

Insights from the Apprenticeships in Public Libraries Survey

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Libraries Connected

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Executive summary

Apprenticeships are considered an important route into skilled employment. Within the library sector, the introduction of the Library, Information and Archive Services (LIAS) Assistant apprenticeship standard created a dedicated Level 3 pathway into library, information and archive careers. Despite this, relatively little is known about how apprenticeships are being used across public library services. To address this evidence gap, Libraries Connected surveyed library services in England and Wales during June and July 2026. The survey received 55 valid responses from library services across England and Wales.

Apprenticeship adoption remains uneven

More than half of responding library services (58%) reported recruiting apprentices during the previous five years. However, uptake varied considerably across the sector. 42% of respondents reported no apprenticeship recruitment during this period, while almost half of those that had recruited apprentices (15 of 32 services) reported recruiting only one or two apprentices. By contrast, four services had recruited more than ten apprentices over the same period. These findings suggest that apprenticeships are established within some services but have not yet become embedded across the sector.

Apprenticeships support both recruitment and workforce development

Across the 55 responding library services, respondents reported recruiting a total of 164 apprentices over the previous five years. Of the 117 apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship, 84 (72%) were reported to have secured permanent employment within the library service. The findings suggest that apprenticeships can provide a route into library careers and permanent employment. The survey also found that apprenticeships are being used to develop existing staff and support career progression.

Apprenticeships can deliver a wide range of benefits

More than half of services that had recruited apprentices (17 of 32, 53%) reported three or more benefits arising from apprenticeship provision. These included workforce development, service improvement, increased skills capacity, and the introduction of new ideas and perspectives. Apprenticeships were also seen as creating opportunities for existing staff to develop mentoring, coaching and supervisory skills.

Funding and capacity remain significant barriers

More than half of all respondents reported funding constraints (31 responses, 56%) and staffing capacity for supervision (30 responses, 55%) as barriers to apprenticeship provision. Multiple barriers were common, with 55% of respondents identifying three or more constraints. While many library services recognise the value of apprenticeships, concerns about short-term funding, workforce capacity and organisational stability are likely to continue to limit their use.

Practical support, collaboration and strategic action are needed

Information about funding and incentives was the most frequently requested area of support (28 responses, 51%), followed by training and resources for managers (24 responses, 44%). 16 respondents (29%) wanted opportunities for apprentices to connect and share learning, while 14 (25%) highlighted the value of peer learning and examples of successful apprenticeship models. These findings suggest that wider adoption of apprenticeships is likely to require practical support, shared learning, stronger collaboration and a more strategic approach to workforce development.

Key implication

Overall, the findings suggest that apprenticeships can make a positive contribution to recruitment, workforce development and career progression within public libraries. However, adoption remains uneven and future growth is likely to be constrained by funding pressures, workforce capacity and organisational factors. Realising the full potential of apprenticeships will require continued investment in the public library workforce, alongside practical guidance, shared learning and stronger collaboration across the sector.

Key recommendations for Libraries Connected

- Facilitate peer learning and the sharing of effective practice across library services.
- Improve access to information and guidance on apprenticeship funding and incentives.
- Strengthen connections between library services, apprenticeship providers and local authority workforce teams.
- Establish a peer network for library apprentices, co-designed with current and former apprentices.
- Explore opportunities for sector-led apprenticeship delivery.
- Work with strategic partners to advocate for sustainable investment in public library staffing and workforce development.

Introduction

Apprenticeships are considered an important route into skilled employment. Evidence suggests they can improve skills, support employment outcomes and provide opportunities for career progression (What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, 2015). Within the library sector, the approval of the Library, Information and Archive Services (LIAS) Assistant apprenticeship standard in 2018 created a dedicated Level 3 pathway into library, information and archive careers (CILIP, n.d). A revised version of the LIAS apprenticeship standard is scheduled to take effect in December 2026 (Skills England, 2026).

The national apprenticeship dataset suggests that use of the LIAS apprenticeship standard has varied in recent years. Apprenticeship starts rose from 60 in 2019/20 to a peak of 110 in 2021/22, before declining to 90 in both 2022/23 and 2023/24 and then falling further to 70 in 2024/25. A further 50 starts had been recorded in 2025/26 at the time of reporting (Department for Education, 2026a). The data suggest that the LIAS apprenticeship standard is being used within the library sector.

However, the dataset does not identify how many of these apprenticeship starts occurred within public library services. As a result, there is limited evidence about the extent to which apprenticeships have been adopted across the public library sector, the benefits they are delivering and the barriers affecting their use. Libraries Connected surveyed its member library services in England and Wales during June and July 2026 to address this evidence gap. The survey gathered evidence from library services that had recruited apprentices as well as those that had not, providing an opportunity to better understand apprenticeship provision across the sector. The findings also provide a baseline understanding of apprenticeship provision within public library services ahead of the introduction of the revised standard.

Apprenticeships have the potential to support recruitment, skills development and career progression within public libraries. This is particularly relevant at a time when many services continue to face significant workforce challenges. Alongside an ageing workforce (CILIP, 2023), library services have experienced substantial reductions in staffing levels over the past decade. According to UNISON's Closing Chapters? 2026 report, staffing levels fell by 47% between 2010/11 and 2024/25 in councils able to provide data. Against this backdrop, apprenticeships offer a potential mechanism for attracting new entrants, supporting succession planning, developing existing staff and bringing new skills into services.

Apprenticeship delivery takes place within different policy and funding frameworks in England and Wales. While England operates a levy-funded apprenticeship system, Wales delivers apprenticeships through a nationally funded programme overseen

by Medr (Department for Work and Pensions, 2026a; Welsh Government, 2026). Consequently, the funding arrangements, administrative processes and incentives available to employers differ between the two nations, which may influence levels of apprenticeship uptake.

The wider policy environment has also increased the focus on apprenticeships as a route into skilled employment and workforce development. This emphasis has been reinforced by the Milburn interim review into Young People and Work (Department for Work and Pensions, 2026b), which highlighted the need for stronger pathways into employment, particularly for young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Apprenticeships are increasingly viewed as an important mechanism for widening access to careers and developing future skills. This aligns with the ambitions set out in Shared Ambitions: Developing the Future Public Library Workforce, which identifies apprenticeships as an important means of widening access to library careers and developing a more diverse, sustainable workforce.

The survey was open to Libraries Connected member services and received 55 valid responses, of which 32 (58%) had recruited apprentices during the previous five years. This report presents the findings from the survey, examining the extent to which apprenticeships are used across public library services, the apprenticeship standards that have been adopted, and the experiences of library services. Together, the findings provide a snapshot of apprenticeship provision in public libraries over the last five years and identify opportunities and challenges for future development.



Shape Youth Festival, Gateshead Libraries, image by Mark Savage

Limitations

This survey provides a useful insight into apprenticeship provision within public library services and the experiences of participating library services. However, several limitations should be recognised. The survey was based on a self-selecting sample of 55 library services and did not collect individual-level data directly from apprentices. Consequently, the findings reflect the perspectives and experiences of responding services and may not be fully representative of the wider public library sector.

In addition, apprenticeship policy and funding arrangements differ between England and Wales. While the survey included responses from library services in both nations, only a small number of responses were received from Wales. As a result, the findings are more representative of practice in England than in Wales and should be interpreted with an awareness of these differing national contexts.

Findings

Survey respondents

The survey received 55 valid responses, each representing a single public library service. Of these, 51 responses were from library services based in England and four from Wales. At the time of the survey, there were 152 library authorities in England and 22 in Wales. Responses were received from a mix of urban, rural and mixed service areas, providing a useful cross-section of perspectives from across the sector.

Current use of apprenticeships

This section of the report explores the extent to which apprenticeships are being used within public library services, the characteristics and backgrounds of apprentices, the outcomes reported, and the standards being adopted.

Adoption of apprenticeships

The survey responses suggest that apprenticeship adoption varies considerably across the public library sector. As shown in Figure 1, 23 library services (42%) reported that they had not recruited any apprentices during the previous five years, while 32 services (58%) had recruited at least one apprentice. Among those that had recruited apprentices, recruitment was typically on a small scale. Fifteen services recruited only one or two apprentices over the five-year period, while a further 11 services recruited between three and five apprentices. Most recruiting library services (28 of 32) reported fewer than ten apprentices over the five-year period.

Figure 1: Distribution of apprentice recruitment across library services in the last five years.



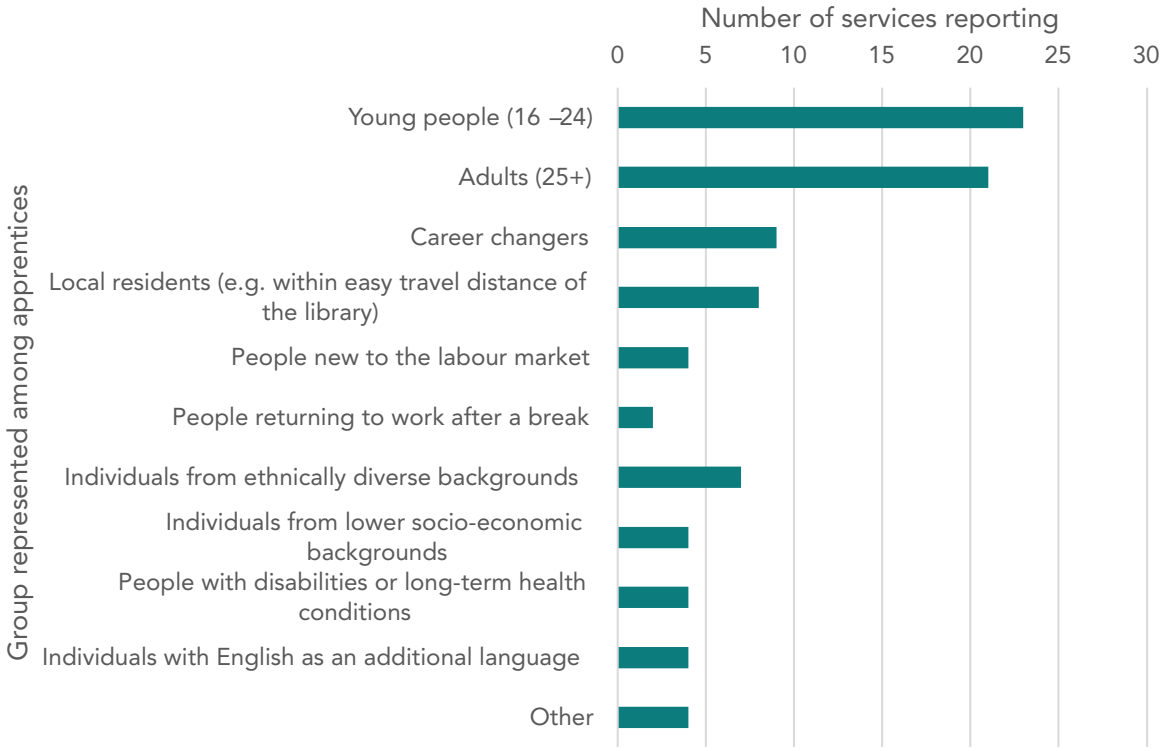
The distribution is heavily concentrated at the lower end of the scale. Only four services reported recruiting ten or more apprentices, and just three reported recruiting more than 15 apprentices. One library service was a notable outlier, reporting the recruitment of 36 apprentices over the five-year period.

These findings suggest that approaches to apprenticeship recruitment differ across the sector. While some library services appear to make regular use of apprenticeships, many recruit apprentices only occasionally, and more than a third reported no apprenticeship recruitment during the period covered by the survey.

Backgrounds and characteristics of apprentices

Respondents were asked to identify the backgrounds and characteristics of individuals represented among their apprentices. Multiple responses were permitted. As Figure 2 shows, apprenticeships appear to be attracting people from a range of backgrounds and at different stages of their careers. Respondents reported recruiting both young people aged 16-24 (23 responses) and adults aged 25 and over (21 responses) in broadly similar numbers. Nine respondents also identified career changers among their apprentices.

Figure 2: Demographic groups represented among apprentices by number of library services reporting. Multiple responses permitted.



Several respondents highlighted the role of apprenticeships in attracting people from the local community, with eight services reporting that apprentices had been recruited from within easy travelling distance of the library. There was also some evidence that apprenticeships may be helping public libraries attract applicants from a wider range of backgrounds. Respondents reported recruiting people from ethnically diverse backgrounds (7 responses), lower socio-economic backgrounds (4 responses), people with disabilities or long-term health conditions (4 responses),

individuals with English as an additional language (4 responses), those new to the labour market (4 responses), and people returning to work following a career break (2 responses).

While the survey did not collect demographic data directly from apprentices themselves, these findings suggest that apprenticeships may be supporting public libraries' ambitions to widen access to careers and attract people from a broad range of backgrounds and life experiences.

Free-text responses in the "other" category identified a small number of additional groups that were not included in the predefined response options. These included care-experienced young people and care leavers (3 response), recent graduates (2 response) and people with experience of seeking asylum (1 response).

Completion and employment outcomes

Over the last five years, the total number of apprentices recruited by respondents in our sample was 164. Of these, 117 apprentices had successfully completed their apprenticeship, while others were still in progress at the time of the survey. 84 (72%) of those who completed their apprenticeship were reported to have secured a permanent position within the library service. Although some apprenticeships remained ongoing, these findings suggest that apprenticeships can provide a route into permanent employment within public library services.

A small number of free text comments highlighted challenges relating to recruitment and completion, including difficulties appointing suitable candidates and instances of apprentices leaving before completing their studies. As one respondent explained:

> *"Of the five recruited, one left early... one completed their apprenticeship but left to resume their academic studies... The other two apprentices came to us despite our expressed reservations about their suitability..."*

Free text responses also highlighted the different ways apprenticeships are being used. While many services use apprenticeships to recruit new talent, several reported using apprenticeships to develop existing staff and expand workforce skills.

> *"Although we have only recruited to one apprenticeship we have 7 other existing staff members within the service who have completed or are completing apprenticeships..."*

These findings suggest that apprenticeships are being used both as a route into employment and as a workforce development tool for existing staff.

Progression and destinations

Respondents were asked to describe the roles apprentices moved into following their apprenticeship. 17 respondents indicated that apprentices had secured frontline library positions. These roles included Library Assistant, Customer Service Assistant, Community Library Assistant and Community Hubs and Libraries Assistant. This suggests that apprenticeships are contributing to the workforce pipeline for core service delivery.

Three respondents reported apprentices moving into more specialist positions, including Library Officer, Stock Officer, School Library Service and development-

focused roles. Some respondents also highlighted progression beyond initial entry-level appointments, including some individuals moving into management and service development roles.

Apprenticeships were also reported to support the development of existing staff. As one respondent noted:

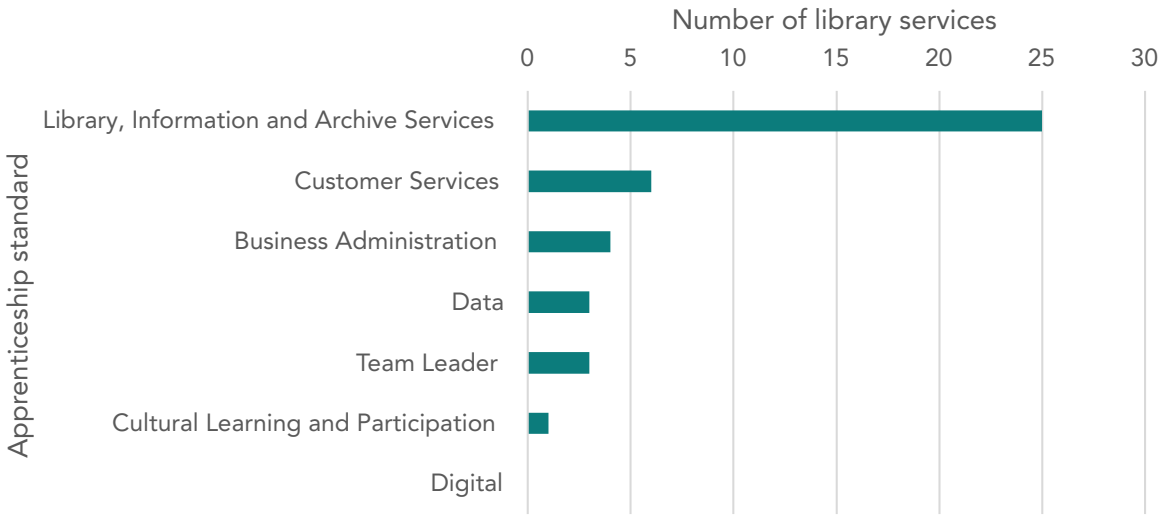
> *"The Team Leader apprenticeships have allowed us to offer development opportunities to existing staff, some of whom have gone on to be promoted."*

Overall, the findings suggest that apprenticeships are supporting both entry into library careers and the development of the existing workforce. While most reported destinations were frontline library roles, respondents also identified examples of progression into specialist, supervisory and management positions.

Apprenticeship standards used

Library services were asked to report which Level 3 apprenticeship standards they had used. Respondents were able to select more than one option. Figure 3 shows the number of services reporting use of each apprenticeship standard.

Figure 3: Apprenticeship standards used by library services



The Library, Information and Archive Services Assistant (LIAS) apprenticeship was by far the most widely used standard within the sample (25 out of 32, 78%). The Customer Service apprenticeship was used by seven services (22%), while Business Administration (4 out of 32, 14%), Data (3 out of 32, 13%) and Team Leader 3 out of 32, 13%) apprenticeships were less common. Just one service reported using the Cultural Learning and Participation apprenticeship.

Of the 32 services that had recruited apprentices, 24 (75%) reported using a single apprenticeship standard. This represents 44% of the full survey sample. However, some library services had adopted a more varied approach. One service reported using four different apprenticeship standards, while a further eight had used two standards.



These findings suggest that public library services primarily make use of the sector-specific LIAS apprenticeship standard. However, some are also drawing on broader apprenticeship standards, which may reflect the diverse skills and knowledge needed within the modern public library workforce. For example, three respondents reported using the Team Leader apprenticeship. Funding for this apprenticeship was withdrawn in England in September 2026 (Department for Education, 2026b). As a result, opportunities for library services to use apprenticeship funding to support the development of management and supervisory staff may become more limited.

The findings also suggest that some apprenticeship standards with potential relevance to library services are not currently being adopted. For example, no respondents reported using the Digital apprenticeship standard. This is a notable given the role of public libraries in supporting digital inclusion and digital skills development, as well as their increasing engagement with emerging technologies including virtual reality, augmented reality and, more recently, artificial intelligence (WSA Community Consultants, 2026).

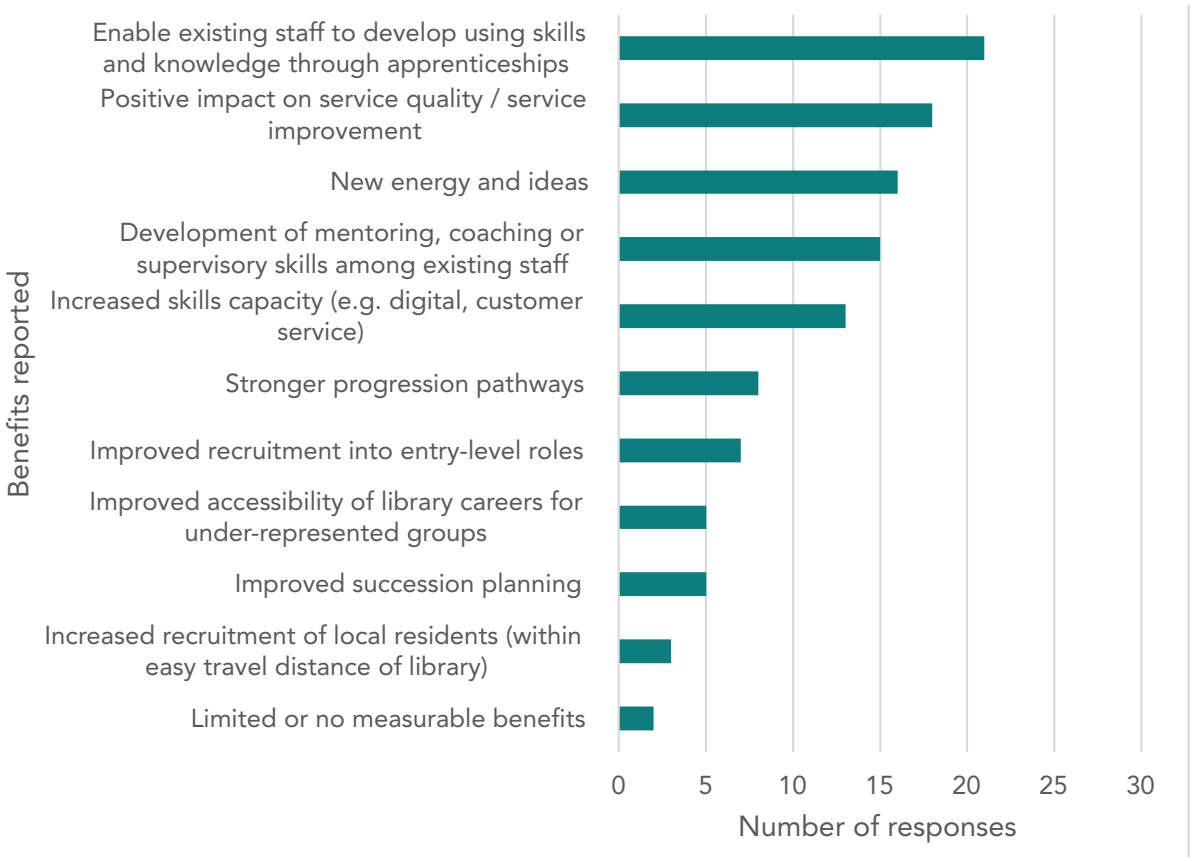
The absence of the Digital apprenticeship standard within the sample would benefit from further exploration. While the survey did not explore how digital skills are being developed within services, the finding raises questions about whether this digital pathway is an area that could add value to library workforce development.

Benefits

Library services identified a range of benefits arising from offering apprenticeships. Many respondents identified multiple benefits. Of the 32 services that had recruited apprentices, 17 (53%) reported three or more benefits, indicating that apprenticeships are frequently associated with a combination of workforce, service and organisational benefits rather than a single outcome.

As shown in Figure 4, the most frequently reported benefits included enabling existing staff to develop new skills and knowledge (21 out of 32, 66%), a positive impact on service quality and service improvement (18 out of 32, 56%), the introduction of new ideas and perspectives (16 out of 32, 50%), the development of mentoring, coaching and supervisory skills among existing staff (15 out of 32, 47%), and increased skills capacity within the service (13 out of 32, 41%).

Figure 4: Benefits reported by library services. Categories are presented in order of frequency (highest to lowest) for ease of interpretation, rather than in the order used in the survey.



At the end of the survey, library services were asked: "Is there anything else you would like to share with us about apprenticeships in public libraries?" One respondent outlined the positive contribution that apprenticeships had made to service development:

> *"Apprenticeships have been very beneficial to our service. Apprentices have brought new ideas, skills, knowledge and experience to enable us to develop different areas of our service. They have supported our existing programme of work, increasing our capacity to deliver activities and sessions with more groups."*

Another commented on the personal benefits of supporting apprentices, highlighting how working with apprentices can provide a rewarding development opportunity for existing staff:

> *"From my personal experience working with our first cohort of apprentices was one of the most rewarding times in my career. Seeing a passionate group of people develop and grow and bring so much enthusiasm into the service has been invaluable to us and them."*

These responses suggest that the benefits of apprenticeships extend beyond the direct contribution apprentices make to services. Apprenticeship programmes can also create opportunities for existing staff to develop skills and experience in mentoring and supervision.

Respondents also identified benefits relating to recruitment and career development. Stronger progression pathways were selected as a benefit by eight services, while seven reported that apprenticeships had improved recruitment into entry-level roles. Benefits relating to workforce diversity and inclusion were also identified. Five respondents indicated that apprenticeships had improved the accessibility of library careers for under-represented groups, while three reported increased recruitment of local residents.

Although reported less frequently, these findings suggest that apprenticeships may offer a mechanism for widening access to public library careers and supporting broader workforce ambitions around inclusion and representation.

Summary

Overall, the findings suggest that apprenticeships can deliver a wide range of benefits for public library services. Respondents highlighted benefits relating to workforce development, service improvement, organisational capacity and the introduction of new ideas and perspectives. Existing staff also benefited through opportunities to mentor and support apprentices. Although some benefits were reported less frequently than others, the findings indicate that apprenticeship programmes can contribute to multiple aspects of workforce and service development.



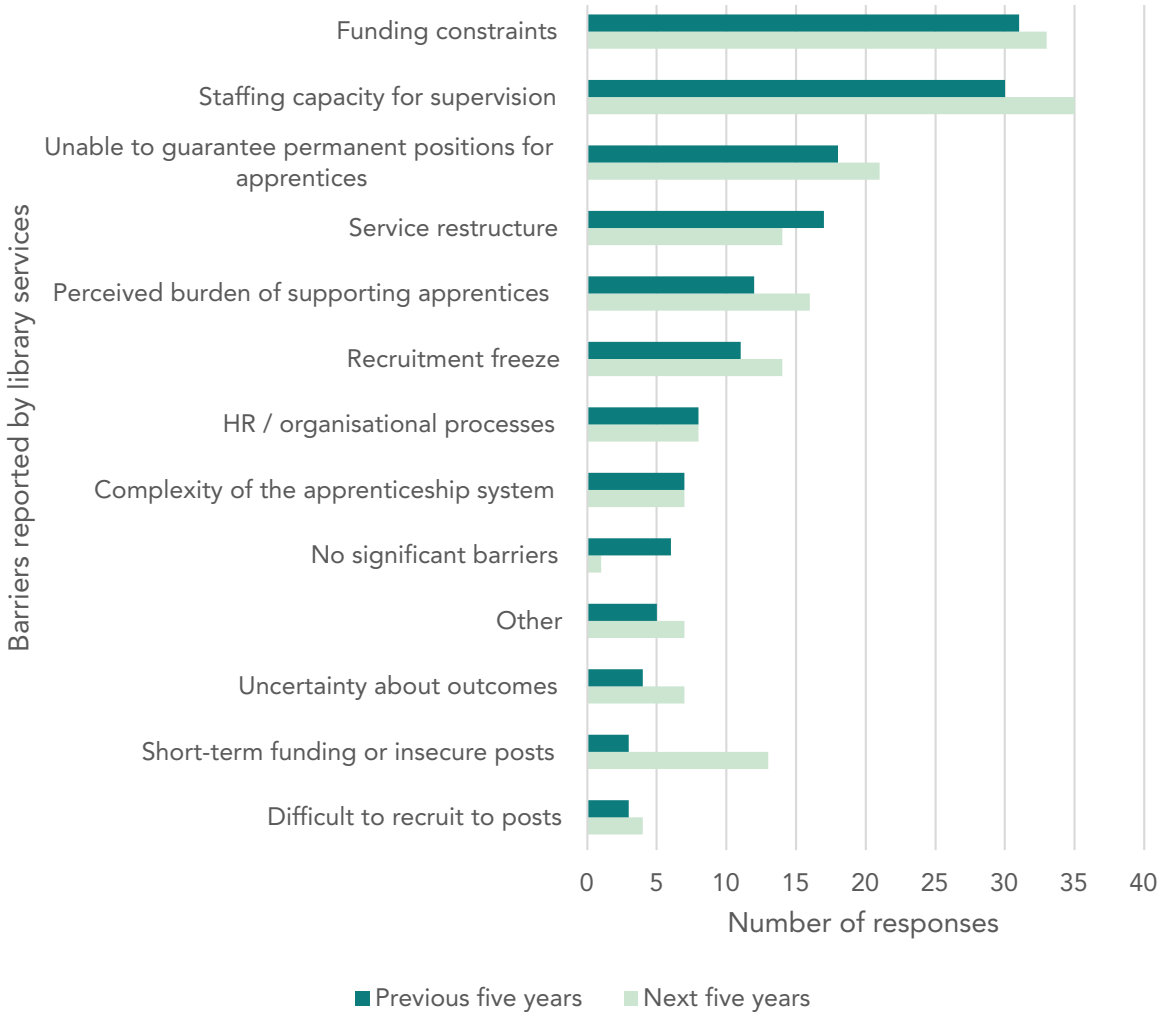


Barriers

Barriers to offering apprenticeships

All respondents were asked about the barriers that had limited their ability to offer apprenticeships during the previous five years (see Figure 5). More than half identified funding constraints (31 responses, 56%) and staffing capacity for supervision (30 responses, 55%) as barriers to apprenticeship provision. Respondents also highlighted a range of organisational challenges, including an inability to guarantee permanent positions for apprentices (18 responses, 33%), service restructuring (17 responses, 31%), perceived burdens associated with supporting apprentices (12 responses, 22%), recruitment freezes (11 responses, 20%) and HR or organisational processes (9 responses, 16%). This suggests that barriers to apprenticeship provision are closely linked to the wider resource, capacity and organisational pressures facing public library services.

Figure 5: Barriers limiting library services' ability to offer apprenticeships in the previous and next five years



Multiple barriers were common, with 30 services (55% of respondents) identifying three or more barriers to offering apprenticeships. Despite this, ten of these services had successfully recruited apprentices, suggesting that barriers can make apprenticeship provision more difficult but do not necessarily prevent it.

Comments submitted in response to the survey's final open-ended question highlighted the impact of changing funding arrangements. One respondent described the contrast between previous centrally funded apprenticeship programmes and their current service-level funding responsibilities:

> *"In terms of external apprenticeships, previously the Council funded these centrally so it was easy for us to include these as additional roles in our establishment. Now, we would have to fund these in the service, which means we would have to use a Community Hubs and Libraries Assistant vacancy to fund this. Given how tight staffing now is, this could be difficult for us to do in terms of capacity at the frontline."*

Several respondents highlighted the relationship between apprenticeship provision, staffing structures and service capacity. Comments described the challenges of funding apprenticeships within existing budgets, releasing staff time to support apprentices, and creating apprenticeship opportunities in services affected by restructuring, reduced staffing levels and part-time workforce models. As one respondent explained:

> *"It can be quite onerous recruiting and training someone for a post that lasts only 18 months. Apprentice posts have to be funded within existing budgets, so the only way to create one is to remove an existing permanent post. We have had a couple of apprentices over the years who required a lot of support and time; conversely we have had a couple who were quite brilliant and enhanced the service greatly."*

A further respondent highlighted the impact of workforce restructuring:

> *"I have seen this work well in another service… However they were always in a 30-37 hour role, and we don't have any of these following funding cuts and service restructures. If we had any additional funding for an apprenticeship role we would consider this again."*

A small number of respondents identified issues that were not captured by the predefined survey options. Two reported challenges in releasing apprentices from day-to-day duties to undertake required off-the-job training, highlighting the difficulty of balancing service delivery with apprenticeship requirements. Another respondent noted that balancing apprenticeship study requirements alongside family and employment commitments could be difficult for learners.

Overall, the findings indicate that decisions about apprenticeship provision are influenced by workforce planning considerations, funding pressures, organisational capacity and local service priorities.

Future barriers to apprenticeship provision

Respondents were also asked to consider what barriers might affect their ability to offer apprenticeships during the next five years (see Figure 5). Responses suggest that many of the challenges affecting apprenticeship provision are expected to persist. Concern about short-term funding or insecure posts increased substantially, rising from three to 13 responses. Concerns also increased in relation to recruitment freezes,

uncertainty about outcomes, the perceived burden of supporting apprentices, and the ability to guarantee permanent positions for apprentices. At the same time, the number of respondents reporting no significant barriers fell from six to one.

These findings suggest growing concern about workforce stability and the longer-term sustainability of apprenticeship provision within public libraries.

One respondent explained how recent organisational change had affected their ability to recruit apprentices:

> *"We have just been through a staff restructure and significantly reduced our staff numbers and until we become used to this we are unable to take a new apprentice on but this may change next year."*

Several respondents highlighted future uncertainties relating to workforce capacity, staffing structures and wider organisational change, including Local Government Reorganisation. As one respondent noted:

> *"As we approach Local Government Reorganisation, waiting to hear what new authorities there will be, we may revisit apprenticeships in future."*

These factors may affect the ability of some services to plan for, implement and sustain apprenticeship opportunities.

Overall, while many library services recognise the value of apprenticeships, concerns about funding, workforce capacity and organisational stability are likely to continue to limit their use.

Barriers to using the LIAS apprenticeship

Library services who had not used the Library, Information and Archive Services (LIAS) Assistant apprenticeship standard were asked to identify the reasons for this. Table 1 summarises the barriers reported by these services and provides insight into the factors influencing uptake of the sector-specific apprenticeship standard.

Table 1: Reasons for not using the Library, Information and Archive Services (LIAS) Assistant apprenticeship standard

Reasons for not using the Library, Information and Archive apprenticeship	Number of responses
Capacity to support apprentices	24
Cost or funding issues	21
Other	11
No local provider	7
Concerns about quality or relevance	6
Not aware of sector-specific apprenticeships	3
Standards do not fit the service needs	3
Lack of interest or engagement from candidates	3
Preference for alternative routes (e.g. traineeships, graduate roles)	1

The main reasons for not using the sector-specific apprenticeship related to capacity to support apprentices and cost or funding issues which suggests that uptake of the LIAS apprenticeship is largely influenced by practical, financial and organisational considerations.

Access to providers

Seven library services cited a lack of local providers as a barrier to using the LIAS apprenticeship.

> *"There is a difficulty in finding providers for the level 3 libraries and archives apprenticeship. We have only found one that offers a fully online version as there were no local providers in our area. Some require day release which would not be applicable for us."*

This indicates that provider availability and delivery arrangements may influence uptake of the LIAS apprenticeship for some services. However, further work would be needed to better understand these issues as some providers may offer fully online delivery for their programmes.

Organisational factors

Free text comments in the 'other' category highlighted a range of organisational factors that influenced the use of the LIAS apprenticeship standard. Two respondents reported that decisions about apprenticeship provision were determined centrally through local authority workforce development teams rather than by the library service itself.

These responses suggest that library services do not always have direct control over apprenticeship provision and may have limited influence over which apprenticeship standards are available for use.

Summary

The findings suggest that barriers to apprenticeship provision are closely linked to the wider financial, workforce and organisational pressures facing public library services. Funding constraints and staffing capacity emerged as significant challenges, often alongside concerns relating to workforce structures, organisational change and the ability to sustain apprenticeship opportunities over time. Respondents also anticipated that many of these challenges would continue into the future, particularly in relation to workforce stability, short-term funding and organisational uncertainty.

The findings relating to the LIAS apprenticeship standard point to a similar pattern. Concerns about capacity to support apprentices, funding constraints, organisational decision-making processes and provider availability all influenced uptake. By contrast, relatively few respondents cited concerns about the quality or relevance of the standard itself, its suitability for service needs, or a lack of candidate interest. Overall, the evidence suggests that barriers to apprenticeship provision are associated less with the content of apprenticeship standards and more with the practical challenges of implementing and sustaining apprenticeship programmes within the current operating environment of public library services.

Wider perspectives on workforce development

The final question of the survey invited library services to share any other comments about apprenticeships in public libraries. Several free text responses highlighted broader perspectives on workforce development within public libraries. One respondent reported that an established volunteer-to-employment pathway was already meeting workforce needs, reducing the perceived need for apprenticeships:

> *"We take on up to 50 teenage volunteers each year and have around 20 -25 young people on employment contracts, many of whom came through the volunteer programme. This works very well for the service and for the young people with constant turnover, allowing more young people to join the programme each year."*

Another respondent expressed an ambition for their library service to become an apprenticeship training provider. It would be interesting to explore this further to understand whether this reflects confidence in the service's existing approach to staff training and development, or other factors influencing its interest in apprenticeship delivery.

Two respondents highlighted the need for higher-level apprenticeships to support professional development and career progression within the sector:

> *"A level 5 or 6 apprenticeship equivalent to a professional qualification is urgently needed, providing a career progression pathway eligible for apprenticeship levy funding."*

This comment highlights a perceived gap in current workforce development provision, with respondents identifying a need for pathways that support the development of specialist knowledge and progression into more senior roles. While only two respondents raised this issue, their comments suggest a continuing demand for higher-level apprenticeship pathways within the sector. The previously proposed Level 7 apprenticeship for the library sector would have provided such a route (CILIP, n.d.). However, the standard did not proceed following changes in English apprenticeship policy, including the refocusing of public funding away from Level 7 apprenticeships (Department for Education, 2025). The findings suggest that the need for higher-level career development pathways within the sector may remain.

The importance of workforce development was also reflected in another comment, which emphasised the need for a more strategic and coordinated approach across the sector:

> *"Public libraries need some form of recognised, structured training programme for consistent and updated staff development and career development. There are so many pressing matters for a small leadership team to prioritise that only a new structure which can put workforce development at the top of the tree can take apprenticeships forward. It would be awful to offer them and then do a half-baked delivery."*

These responses suggest that apprenticeships are viewed as one part of a broader workforce development approach. Alongside apprenticeships, respondents identified the importance of volunteer pathways, professional development opportunities, structured career progression and wider investment in workforce development.

Additional support needs

All respondents were asked what additional support would help them to offer or expand apprenticeships. Information about funding and incentives was the most frequently selected area of support (28 responses, 51%), followed by training and resources for managers (24 responses, 44%) (see Figure 6). These findings suggest that many library services would benefit from greater practical support in understanding, funding and managing apprenticeship provision.

Figure 6: Support needed to offer or expand apprenticeships in public libraries



Respondents also identified a strong appetite for peer learning and networking. Sixteen respondents (29%) selected opportunities for apprentices to connect and share learning, while 14 (25%) selected opportunities for managers to share good practice and examples of successful apprenticeship models. This finding is notable because apprentices participating in the focus groups also expressed a desire for peer networks and opportunities to connect with fellow apprentices. This suggests that it would be beneficial to create opportunities to share learning and good practice among both apprentices and library services.

Support relating to recruitment and career promotion was also identified. 14 (25%) respondents wished to learn more about innovative approaches to recruitment, 13 (24%) requested promotional materials about library careers, and 12 (22%) identified a need for support in marketing apprenticeship opportunities to diverse candidates.

Free-text responses submitted under the "other" category highlighted how practical

support needs are often closely linked to wider capacity challenges. One respondent noted that, despite recognising the value of apprenticeships, competing priorities and limited capacity made it difficult to consider introducing them:

> *"We believe apprenticeships are great and would love to see this develop here but... nowhere near able to contemplate starting due to other priorities, and poor capacity to manage. Would love to know more from other authorities how they manage/value/outcomes etc."*

In response to the final open-ended survey question, another library service highlighted the role of organisational processes and support needed to collaborate with workforce colleagues beyond the library:

> *"We would love to have more but our internal HR processes and their lack of understanding causes issues. This could be a key way to support libraries, is support their LA HR teams."*

Overall, the findings suggest that library services are seeking practical guidance, clearer information about funding arrangements and opportunities to learn from the experiences of others. They also indicate that wider adoption of apprenticeships may depend on support beyond library teams themselves, including engagement with HR colleagues and others involved in workforce development. These themes are explored further in the key findings and implications section.





Key findings and implications

Apprenticeship adoption remains uneven

More than half of respondents reported recruiting apprentices during the previous five years. However, uptake varied considerably between services. 42% of respondents reported no apprenticeship recruitment during this period, while almost half of those that had recruited apprentices (15 of 32) reported recruiting only one or two. These findings suggest that apprenticeships are established within some public library services but have not yet become embedded across the sector. Adoption appears to be strongly influenced by local circumstances, including workforce capacity, funding arrangements and organisational factors.

Apprenticeships support recruitment and workforce development

The findings demonstrate that apprenticeships are serving more than one purpose within public libraries. While many services use apprenticeships to recruit new talent, they are also being used to develop existing staff and support progression into more senior roles. In our sample, 72% of apprentices who had completed their apprenticeship progressed into permanent employment within the library service. This suggests that apprenticeships can provide an effective route into library careers.

Free text responses also highlighted a perceived need for higher-level apprenticeships to support specialist skills, professional development and career progression. This suggests that some library services see potential for apprenticeships to play a wider role in workforce development than is currently available through existing provision.



Capacity and funding constraints limit growth

Funding pressures and staffing capacity were consistently highlighted as significant barriers to apprenticeship provision and to the uptake of the LIAS apprenticeship standard. Concerns about staffing capacity, short-term funding and workforce stability were also expected to increase over the next five years. The findings suggest that future growth in apprenticeship provision is likely to be limited by funding pressures, workforce capacity and organisational constraints, rather than any concerns about the quality or relevance of apprenticeship standards. This highlights the importance of addressing wider workforce and organisational challenges alongside efforts to promote apprenticeships.

Practical support, collaboration and strategic action are needed

Respondents identified a need for practical guidance, clearer information about funding and incentives, examples of successful apprenticeship models, manager training and opportunities for peer learning. More than half of respondents identified information about funding and incentives as a support need, while 56% reported funding constraints as a barrier to apprenticeship provision. Respondents also highlighted the importance of wider organisational support, particularly from HR teams and colleagues involved in workforce development. These findings suggest that apprenticeship provision is influenced by wider organisational processes as well as the resources available to library services. Expanding apprenticeship provision is therefore likely to require practical support, shared learning, stronger collaboration and more strategic workforce planning across the sector.

Recommendations

1. Facilitate peer learning and the sharing of effective practice

Libraries Connected should create opportunities for services to learn from those already successfully delivering apprenticeships. This could include webinars, case studies and peer learning events showcasing different apprenticeship models, approaches to supervision and support, and outcomes achieved by library services. This would respond directly to the need for examples of successful apprenticeship models and opportunities for managers to share learning.

2. Strengthen connections between library services, apprenticeship providers and local authority workforce teams

Libraries Connected should facilitate opportunities for library services, apprenticeship providers, HR teams, apprenticeship leads and workforce development colleagues to share knowledge. This could include provider showcase events, collaborative webinars and practical guidance on selecting and working with providers. The findings suggest that stronger links between library services and colleagues responsible for workforce planning, recruitment, apprenticeships and apprenticeship funding could help address some of the organisational barriers identified by respondents. Greater collaboration and shared understanding may support a more strategic approach to apprenticeship planning and delivery.

3. Establish a peer network for library apprentices

The findings from both the survey and the preliminary focus groups indicate a desire for apprentices to connect with their fellow learners. Libraries Connected should explore establishing a peer network for library apprentices, providing opportunities to share experiences, build professional relationships and access peer support. The network should be co-designed with current and former apprentices to ensure it meets the needs of learners. This could help improve the apprentice experience, support learner engagement and strengthen connections with the wider public library sector.

4. Support access to apprenticeship funding guidance

Funding constraints were the most frequently reported barrier to apprenticeship provision, while information about funding and incentives was the most requested area of support. Libraries Connected should explore ways to improve access to clear, up-to-date information about apprenticeship funding and incentives for library services.

5. Explore opportunities for sector-led apprenticeship delivery

One respondent expressed an ambition for their library service to become an apprenticeship training provider. This suggests a possible opportunity to explore whether public library services could play a greater role in apprenticeship training provision. Libraries Connected should consider investigating the feasibility of a library service, or consortium of services, becoming an apprenticeship training provider. It could also broker national conversations between library services and apprenticeship providers to explore how apprenticeship delivery arrangements can better support the operational needs of public library services.

6. Advocate for sustainable workforce investment in public libraries

The findings indicate that funding pressures, workforce capacity and organisational constraints remain the principal barriers to apprenticeship provision. Libraries Connected and its strategic partners should work together to advocate for sustainable investment in public library staffing and workforce development, recognising that apprenticeships are most likely to succeed where services have the capacity and resources required to recruit, supervise and support apprentices effectively.





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Libraries Connected

We are an independent charity that supports, promotes and represents public libraries. Our work is driven and led by our membership, which includes every library service in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies. As well as providing practical support, training and advice to libraries, we represent them to government and raise their profile in the media. We also develop and lead national library projects with a range of cultural, academic and corporate partners.

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