy, employment, digital skills, health, culture, and wellbeing.

Introduction

The Public Library Workforce Development Partnership comprises [Arts Council England](#) (ACE), the [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals](#) (CILIP), [Libraries Connected](#) and [Libraries Rising](#). We have worked together to create this toolbox, designed to strengthen the skills of the public library workforce and help it thrive now and into the future. This work was developed to address a need identified by the [English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group \(EPL\)](#), which brings together sector partners to support and champion public libraries at a national level.

Public libraries are vibrant, participatory spaces which provide services for communities and for people at all stages of life. As a sector, we want to attract people into our workforce from across the diverse communities we serve, and who reflect the broadest range of groups in our society.

Our aim is to create an inclusive, vibrant sector where individuals from all backgrounds see public libraries as a rewarding career path. This will strengthen our collective ability to meet the needs of our communities and showcase the wealth of creativity and innovation they have to offer.

The skills needed in a public library service are constantly evolving, guided by national frameworks, local contexts, community needs, and local partnerships—all of which influence and respond to ongoing societal change. Underpinning these evolving skills and practices are the ethics and values of the library and information profession, such as inclusion, impartiality, access to information, and freedom from censorship [1]. Public libraries are a cornerstone of human rights, lifelong learning, and social cohesion [2].

While we recognise the many challenges facing the sector (which include an ageing workforce [3] and the current funding climate), we believe that the key to a

thriving future lies in strengthening our workforce. This is the central focus of this document. We also acknowledge that there are other important workforce-related issues beyond the scope of this work (see Scope), and we look forward to continuing this journey collectively.

How to use this document

This document is divided into five sections:

- planning for a diverse and future-ready workforce;
- identifying skill needs;
- development pathways;
- leadership; and
- the future.

Each section has introductory text, a selection of useful tools and a set of ambitions for the strategic development of the workforce. It is designed to be used flexibly, allowing library leaders to refer to individual sections as needed, depending on their specific organisational needs.

Executive summary

This document sets out a shared vision for developing a diverse, skilled, and future-ready public library workforce. Co-created by [Arts Council England](#) (ACE), the [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals](#) (CILIP), [Libraries Connected](#) and [Libraries Rising](#), it offers a practical framework to support workforce development across the sector. It recognises the evolving role of public libraries as inclusive, participatory spaces and highlights the importance of a workforce that reflects and responds to the communities it serves.

Structured around five key areas, the document outlines how public libraries can build a resilient and responsive workforce equipped to meet current and future challenges:

Section 1: Planning for a diverse and future-ready workforce

The strategy promotes multiple entry routes into the profession to support a broader and more diverse talent pipeline, including:

- academic qualifications;
- apprenticeships; and
- applied practice recognition.

It highlights the need to address structural barriers such as underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and gender disparities in leadership. Employers are encouraged to adopt inclusive recruitment and development practices, while sector bodies are called to advocate for improved workforce data and equitable opportunities.

Section 2: Identifying skills needs

The document outlines both traditional and emerging skillsets essential for modern library services, including:

- customer service;
- trauma-informed practice;
- community engagement;
- digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) literacy; and
- data analysis.

It encourages alignment with national frameworks such as the Universal Library Offers and the CILIP Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) and calls for proactive horizon scanning to anticipate future skill demands.

Section 3: Development pathways

Recognising the varied career stages and experiences of library staff, the document highlights flexible development pathways and lifelong learning. It identifies opportunities for professional growth through:

- mentoring;
- coaching;
- peer networks and communities;
- practitioner research;
- training and events; and
- project-based learning.

Employers are encouraged to support staff development in alignment with their strategic goals, while sector organisations are urged to expand bursary access and promote peer-to-peer learning.

Section 4: Leadership

Leadership is a shared responsibility across all levels of the workforce. The document advocates for inclusive leadership development, succession planning, and the removal of barriers that prevent progression for underrepresented groups. It highlights current programmes within the sector, and promotes leadership through service development, partnership working, and professional networks.

Section 5: The future

This document emphasises agility, innovation, and futures thinking to prepare for a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous future shaped by:

- political;
- economic;
- social;
- technological; and
- environmental change.

It proposes short-, medium-, and long-term approaches to skill identification, including data analysis, trend forecasting, and scenario planning. Collaboration between sector bodies and thought leaders, academic institutions, and funders is advocated to ensure the workforce remains resilient and responsive.

The document provides practical resources and actionable recommendations for library leaders and sector organisations. It acknowledges current limitations, such as inconsistent workforce data and structural challenges, but positions this shared vision as a living document, adaptable to changing needs and reviewed regularly and collectively by our four organisations.

By championing inclusive development, strategic planning, and leadership at all levels, *Developing the future public library workforce: Realising our shared ambitions* aims to build a thriving public library workforce equipped to serve communities now and into the future.

About our partners

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Between 2023 and 2026, we will have invested over £467 million of public money from the Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to support individual practitioners, arts organisations, museums and libraries, and to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Visit [our website](#) to learn more about our work.

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) is the professional body for the information, knowledge management and library profession. It supports the public library workforce by setting professional standards, offering learning and development opportunities, and promoting the value of professional skills and expertise. Through advocacy, research and accreditation, CILIP helps build workforce capability and resilience, strengthening the role of libraries and library professionals across all sectors.

Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is the independent charity that supports, promotes and represents public libraries. Led by its membership, which includes almost every library service in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies, it provides practical support, training and advice while advocating for libraries with government and the media. It also delivers national projects with cultural, academic and corporate partners. Libraries Connected is an Arts Council England-funded Investment Principles Support Organisation (IPSO).

Libraries Rising

Libraries Rising is the national network for leaders in children's public and Schools Library Services. We believe children and young people need safe, welcoming spaces and real-life connections to support the demands of modern life. Together, we're creating libraries for today's world, where children and young people feel understood, empowered, and inspired. Libraries Rising is the working name of Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (formerly known as ASCEL). You can find out more about Libraries Rising at www.librariesrising.org.uk. Libraries Rising is an Arts Council England Investment Principles Support Organisation.

Scope

This document focuses on strengthening the public library workforce by sharing useful resources, highlighting opportunities and setting out shared ambitions for the future. We recognise, however, that there are important areas of work that need further attention, but these are beyond the scope of this document. A key limitation is the lack of a centralised and comprehensive approach to workforce data collection across the public library sector, particularly in relation to equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) indicators. Most available data is from the CILIP 2015 and 2023 Workforce Mapping surveys, which were completed by individuals rather than employers [3, 4]. While these surveys offer valuable insights, they rely on voluntary self-reporting and contain significant gaps.¹

Additionally, the findings do not break down data by subsectors within the library field (e.g. health, academic, public). This makes it difficult to understand issues related to workforce composition, retention, engagement, and experience across different library workplace settings. As a result, these gaps hinder the public library sector's ability to develop targeted and inclusive workforce strategies.

It is also important to note that recruitment approaches and practices vary across local authorities. While this local flexibility is valuable, it presents challenges in building a clear national picture. As such, this issue also falls beyond the scope of this piece of work.

We also acknowledge that low pay and the long-term reduction in staffing levels are significant and ongoing challenges affecting the public library workforce [5]. These structural issues have a considerable impact on workforce sustainability and morale. However, they fall outside the scope of this document. Our focus is on areas where there is potential to make meaningful progress, while acknowledging the broader context in which this work takes place.

This work is a starting point. We are committed to continuing this journey collectively and working with partners to advocate for further research and improved, consistent data collection to help build a more inclusive and representative workforce.

¹ For example, there is a lack of data on religion or belief, and published findings often use broad ethnicity categories such as "white," which obscure the representation and experiences of minority white groups (e.g. Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities). Some characteristics are not commonly included in EDI monitoring, further limiting the sector's understanding of workforce diversity and inclusion. For example, socio-economic background, caring responsibilities, and career breaks for maternity leave.

Note on language

Across our different partner organisations, there are differences in preferred language when writing about ethnicity. In this document we followed the Government guidance on [writing about ethnicity](#).

Section 1: Planning for a diverse and future-ready workforce

People enter the public library workforce through varied routes and with a variety of different skills and experience. Entry-level staff may join the workforce with GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

The sector currently offers three equal development pathways to grow the specialist skills, knowledge, and expertise needed for the public library workforce of the future. These provide a choice of quality-assured and sector-recognised routes to enter and progress within the profession:

- An academic pathway through CILIP-accredited higher education courses, typically at master's level but some at degree level.
- A blended vocational model through [sector-designed apprenticeships](#).
- An applied practice route which recognises on-the-job learning (CILIP Professional Registration awards: Certification, Chartership and Fellowship).

These three different routes enable more people to enter and progress within the sector. This fosters a more diverse workforce and allows individuals to choose what works best for them and their employer.

We also welcome those transitioning into the profession from other careers, whose specialist knowledge and transferable skills enrich the sector and complement our existing development pathways e.g. through local authority development programmes or adjacent sectors such as heritage. Likewise, we welcome those entering public libraries from other sectors of the profession such as school, college or university librarianship.

The value of professional development

Opportunities for continued professional development include:

- mentoring and coaching;
- project-based skills development;
- eLearning and digital upskilling;
- peer learning networks;
- shadowing colleagues; and
- participation in communities of practice.

Employers can support staff to develop their skills, knowledge, experience and reflective practice. Being a learning organisation enables employers to build a resilient, future-ready workforce that delivers greater impact for the communities they serve. In turn, this creates a positive organisational culture where staff feel valued and helps to attract and retain talented staff [6].

Addressing structural barriers

Our ambition to create a strong and sustainable public library workforce for the future requires that we attract talent from across the breadth of the UK population. While women constitute a significant majority of the library workforce, their representation decreases in senior leadership roles [3].

Simultaneously, the profession faces a lack of gender diversity at entry levels, with young men being notably underrepresented [3]. Addressing workforce equity requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges the intersection of identities. For instance, women from ethnic minority backgrounds may face barriers to both entry and leadership. CILIP's (2023) Workforce Mapping indicates that individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds comprise less than 5% of the library workforce, highlighting a critical need for increased ethnic diversity across all levels [3].

Although there is limited data about the public library workforce, there is evidence of a significant decline in public library staff numbers across the UK since 2016 [7]. Between 2012 and 2023, pressures on local authority funding led to a 32% reduction in headcount [6]. Part-time roles were disproportionately affected, and these are often held by those with caring responsibilities.

Recognising structural barriers, such as socio-economic factors or geographic and rural disadvantages, is crucial to address inequalities and ensure our profession reflects our communities. Efforts to create opportunities for young men to enter the library workforce should occur in tandem with initiatives that empower women, particularly those from underrepresented ethnic minority backgrounds, to advance into leadership. To achieve a truly equitable and representative library workforce, sector bodies and employers must develop strategies that can address multiple dimensions of diversity. While recruitment strategies fall under the remit of local authorities and are beyond the scope of this document, a universal approach to planning and developing the workforce has the potential to benefit all by creating a vibrant and skilled talent pipeline.

Attracting diverse talent toolbox:

Sector-specific guidance

- [Welcome to Libraries induction pack](#)
- CILIP's [Ethical Framework](#)

- CILIP's [Professionalism definition](#)
- [Salary guidance](#)
- CILIP's [Best practice guidance for apprenticeships](#)
- [Workforce Mapping](#)

Inclusive workplaces

- [Local Government Association: Diverse by design](#)
- [Ensuring Inclusive Working Cultures – What Really Works? Report by Business in the Community](#)
- [Building inclusive workplaces: assessing the evidence – Literature review by CIPD](#)
- [Inclusion at work 2022 – CIPD report](#)

Realising our ambitions

What can library leaders do?

- Promote public libraries as inclusive, innovative workplaces by connecting young people to library careers through schools, colleges, digital platforms, volunteering opportunities and community networks. This should include government-funded programmes such as Discover! Creative Careers.
- Provide opportunities for young people's work experience and youth volunteering.
- Provide structured placement opportunities for students at different levels in public libraries.
- Increase the provision of apprenticeship positions at Level 3 to support the broadest possible range of people to enter the profession.
- Focus on skills and capabilities in recruitment to acknowledge the breadth of valuable experiences that diverse applicants can bring from adjacent sectors e.g. teaching, youth work, early years, digital marketing.
- Share success stories that demonstrate impactful approaches to increasing workforce diversity.

What can sector organisations do?

- Collectively advocate for the centralised collection of public library workforce data to ensure services are adequately staffed to meet the evolving needs of communities.

- Facilitate cross-sector collaboration, and collaboration with adjacent professions to develop new skills and expertise within our services to meet local needs.
- Actively create platforms and opportunities that showcase diversity within the profession, ensuring people can see themselves represented in public library roles.

Section 2: Identifying skills needs

The public library workforce includes a range of roles which employ a broad set of knowledge, skills and behaviours across different levels of expertise. These are underpinned by the ethics and values of the profession.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is leading a strategic research partnership, The Skills Imperative 2035, to identify the essential employment skills people will need for work by 2035 [8]. Its 2023 report, looking at the national workforce across all industries and sectors, identified the six most in-demand 'essential employment skills' in the future [9] as follows:

- communication;
- collaboration;
- problem-solving;
- organising, planning & prioritising work;
- creative thinking; and
- information literacy.

Its 2024 report identifies that not only is the demand for these skills growing but that employers face a 'double skills gap' challenge, finding gaps in role-specific technical skills alongside the gap in these essential skills that crucially support the technical ones [10].

Traditional and evolving skillsets

Public library services adopt different staffing models. Some services use a model of specialist roles to deliver specific functions, while others prefer a model where key skills are dispersed across the workforce. Whichever model is used, high-level specialist expertise underpins effective service delivery.

This in turn highlights the need for a diverse and evolving skillset to meet the needs and priorities of local communities. These skills and capabilities are shared across the library workforce and developed progressively. Career progression involves deepening and broadening how these skills and capabilities are applied, rather than moving simplistically from "basic" to "advanced" skills.

A [skills matrix](#) can be a useful tool to map existing skills across a team, identify gaps, and inform workforce development planning over a three-year cycle.

Skills and capabilities

The following is an indicative list of knowledge, skills and capabilities commonly needed across the public library workforce:

- Access to collections and services.
- Advocacy and influencing.
- Business support.
- Computer coding and programming.
- Collaboration and partnership working.
- Collection development.
- Co-creation and participatory approaches.
- Communication.
- Community engagement.
- Conflict resolution and de-escalation.
- Creative thinking.
- Cultural competence and inclusive practice.
- Customer service.
- Data-driven decision-making.
- Digital, media and artificial intelligence (AI) literacy.
- Electronic and technical skills.
- Event and programme management.
- Income generation, fundraising and bid writing.
- Information literacy.
- Leadership and change management.
- Literacy and learning.
- Marketing, social media and promotion.
- Organising, planning and prioritising work.
- Personal effectiveness.
- Problem-solving.
- Reader development.
- Research and data analysis.
- Service design and delivery.

- Social justice approaches.
- Strategy, planning and people management.
- Trauma-informed practice.
- User needs assessment.
- Volunteer management.
- Working with children and families.

Whether skills are embedded within specific roles or shared across teams, they are applied across three main domains:

- Working with people and communities (including underserved groups).
- Working within systems and services.
- Working across and beyond the organisation.

An example to illustrate skills across domains: a staff member who has responsibility for a library makerspace.

Working with people and communities	Working within systems and services	Working across and beyond the organisation
Developing a 3D animation programme for young people to build creative thinking and technical skills.	Applying electronic and technical skills to evaluate, procure and maintain equipment.	Working with a local college to enable inclusive access.
Supporting learning, confidence and participation.	Developing and marketing makerspace programmes.	Collaborating with partner organisations to organise a STEM festival.

Partnerships and place-based working

Public libraries are essential infrastructure and are commonly co-located with partner services. Key to the success of our workforce is understanding [place-based approaches](#) and developing the collaborative skills needed to build successful partnerships.

Universal Library Offers

The [Universal Library Offers](#) provide a framework for high-quality library services and focus on four themes which enrich our communities:

- Reading.

- Creativity and Culture.
- Health and Well-being.
- Information and Digital.

Each offer is underpinned by the [Vision and Print-Impaired People's Promise](#), developed by Share the Vision, and [The Children's and Young People's Promise](#), developed by Libraries Rising.

Workforce skills planning

Workforce skills planning should recognise the context of the Universal Offers in tandem with Arts Council England's [Libraries Development Framework](#) and local authority strategic planning, and be underpinned by the broad range of knowledge and skills found in the CILIP [Professional Knowledge and Skills Base \(PKSB\)](#).

The PKSB is the sector skills standard for the information, knowledge, library, and data profession. Developed in consultation with employers, practitioners, experts, and learning providers, it underpins learning and professional development across the sector and is periodically updated through an extensive consultation process.

- For employers, the PKSB provides a framework for skills analysis, staff training, and workforce development. It has been adopted by major public sector employers to shape in-house capability, career pathways, and assessment schemes.
- For individuals, it supports career development by helping identify training needs, prepare for appraisals, plan progression, and strengthen job applications.
- The PKSB is also central to CILIP's accredited qualifications and Professional Registration, offering a recognised route into and through the profession. It aligns closely with the Knowledge, Skills and Behaviours (KSBs) in sector apprenticeships, enabling progression to fast-tracked Professional Registration.
- Its portability across library sectors supports the transfer of learning and cross-fertilisation of knowledge, particularly into public libraries.

Apprenticeships and T Levels

At the time of writing, the following [sector-designed apprenticeships](#) are available in England:

- Level 3 - Library, Information and Archive Services Assistant.
- Level 4 - Information Manager.

- Level 7 - Health and Care Intelligence Specialist.
- Level 7 - Archives and Record Management.

Both in-person and online delivery is available for apprenticeships.

Library services in England may also wish to explore alternative apprenticeship options to address local skills gaps:

- Level 3 - Cultural Learning and Participation Officer.
- Level 3 - Data Technician.
- Level 3 - Content Creator.

In England, [T Levels](#) are post-16 qualifications which combine knowledge-based learning in an educational setting with an industry placement. Public libraries may wish to work with local educational providers to deliver these courses and build skills for the future:

- Digital Support.
- Digital Data Analytics.
- Education and Early Years.
- Media, Broadcast and Production.
- Marketing.

Current programmes

Arts Council England, CILIP, Libraries Connected and Libraries Rising engage with library staff at all levels through training needs analysis, surveys, reference and focus groups to identify emerging areas for skills development, and this informs the development of training opportunities. Here are some examples of current or recent programmes:

Future Libraries

[Future Libraries](#) is a two-part initiative funded by Arts Council England and developed by CILIP in collaboration with Libraries Connected, the British Library, and Shared Intelligence. It supports public library staff and leaders in reimagining libraries for a changing world shaped by political, economic, social, and digital forces, including climate change, demographic shifts, and technological advancement. The initiative includes [Come Rain or Shine: Preparing Public Libraries for the Future in an Age of Uncertainty](#) and the [Future Libraries Toolkit](#), a practical framework for strategic, agile thinking and horizon scanning.

SparkSpace

[SparkSpace](#) is a new project funded by the Foyle Foundation, driven by Libraries Rising and created by Participation People. It supports library services to work inclusively, equitably, and co-creatively with all children and young people, including those with lived experience of marginalisation or deprivation. Building on insights from Libraries Rising's Youth Engagement Network and member skills audit, *SparkSpace* offers an interactive online learning module, a downloadable toolkit, and associated learning resources co-created with young people, members, and expert partners.

The identification of future skills will require proactive horizon scanning by thought leaders, membership and professional organisations, think tanks, funding bodies and academic researchers to underpin the creation of new roles (see The future).

Identifying skill needs toolbox:

- CILIP's [Ethical Framework](#)
- [Libraries Rising \(formerly ASCEL\) Skills Audit](#)
- [Universal Library Offers](#)
- [How libraries can support AI and digital media literacy](#)
- [The Libraries Development Framework](#)
- [CILIP's Professional Knowledge and Skills Base \(PKSB\)](#)
- [CILIP's Future Libraries resources](#)
- [SparkSpace](#)
- [Digital Heritage Hub – assessing future digital skills](#)
- [Responsible AI Practical Toolkit](#)
- [T Levels](#)

Realising our ambitions:

What can library leaders do?

- Map workforce training needs and areas for skills development.
- Implement a three-year cycle of workforce planning.
- Embed protected time for staff professional development within staffing models and resource planning.
- Align skills development with the library's long-term vision and strategic goals.

What can sector organisations do?

- Employ creative and collaborative approaches to secure funding to support staff development opportunities.
- Facilitate regional collaborations to enhance local provision of training.
- Seek funding for a bespoke skills and training needs analysis tool for the sector.
- Create a forum for discussion and horizon scanning which addresses future skills needs in the sector.

Section 3: Development pathways

The public library workforce is its greatest asset. People join our workforce at different career stages and with different levels of experience. Entry level staff may join the workforce with GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. As the sector recruits at different entry points, staff may develop through on-the-job training and in-house local authority training programmes.

The sector offers three equal development pathways to grow the specialist skills, knowledge and expertise for a library service to thrive into the future. These pathways offer flexibility to meet individuals' learning and development needs. Individuals may choose to undertake an academic qualification, achieve recognition through Professional Registration (demonstrating their applied learning in practice), or a blended learning model through an apprenticeship route. Employers should support staff to pursue these pathways and develop their skills and knowledge in alignment with organisational strategic aims and performance review processes.

Opportunities for learning and development

A range of professional development opportunities are available outside of formal training and learning. Library staff can explore their professional interests, build new skills and grow creatively through roles on:

- Regional, national and international committees e.g. CILIP regional networks, the Libraries Connected Advisory Committee and [IFLA committees](#)).
- Networks and professional groups focused on sectors or interests:
 - [CILIP Youth Libraries Group](#) (YLG)
 - [CILIP Public & Mobile Libraries Group](#) (PMLG)
 - [CILIP Information Literacy Group](#) (ILG)
 - [CILIP Library & Information Research Group](#) (LIRG)
 - Libraries Rising Regional and National committees
 - [South Western Regional Library Services CIO](#).
- Libraries Connected Universal Offer Steering Groups and Project Groups.
- Charity trustee and education institution governor roles.

These experiences support personal and professional growth, while bringing fresh insights and learning back to the workplace. Roles on committees and in professional networks can increase productivity which demonstrates how beneficial this is for employers and the wider economy [11].

The sharing of learning amongst colleagues is a powerful catalyst for the diffusion of innovative practice across the sector. Enriching experiences that facilitate this sharing of knowledge and support staff development include:

- mentoring;
- coaching;
- shadowing and observing colleagues; and
- exchange visits.

Formal opportunities for further learning are readily available through:

- conferences;
- secondments;
- seminars;
- symposia;
- training; and
- eLearning courses.

Some seminars and conferences offer bursaries. Look out for these where appropriate and encourage appropriate staff to apply. Staff can also keep up to date in bitesize formats through webinars and professional reading.

Projects and research opportunities

Staff can strengthen their management, leadership and research capabilities through active involvement in projects and practitioner research, gaining experience that supports both personal and service development.

Key grant-making organisations

Grant funding for projects and research provides valuable opportunities for staff to develop their skills while also enabling organisations to broaden and enhance their service offer. Key grant-making bodies to follow on social media are:

- [Arts Council England](#)
- [Community Foundation Wales](#)
- [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#)

- [The National Lottery Community Fund](#)
- [The National Archives Community Hub](#)

It's also worth following local and regional charities, as they may offer funding opportunities for community-based projects and initiatives that support staff skills development.

Celebrating excellence

Alongside formal recognition (such as accredited qualifications and Professional Registration) our profession fosters a culture that celebrates success to ensure our workforce feels valued. Intentional opportunities include:

- Sharing stories of good practice.
- Sector-specific awards.
- Highlighting professional achievements.
- Demonstrating impact in our communities through data and case studies.

National and regional awards and media coverage play a vital role in raising the profile of the positive impact staff have on our communities, and this showcases the different roles in our profession.

Development toolbox:

Talent management

- [NHS Talent Management Conversation Tool](#)
- [NHS Leadership Academy Conversation Tool and resources](#)
- [The Talent Hub and Conversation Tool – University of Huddersfield](#)

Good practice in value and recognition

- [Incentives and recognition report CIPD](#)
- [NHS staff recognition framework](#)

Sector learning opportunities

- [Arts, Culture and Libraries 2025 programme](#)
- [CILIP's develop your skills](#)
- [Libraries Connected eLearning – Learning Pool](#)
- [Libraries Connected Webinars](#)

- [Living Knowledge Network Webinars](#)
- [Digital Culture Network](#)
- [LibParlor eLearning for developing research capabilities](#)

Realising our ambitions:

What can library leaders do?

- Ensure staff from all levels have protected time to undertake professional development activity.
- Facilitate the cross-fertilisation of staff learning from their additional committee and network roles.
- Celebrate successes and showcase different examples of professional development and how it leads to career progression.
- Harness funding opportunities to facilitate project development and develop new staff skills to supplement training budgets.
- Foster opportunities for job shadowing both within and beyond the organisation

What can sector organisations do?

- Enhance equity within the profession by piloting randomisation approaches in bursary allocation.
- Increase bursary allocation by working with commercial and charitable partners.
- Develop creative opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and professional development and promote these to library leaders.
- Create and promote flexible and accessible professional development opportunities to respond to sector needs.

Section 4: Leadership

Good practice leadership in public libraries empowers staff at every level to lead and influence the future direction of the service. A culture of leadership at every level is cultivated through shared decision-making, open dialogue and opportunities for staff to contribute, innovate and grow.

While our ambition for the public library workforce is an inclusive, empowering environment where all staff can flourish as leaders, there is established evidence that a “glass ceiling” disproportionately affects women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds in reaching senior leadership positions across the sector. Women constitute 80% of the library workforce yet hold only 66% of managerial and director positions within the creative industries [12]. 90% of these leadership positions within the creative industries are held by white people [12]. We wish to challenge these inequalities and give a platform to leaders from underrepresented groups to amplify their voices and increase their visibility within our workforce. This work sits alongside local authority inclusive recruitment practices (see [Attracting diverse talent](#)) and their leadership development opportunities, continues with our sector development pathways but must also underpin the design of library leadership programmes.

Formal leadership programmes

Examples of leadership programmes in the sector include:

Leading Libraries

[Leading Libraries](#) was funded by Arts Council England and developed by Libraries Connected in collaboration with the Birmingham Leadership Institute to strengthen and diversify public library leadership. The [21st Century Public Servant](#) model was central to the programme design [13]. Participants reported increased confidence and a lasting positive impact on them as leaders. The Leading Libraries eLearning module provides an ongoing opportunity for staff to develop their skills and capabilities in innovation, dialogue, inclusion and resilience in leadership.

Arts, Culture and Libraries 2025 programme

The [Arts, Culture and Libraries 2025 programme](#), funded and curated by Arts Council England in partnership with the Local Government Association, offers tailored leadership development opportunities for staff. These include peer learning, strategic planning support, and capacity-building activities designed to strengthen leadership in cultural and library services. The programme aims to equip leaders with the skills and confidence to champion culture and libraries as drivers of local wellbeing and regeneration.

Online learning

Online learning facilitates leadership development for staff at all levels. It fits flexibly around the needs of the library service and the personal commitments of library staff. [CILIP's Digital Leadership for Libraries](#) module, funded by Arts Council England, develops the learner's digital mindset and the ability to deliver digital transformation in public libraries. The module is free to access. [CILIP's Stepping into Leadership](#) online programme includes six modules that support individuals to improve their personal effectiveness as leaders.

Leadership opportunities

There are also numerous opportunities to lead within public library roles and through sector development opportunities. For example, staff can:

- Undertake service development projects.
- Lead a project funding bid.
- Lead the development of research in partnership with academic colleagues.
- Develop specialist subject knowledge.
- Support the development of others through mentoring and coaching.
- Lead a partnership working group in their local authority.
- Lead on a Universal Library Offer Steering Group for the service or region.
- Contribute to a [CILIP Member Network](#).
- Contribute to a conference planning committee.
- Lead change in the profession through sharing their good practice.

Conference attendance and engagement with peer networks, including holding volunteer committee positions in these, are key to the development of leadership confidence and abilities.

Public library staff navigate a rapidly changing environment, characterised by high levels of uncertainty, and resource constraints. Leadership for an uncertain future is vital and facilitated through CILIP's [New Skills for the Future Library Leader](#) and resources. Leadership at all levels of the workforce is vital to challenge inequities, create participatory spaces which meet the needs of communities and drive meaningful change.

Leadership toolbox:

- [Leading Libraries](#)
- [Arts, Culture and Libraries 2025 programme](#)
- [CILIP's Digital Leadership for Libraries](#)
- [CILIP's Stepping into Leadership](#)
- [Clare Leadership](#)
- [RLUK Emerging Leaders](#)
- [CILIP's Future Libraries resources](#)
- [Workforce Mapping](#)

Realising our ambitions:

What can library leaders do?

- Support staff to identify and undertake leadership activities and professional development.
- Share relevant opportunities with team leaders and staff based on their individual career ambitions and development goals.
- Nurture and encourage staff to recognise their potential and consider leadership pathways they may not have explored without support.
- Engage in proactive succession planning.
- Empower staff to lead at all levels, fostering a culture of shared leadership.
- Apply a situational leadership approach, adapting to different contexts, challenges and individual needs.

What can sector organisations do?

- Develop opportunities to build a diverse workforce and remove the glass ceiling (through for example, building coaching programmes with leaders from ethnic minority backgrounds outside the library sector).
- Increase the diversity of senior leaders and trustees, ensuring representation reflects the communities that libraries serve.
- Seek funding for new leadership programmes which build on Leading Libraries.
- Advocate for specific funding streams to enable leadership development in libraries to facilitate leading at all levels and support succession planning.

- Take positive action to ensure diverse representation among conference speakers, trainers, and mentors.
- Conduct equality impact assessments to inform leadership programme design, delivery, and evaluation.

Section 5: The future

Our public library workforce must be agile, flexible and ready to embrace many possible futures. We must cultivate creative thinking to address the challenges ahead. A range of factors will shape the future of our public libraries, including social, political, and economic change. Identifying the future skills of the workforce requires different approaches for the short, medium and long term.

Identifying skills in the short term

Short-term and immediate needs will be identified through:

- Service usage data.
- Emerging local community needs.
- Changing regional and national contexts.
- Acting on national opportunities.
- Staff and community engagement.
- Skills gap assessments.
- Universal Library Offers.
- Grant funding streams.

Identifying skills in the medium term

In the medium term, trend analysis will shape workforce planning. [CILIP's Future Libraries resources](#) empower library staff to consider how potential trends and patterns may shape services. The following may influence future skills and staffing models [14, 15]:

- planned changes in local government reorganisation and devolution;
- the rise in mis/disinformation;
- declining social cohesion;
- increasing co-production with communities;
- population demographic shifts; and
- place-based partnership working.

Partnership work, co-location approaches and cross-sector collaboration will shape a more integrated workforce. Commercial income generation opportunities, Artificial Intelligence, automation and linked data will also influence the skills

needed for the future. The digital capabilities and environmental sustainability knowledge of our workforce will be increasingly important [5, 6].

Identifying skills in the long term

In the long term, future skills will be identified through horizon scanning and an active dialogue with the following:

- Thought leaders.
- Membership and professional organisations.
- Adjacent sectors.
- Think tanks.
- Funding bodies.
- Government.
- Arm's length bodies.
- Academic researchers.

Global trends (our changing climate, natural disasters, potential global food shortages, international politics and conflict) may impact on our communities and public libraries must be ready to respond, as they did so well during Covid-19. It is vital to engage in scenario planning, learn from international partners and create space for innovation to take place.

Succession planning and sustainability across all levels of the public library workforce are essential to ensure the sector is adaptable, resilient and future-ready. We need a collective commitment to champion development pathways, proactive investment in ongoing skills acquisition for all staff, and robust knowledge transfer processes for staff as they enter, exit and re-enter the workforce. By embracing futures thinking, trend analysis, horizon scanning and robust succession planning, we can ensure that our public library workforce is ready for any possible future.

This vision aligns with our shared ambitions for the sector. This document will be reviewed responsively to reflect evolving community needs and workforce trends, as well as through formal regular reviews.

Realising our ambitions:

What can library leaders do?

- Build a culture of futures thinking, enabling services to respond rapidly and innovate in the face of change.

- Engage in strategic dialogue with sector bodies to contribute to the early identification of emerging trends and workforce needs.
- Embrace opportunities to demonstrate the impact of public libraries.

What can sector organisations do?

- Collaborate nationally and regionally with sector bodies, learning providers, and library leaders to anticipate emerging skills needs and co-design innovative staffing models.
- Deliver digital upskilling programmes to ensure services are future-facing.
- Lead roundtable discussions with partner organisations, academics and thought leaders to actively plan for future scenarios.
- Advocate for follow-on grant funding streams to underpin the diffusion of successful innovations and staffing models across library services.
- Advocate for dedicated funding streams to support workforce development and upskilling, enabling future-ready services and responsive support for evolving national and community needs.

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