

# Users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries in the United Kingdom

Final report

March 2013

Susannah Quick, Gillian Prior, Ben Toombs, Luke Taylor and Rosanna Currenti



BILL &  
MELINDA  
GATES  
*foundation*

## Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Background and methodology</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. The public library landscape and internet provision</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Library and PAC usage</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Impressions of public libraries</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5. Informal and non-formal learning</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. Use of PACs for employment and business</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7. E-government and active citizenship</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>8. Impacts</b>	<b>23</b>

## Acknowledgements

The authors of this report are grateful for the input and assistance of the following people who helped ensure the success of the project:

Jan Braeckman	Bibnet	Belgium
Kelly Carey	GMMB	
Marcel Chiranov	Biblionet Romania	Romania
Mikkel Christoffersen	Kulturstyrelsen / Danish Agency for Culture	Denmark
Giedrė Čistovienė	National Library of Lithuania	Lithuania
Chris Coward	Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA), University of Washington	
Annie Dourlent	Bibliothèque publique d'information	France
Elaine Fulton	Scottish Library and Information Council/CILIP in Scotland	United Kingdom
Francoise Gaudet	Bibliothèque publique d'information	France
Robin Knowles	Civic Agenda	
Maciej Kochanowicz	Library Development Program, Information Society Development Foundation	Poland
Alexandre Lemaire	Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles Service de la lecture publique	Belgium
Zdenek Matušík	Association of Library and Information Professionals of the Czech Republic (SKIP)	Czech Republic
Maria Antonia Carrato Mena	Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte	Spain
Dan Mount	Civic Agenda	
Julia Nagy	GMMB	
Margarida Oleiro	Direção-Geral do Livro, dos Arquivos e das Bibliotecas	Portugal
Marjolein Oomes	Netherlands Institute for Public Libraries	Netherlands
Helen Osborn	Libraries NI	United Kingdom
Kristine Paberza	State Agency „Culture Information Systems“	Latvia
Jeremy Paley	Global Libraries, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation	USA
Stefano Parise	Comune di Milano	Italy
Aldo Pirola	Comune di Milano	Italy
Vasilis Polyhronopoulos	Total Quality Unit of Greek Academic Libraries	Greece
Renata Sadunishvili	Independent consultant	Lithuania
Janet Sawaya	Global Libraries, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation	USA
Miriam Schriefers	Deutscher Bibliotheksverband e.V.	Germany
David Streatfield	Consultant	United Kingdom
Ian Watson	Adult & Community Services Directorate, Lancashire County Council	United Kingdom
Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen	Ministry of Education and Culture	Finland
Branimira Vezhdarova	Glob@l Libraries – Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Anna Kåring Wagman	Swedish Library Association	Sweden
Helen Williams	CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales Council of Libraries and Archives at the Ministry of Education	United Kingdom
Dr George Zachos		Greece

## Disclaimer

This report is based on research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation.

## Executive summary

### Objectives and research approach

TNS, an independent research company with a global presence, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to conduct research across 17 EU countries to identify perceptions and types of use of public libraries. The purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

The research included:

- a workshop among the study stakeholders to discuss the priorities for the research;
- desk research, to collate key data concerning libraries;
- a survey of a representative sample of the population aged 15 and over in each of the 17 countries;
- a survey among library users and public access computer (PAC) users aged 15 and over, in each of the 17 countries, conducted in libraries; and
- qualitative research among library users and library staff.

This report provides a brief overview of the results for the UK and compares the results to the EU total.

### The public library landscape

- The desk research estimates that there are 4,089 public libraries in the UK, which equates to 0.7 libraries per 10,000 population, compared with an average of 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population across the EU.
- Computer access is currently available in around 93% of public libraries in the UK.

### Library and PAC usage

- An estimated 17.6 million adults in the UK, around a third of adults in the country (34%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 4.3 million adults in the UK, 8% of adults, had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU.
- PAC users in the UK were more likely than the EU average to be men, to be aged 40-54, to live in a town rather than a rural area, and to have stopped full-time education aged 19 or under.
- The primary motivations of PAC users, in the UK and across the EU, are the free nature of the service together with the lack of other options that people have. PAC users in the UK, compared with users across the EU, were more likely to say they had no other option for computer access (25% UK compared with 19% EU).
- Overall, it is estimated that 1.1 million PAC users in the UK had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.
- The value placed on the PAC service was higher among users in the UK than the EU average. Overall, 97% of PAC users in the UK said that the library's computer and internet connection services were valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Over half of PAC users in the UK (53%) said the service was extremely valuable, significantly higher than the EU average (36%).
- Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users: 97% of users in the UK were satisfied.

## Perceptions and impacts of public libraries

- Around eight out of ten library users in the UK considered 'free access to computers' and 'free access to the internet' important (compared with around seven out of ten library users across Europe).
- Over two thirds (70%) of the general public in the UK (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was higher than the average across the EU of 64%.
- Around half (47%) of the public in the UK felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the EU average (40%).
- Overall 72% of PAC users in the UK said their PAC use had delivered at least one impact for them, which although lower than the average across the EU (83%) represents approximately 2.7 million people in the UK.
- Library users in the UK were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree that public libraries 'Have highly skilled librarians' (68% UK compared with 43% EU), 'Provide access to information for those who don't have it elsewhere' (82% the UK compared with 65% EU), 'Are modern' (59% UK compared with 39% EU) and 'Are innovative' (58% UK, 38% EU).

## Informal and non-formal learning

- In the UK 14% of library users had taken part in an educational activity in a library in the last 12 months, which was lower than the EU average of 25%.

## Employment and use of PACs for business

- A third (33%) of PAC users in the UK had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, below the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 1.2 million PAC users in the UK who had used PAC for employment related activity.
- An estimated 0.7 million PAC users in the UK had used a PAC to apply for a job in the last 12 months, and an estimated 0.1 million adults were successful in securing employment by this means.

## E-government and active citizenship

- The library survey found that one in five PAC users in the UK (20%) had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, similar to the EU average of one in four (24%). The most common ways in which PAC users in the UK interacted with public authorities were to send filled in forms (15%), to obtain information from public authorities' websites (12%) and to download official forms (12%).
- Overall, 16% of ten PAC users in the UK had used PAC for civic engagement activities in the past 3 months, lower than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (8% UK compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (5% UK compared with 14% EU level).

# 1. Background and methodology

## 1.1 Context for the research

Public libraries across the European Union (EU) have long played an important role in communities by providing free access to information, guidance from trained librarians, and public meeting space. As meaningful participation in society increasingly requires access to digital information and resources, many public libraries in the EU have expanded their offerings to include access to information and communications technologies (ICTs) like computers and the Internet.

There is a growing body of evidence about the ways public access to ICTs contributes to economic, health, education, and social development<sup>1</sup>. For instance, the Global Impact Study on Public Access to ICTs, which covers five developing countries, found that those using Public Access Computers reported positive impact related to communication (79%), education (78%), access to government information (40%) and health (37%). More than 80% of public services in the EU are now fully available online,<sup>2</sup> but in 2011, just 41% of the EU population used government services electronically.<sup>3</sup> Today, some Europeans have their first experiences with computers or the Internet at a public library, and for some individuals this may remain the only place they can access ICTs (or access them without paying unaffordable fees)<sup>4</sup>.

Under the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the EU has set ambitious objectives in many of the development areas to which access-to-information efforts contribute – specifically employment, innovation, education, and social inclusion. EU Member States are expected to meet targets in these areas by 2020. There is anecdotal evidence that ICT access through public libraries can support the implementation of the specific growth, education, and cohesion policies related to the EU 2020 Strategy, such as digital skills and inclusion milestones described under the Digital Agenda for Europe (one of seven flagship initiatives of the Strategy) or informal and non-formal learning, which is mentioned in three of the seven flagship initiatives. In other policy areas, such as supporting a skilled workforce and connecting people to employment opportunities, public libraries' roles may be less obvious and additional data are needed to demonstrate the contributions of public libraries and help them secure EU support for their work.

This research, which includes EU-wide and country-specific reports, was commissioned by the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation to illuminate the role of public libraries in supporting social and economic policies under the EU 2020 Strategy.

From 2002-2004, the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation provided funding to The People's Network, an initiative of the United Kingdom's Library and Information Commission to provide public access computers and Internet access to all public libraries in the UK. Foundation funding was used to create library learning centres located in areas of social deprivation across the UK.

## 1.2 Research objectives

The main purpose of the research was to understand the impact that public libraries in the EU have on users' lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> See [The Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technology](#) about the scale, character, and impacts of public access to information and communication technologies. Looking at libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes, the study investigates impact in a number of areas, including communication and leisure, culture and language, education, employment and income, governance, and health. Implemented by the University of Washington's [Technology & Social Change Group](#) (TASCHA), the Study is part of a broader research project supported by Canada's [International Development Research Centre](#) (IDRC) and a grant to IDRC from the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#).

<sup>2</sup> [Eurostat](#), 2010

<sup>3</sup> [Eurostat](#), 2011

<sup>4</sup> Sciadas, G., with Lyons, H., Rothschild, C., & Sey, A. (2012). *Public access to ICTs: Sculpting the profile of users*. Seattle: Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington Information School.

### 1.3 Research method

The research was conducted in the following seventeen countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom.

The research involved several phases. First, desk research was carried out to collate existing information showing the public library landscape in the survey countries, using sources such as IFLA, national and local library statistics, local library associations, national statistical offices, Eurostat, Eurobarometer and so on. Survey work was carried out in October/November 2012.

- A representative sample of 1,089 members of the public aged 15+ in the UK (17,816 across the 17 countries) were interviewed regarding their usage of libraries, computers in libraries and their attitudes towards libraries.
- Interviews were carried out in libraries. In the UK, 718 interviews were conducted with people who had not used Public Access Computers (PACs) in libraries (12,537 across the 17 countries) and 711 with those who had (11,716 across the 17 countries). The interviews in the UK were conducted in 24 libraries which were selected and contacted with help from a representative of Scottish Library and Information Council/CILIP in Scotland. Respondents were interviewed face-to-face.
- Qualitative fieldwork was conducted, consisting in each country of five 60-minute depth interviews with library managers and four 90-minute group discussions with PAC users. At least 3 libraries were represented in each country, in both urban and semi-rural locations.

Survey results were weighted to ensure that the final results were representative of the population within each country. Weighting was also applied to rebalance the weight of each country within the pan-European totals, in proportion to the population size.

### 1.4 This report

This report provides a brief overview of the results for the UK and compares the results to the EU total. EU results are based on findings from the 17 countries included in this study. Individual reports for each country surveyed have been produced as well as an overall report<sup>5</sup>.

Throughout this report where we refer to:

- A 'library': This means a public library, which anyone can go to, and does not include school, college, or university libraries'
- PAC user/usage': This refers to usage of a public access computer to access the internet within a public library, and is based on those who responded affirmatively to the following question:

*Have you used a public access computer in a public library to access the internet in the last 12 months? Please do not include using your personal computer or smart phone in the library.*

Throughout this report comparisons are made between the findings in the UK and the average across the EU. The EU average is calculated based on responses from the 17 countries in the survey. It should be noted that figures for the UK are *included* in the EU average, which has the effect of lessening the statistical power of comparisons between the UK and EU figures.

While most of the data is presented in terms of percentages, on a number of occasions throughout this report data have been grossed up to represent the population of the UK and are presented in terms of estimated numbers.

---

<sup>5</sup> Quick, Prior, Toombs, Taylor and Currenti (2013): *Cross-European survey to measure users' perceptions of the benefits of ICT in public libraries* (funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation)

## 2. The public library landscape and internet provision

There are 4,089 public libraries in the UK (as of September 2012)<sup>6</sup>, which equates to 0.7 libraries per 10,000 population, compared with an average across the 17 EU countries of 1.3 libraries per 10,000 population. The number of public libraries in the UK has reduced by 87 since 2006/7.

Public libraries are funded and governed by 206 local authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each authority employs a Chief Librarian to set the strategy and oversee the management and development of the authority's library network.

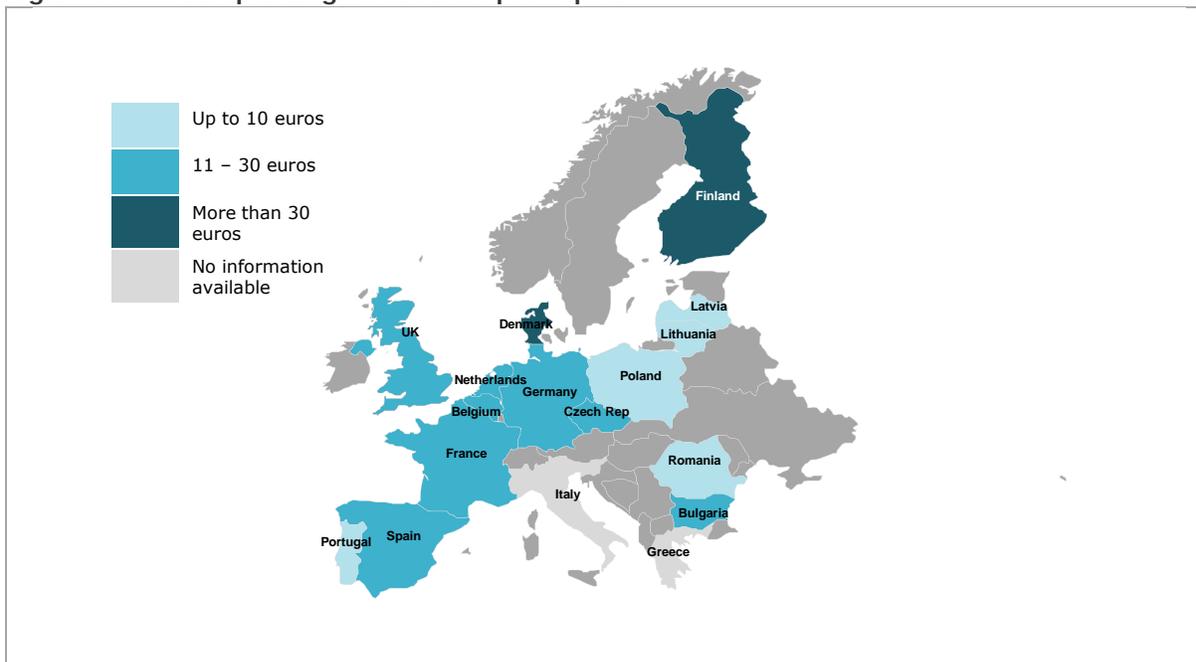
Since the Comprehensive Spending Review instituted by the UK government in 2010, the grants given by central government to local authorities have been reduced significantly while restrictions on the ability of local authorities to increase council tax for their residents and local businesses remain in place. Local authorities face a decrease of, on average, 28% in their income over the Spending Review period and, in reviewing which services they should cut, some local authorities have decided to close some libraries.

Due to the difficult situation, according to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) public libraries have had to take the following steps in 2011-2012: 80% had reduced library staff;

- 30% had reduced opening hours;
- 65% were looking at alternative methods of service delivery;
- 14% had already, or planned to close libraries; and
- 13% had set up community managed (that is, volunteer-run) libraries.

Annual public spending on libraries per capita in the UK at 22 Euros (£19.20) was slightly above the average for other countries included in the study, as shown in the following map:

**Figure 1: Annual spending on libraries per capita**



Source: TNS desk research

<sup>6</sup> Sources: CIPFA stats, Public Libraries Statistics 2011/12 Estimates and 2010/11 Actuals, 2011; HM Government, data.gov.uk, UK Public Libraries contacts, September 2012

Computer access is offered by 93% of public libraries in the UK. The proportion of public libraries with internet access in the UK is also 93%.

Eurostat data (2011) for Internet access at home shows that the UK has one of the highest levels in Europe, with 83% of households having access to the Internet, compared with an EU average of 73%. It may therefore be expected that demand for and usage of PAC services would be lower in the UK than in other countries.

### **3. Library and PAC usage**

#### **3.1 Access to libraries and PACs**

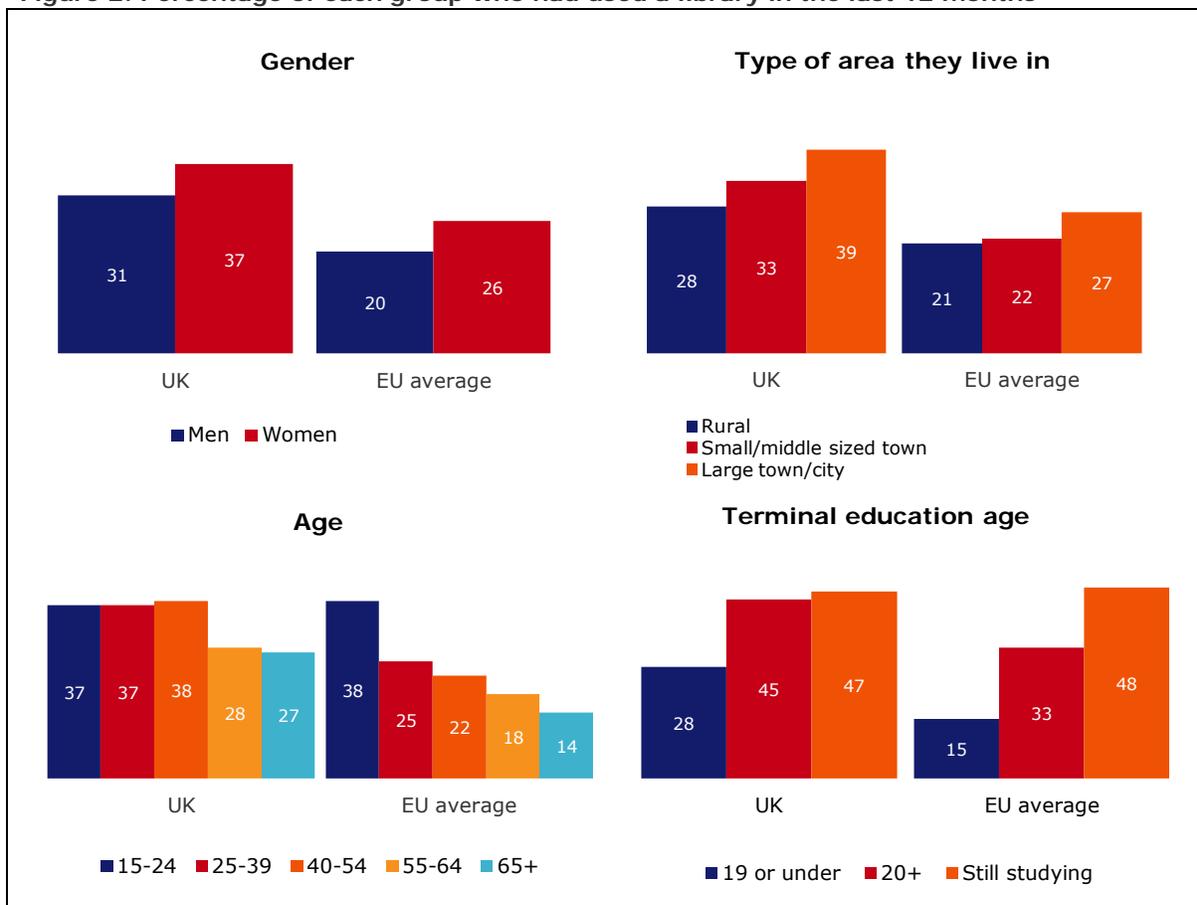
The general public survey found that library usage in the UK was above the EU average.

- An estimated 17.6 million adults in the UK, a third of UK adults (34%) had used a public library in the last 12 months, compared with just under a quarter (23%) of all adults across Europe.
- An estimated 9.6 million adults, almost a fifth (19%) of adults in the UK, had used a library at least once a month, against an EU average of 14%.

The prevalence of library use in the last 12 months, by different groups in the UK and across the EU, is shown in Figure 2. In the UK:

- Women (37%) were more likely than men (31%) to have visited a library, in line with the findings across the EU.
- Library usage in the UK was consistent across the age bands up to age 54 (37% of those aged 15-24, 37% of those aged 25-39 and 38% of those aged 40-54 had visited a library in the last 12 months), falling to 28% of those aged 55-64 and 27% of those aged 65 and over. Library usage in the UK among those aged 25-39, 55-64 and 65+ was higher than the EU average.
- Library use was higher in large towns and cities (39%) than in smaller towns (33%) or rural areas (28%).
- Library use was higher among those who were still studying – 47% of this group had used a public library in the last 12 months, in line with the EU average.
- Library use was also higher among those born outside of the UK – 48% of this group had used a library, compared with 32% of those born in the UK. This pattern was similar for the EU as a whole, with library usage of 22% among those born in the EU, compared with 37% among those born outside the EU.

**Figure 2: Percentage of each group who had used a library in the last 12 months**



Source: Omnibus survey – Q1. Have you visited a public library in the last 12 months?  
 Base: UK – All adults (1089), Men (498), Women (591), 15-24 (233), 25-39 (245), 40-54 (233), 55-64 (146), 65+ (232), Large town/city (394), Small town (456), Rural area (233), Finished education 19 or under (674), 20 or over (239), Still studying (134), EU - All adults (17816), Men (8521), Women (9295), 15-24 (2636), 25-39 (4152), 40-54 (4592), 55-64 (2937), 65+ (3496), Large town/city (5352), Small town (6653), Rural area (5633), Finished education 19 or under (9943), 20 or over (5500), Still studying (1801)

The profile of library users in the UK, compared with across the EU, was:

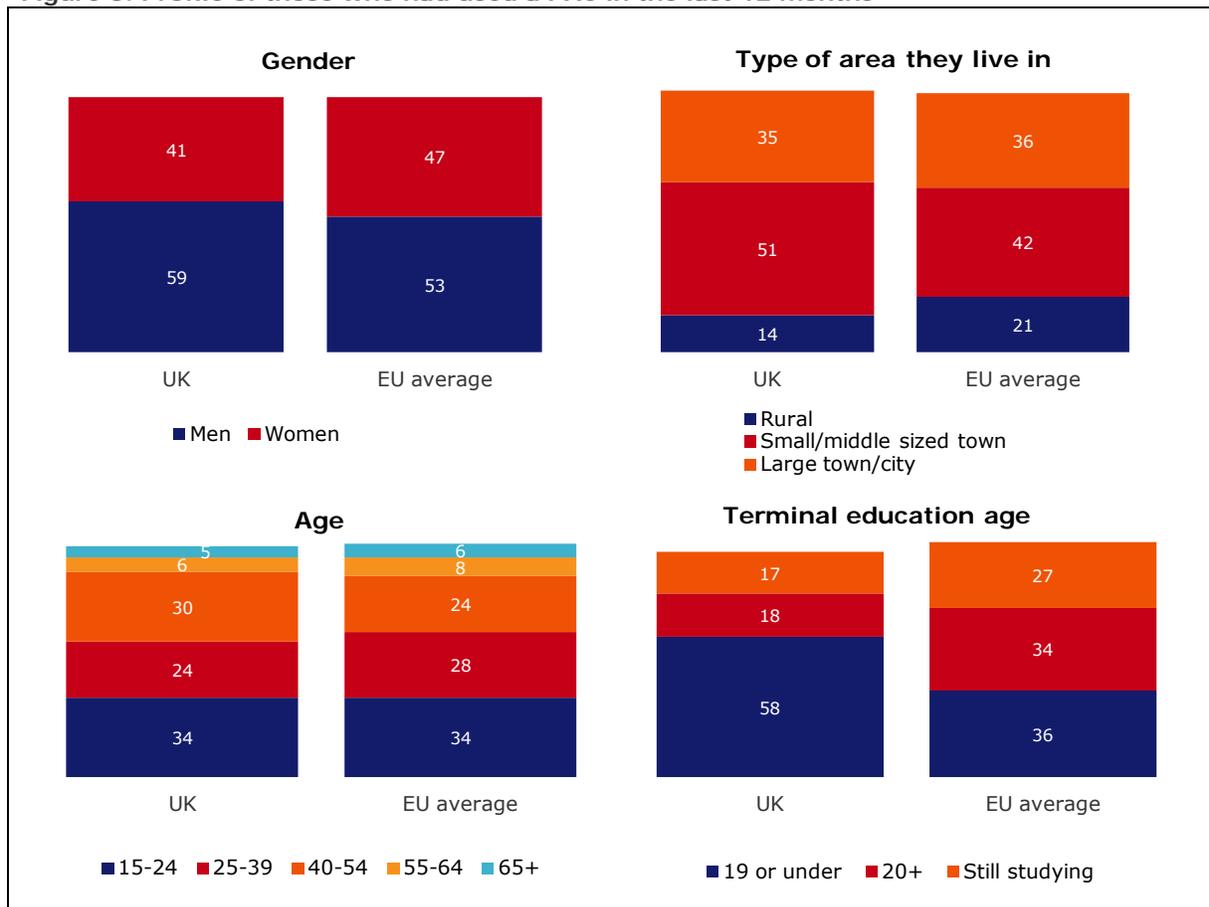
- 44% of library users in the UK were men, 56% women; on a par with the EU average (42% men, 58% women)
- UK users had a slightly younger age profile than the EU average – 19% were aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 28% aged 40-54, 13% aged 55-64 and 14% aged 65+; compared with the EU average of 25% aged 15-24, 26% aged 25-39, 25% aged 40-54, 12% aged 55-64 and 12% aged 65+.

Almost a quarter (22%) of those who had visited a library in the UK in the last 12 months used a PAC, which is higher than the EU average of 14%. When those who had not used a PAC were asked why this was, although the majority said they had no need to because they had a computer/internet at home, a significant minority of 4% said they did not know how to use computers or the internet, implying that there is potential for libraries to further increase their customer base for PAC.

In total, the survey found that 8% of UK adults had used PACs in the last 12 months, significantly higher than the average of 4% of adults across the EU countries. This is estimated to be around 4.3 million adults within the UK.

PAC users in the UK were more likely than the EU average to be men, to be aged 40-54, to live in a small or middle-sized town, and to have stopped full-time education aged 19 or under, as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Profile of those who had used a PAC in the last 12 months**



Source: Library survey – C4. Have you used a public access computer in a public library to access the Internet in the last 12 months?

Base: All PAC users UK (715), EU (11716).

Around half of UK users (51%) had used PACs once every three months or less often, which is on a par with the EU average (47%). A quarter (23%) of UK PAC users made use of PACs at least once a week, the same as the EU average (23%), with 25% doing so once to three times a month (compared with 29% across the EU).

In the qualitative research, library managers described a variety of means by which they were working to increase PAC usage rates and to meet the needs of the people they served. These included targeted projects and initiatives, especially in partnerships and collaborations; marketing; and open and welcoming approach and attitude.

Targeted projects and initiatives were considered the best way for libraries to reach out to the community, including potentially harder to reach audiences such as older people, those with disabilities and the unemployed. Fostering and furthering these relationships was encouraged at a national as well as a local level. Several examples were cited, including: collaborative initiatives to encourage older people to use ICT services (an annual Silver Service day for over 50s), courses in partnership with the University of

the Third Age and Age NI; and partnerships with disability charities such as Down Syndrome Trust, RNIB and RNID, involving specialist courses and the installation of specialist software onto library computers.

*"We used a heritage hook to show them how learning had developed. Part of that was the development of IT. We used specific reminiscence programmes and heritage websites. It was a combined programme. It was using reminiscence as a hook to get older people into IT." (Senior Library Manager, Urban/Semi rural, UK)*

Whilst ethnic minorities and people on low incomes were groups within the communities which the libraries served, there were fewer specific initiatives targeted at these groups.

Marketing was also considered an important means of encouraging the wider community to use ICT services. This included press releases or advertising via local radio or newspapers; libraries were also increasingly looking to social media, such as Facebook, in order to attract a different demographic (primarily younger people).

*"There's a realization that libraries can't exist on their own, we can't sit here and expect people to come in, we have to go and sell it, we have to have a high profile within the community...we have to be out there." (Senior Library Manager, Urban, UK)*

Finally, creating a welcoming environment for members of the wider community was also seen to be important, particularly in attracting some of the hard to reach audiences who might be apprehensive initially about visiting the library.

PAC users were asked what their main reasons were for using computers, the internet and software in public libraries within the last 12 months. As shown in Figure 4, it is clear that the primary motivations for PAC users were the free nature of the service together with the lack of other options that people have.

*"I don't know where you would go. I think it's a great advantage having it in the city for all the people" (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

Other, less commonly cited reasons include the need to work or be with other people, and the speed of the internet when compared with what respondents have available elsewhere. Users in the qualitative research expanded on this list of 'secondary' motivations, mentioning the support on offer, the convenience of having other library facilities on hand, the quality of the environment (especially older users, who often felt the library is a more 'appropriate' environment for their demographic, while internet cafes were seen as a 'young' environment), and the opportunity to meet and interact with other people and be sociable.

*"The thing that amazes me is that we get thousands of pounds of support free as users when we ask a question... and there's Microsoft Word!" (Recent User, F, 25-39, UK)*

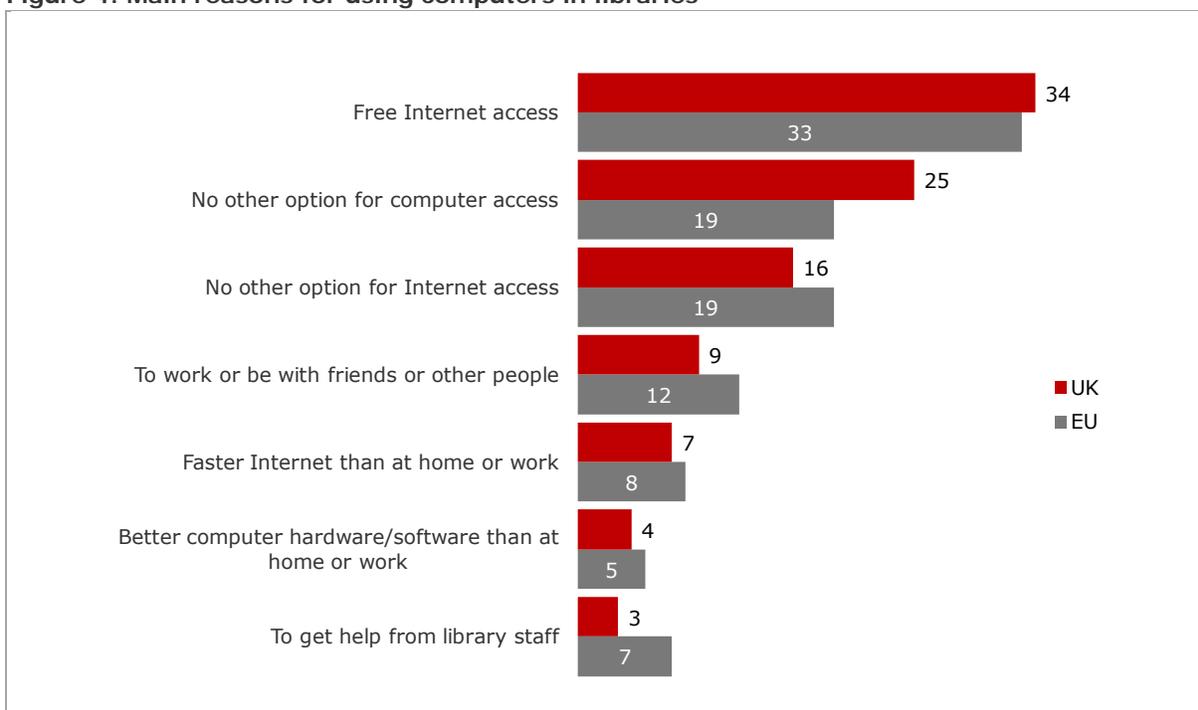
*"It's the social aspect that is so important. Learning in a group is a lot more fun because if someone makes a mistake we all have a laugh and encourage each other." (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

### **3.2 Reasons for using PACs**

PAC users interviewed in the in-library survey were asked what their main reasons were for using computers, the internet and software in public libraries within the last 12 months. It is clear that in the

UK and across the EU, the primary motivations for PAC users are the free nature of the service together with the lack of other options that people have. UK PAC users were more likely than those in other countries to have said that they had no other option for computer access (25% in the UK compared with 19% across the EU).

**Figure 4: Main reasons for using computers in libraries**



Source: Library Survey - C8 What are the main reasons you have chosen to use computers, Internet and software at public libraries in the last 12 months?

Base: All PAC users- UK (715); EU (11716)

PAC users were also asked two more direct questions as to what other options they had, firstly regarding where else they could access the internet from, and secondly, where else they could access the internet 'for free'. In the UK, 17% of PAC users said that they had no other options for accessing the internet (compared with 11% across the EU), and a further 12% that there was no other source of free internet for them (compared with 14% across the EU). Overall, it is estimated that 1.1 million PAC users in the UK (30% of PAC users) had nowhere else to access the internet, or to access the internet free of charge.

Those who indicated that they had no other options for accessing the internet often tended to come from 'digitally excluded' (and often 'socially excluded') groups, which clearly highlights the role of PACs in the future of the EU's 2020 Growth Strategy. Specifically, the following groups were particularly likely to indicate that they did not have any other options:

- Older people – 48% of PAC users aged 65+ had no alternative internet access, compared with 5% of those aged 15-24
- Those who were not in employment – 23% had no alternative for internet access, compared with 10% of the employed.

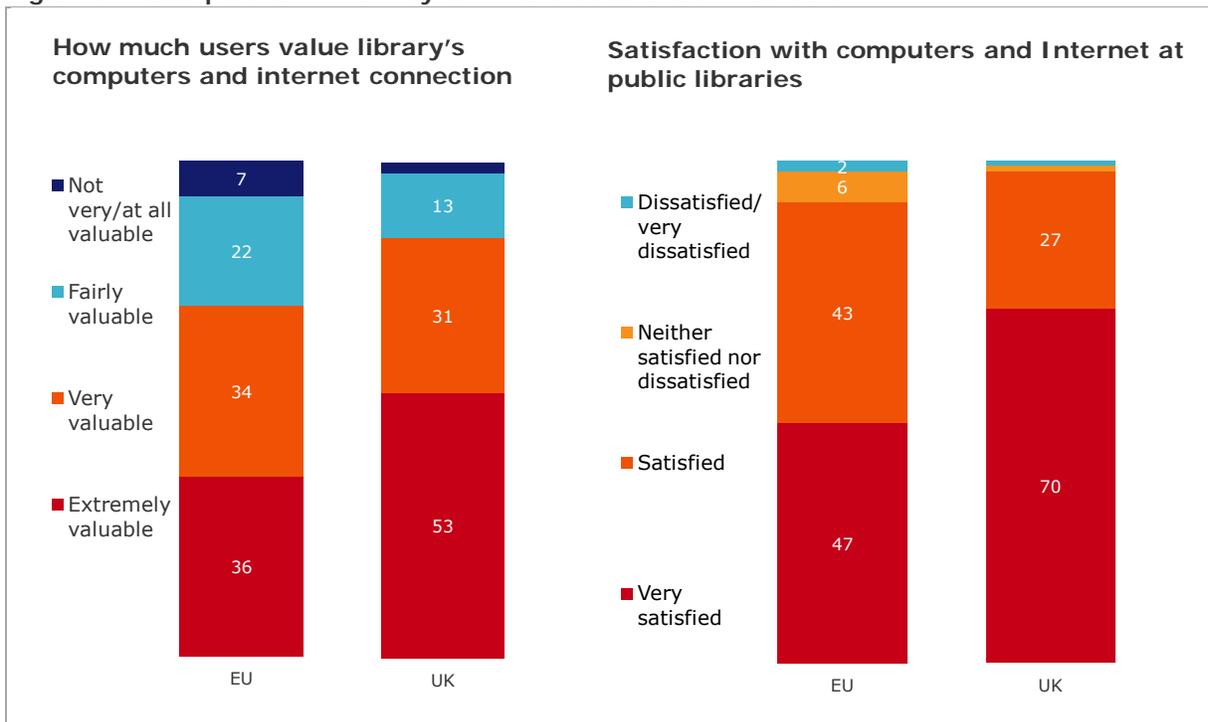
The value placed on the PAC service was higher among UK users than the EU average, as shown in Figure 5. Overall, 97% of UK PAC users said that the library's computer and internet connection services were

valuable, compared with 92% of all EU PAC users. Over half of UK PAC users (53%) said the service was extremely valuable, compared with 36% across the EU.

The library’s computers and internet connection were valued particularly highly in the UK by users aged 40-54 (64% rated the services as extremely valuable), and those in rural areas (64% ‘extremely valuable’).

Satisfaction with computers and the internet at public libraries was high among users, as shown in Figure 5: 97% of UK users were satisfied. Again, UK users were more likely to say they were satisfied with computers and internet at the library than EU users as a whole; 70% of UK users said they were very satisfied, compared with just under a half (47%) across the EU.

**Figure 5: Value placed on PACs by users and satisfaction with PACs**



Source: Library survey - C30 How much do you value the library's computers and Internet connection? & C31 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your access to computers and the Internet at public libraries?

Base: All PAC users. UK (715); EU (11716)

In the UK, around three-quarters of PAC users (76%) said that when they go to a library to use a computer, they find a free computer straight away, and a further 11% that they have to wait for no more than 10 minutes. These waiting times are less than the averages reported across the EU (72% of PAC users find a free computer straight away, and a further 16% wait for no more than 10 minutes).

In the qualitative research, according to the reports of library and senior managers, the numbers of PACs and other hardware and software facilities provided for users varied considerably by the size of library and the population it served. The smallest libraries, for example, might have three computers, whereas the largest might have 40-50. The computers were generally PCs; other hardware included printers, scanners and microfilm readers. Software included mainstream programs such as Microsoft Office and Photoshop, with some libraries providing specialist software for disabled people e.g. Zoomtext, Jaws.

On the whole, managers considered the current hardware and software adequate and reasonably reliable; and indeed the PAC users interviewed in the qualitative research tended to find the number of computers and provision of hardware and software, as well as the speed of internet connection, sufficient for their needs. New users in particular had very basic needs, and were happy with the facilities provided by the library, and happy that the library staff would handle everything technical for them.

*"No I don't want to have all the problems setting up a computer at home and then if it breaks down or doesn't work I would have no idea how to fix it" (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

Many others were grateful just to have free access to ICT facilities that they needed but did not have at home (e.g. Microsoft Word for writing job applications).

However, managers also tended to feel that their ICT equipment was somewhat outdated and due for upgrade. Some of the limitations mentioned included old versions of software (e.g. Office 2003 rather than 2007 / 2010) which could cause compatibility issues, IT security, and the speed of internet connectivity and consequent limitations when streaming videos and downloading files. Users with more advanced needs, skills and/or expectations echoed this view that there were some limitations to what their library offered. Examples included a lack of Wi-fi, inability to use Skype, a lack of 'private' areas for serious use, and slower than expected internet connections.

On the whole, users seemed to be more satisfied with what was available to them than managers, as they appreciated having access to facilities that they might not otherwise be able to use.

## **4. Impressions of public libraries**

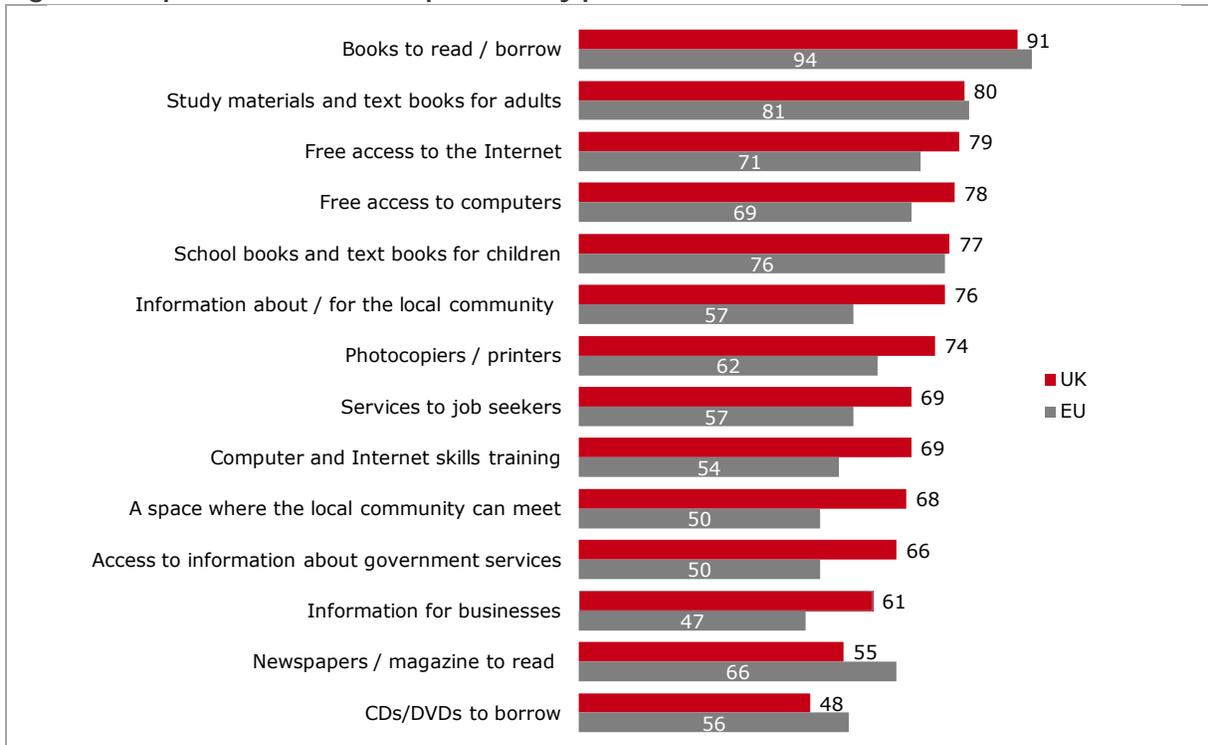
### **4.1 Importance of library services**

Library users (both PAC users and non-PAC users) were asked to rate each of a list of services that could be offered by libraries, on a 5-point scale from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'. Figure 6 shows the percentage in the UK, and across the EU, rating each service as 4 or 5 on the scale.

Not surprisingly, the core service of 'books to read/borrow' was considered the most important, rated as important by 91% of users in the UK (and 95% across the EU), followed by 'study materials and text books for adults'.

'Free access to the internet' and 'free access to computers' were both rated as important by around eight out of ten library users in the UK, which was higher than the equivalent figure of around seven out of ten users across Europe.

**Figure 6: Importance of services provided by public libraries**



Source: Library survey - C15 How important is this service that can be provided by public libraries.

Base: All library users - UK (1432); EU (24253)

UK users were also more likely than the EU average to rate the provision of computer and Internet skills training as an important service (69% in the UK compared with 54% EU average).

The importance of libraries to community life was emphasised among UK library users. Providing a space where the local community can meet was seen as particularly important among UK library users (68% compared with 50% EU average), as was providing information about or for the local community (76% compared with 57% EU average).

In the qualitative research, users were very positive about the library environment, describing it with words such as: open, welcoming familiar, peaceful, calm and relaxed, a good studying environment, well organized, no hassle, and warm. The library was considered a space where one could be comfortable socially, for some even a 'home away from home':

*"You can get out of the house but you can do your own thing...and it can be sociable but it doesn't have to be. It ticks a lot of boxes" (User, F, 40-64, UK)*

Many also commented that the library environment was very much influenced by the staff working there, who were seen to be friendly, approachable, proactive, helpful and knowledgeable.

*"There's a long line yet everyone gets a smile and great service even if you're the tenth person in the row" (Recent User, F, 25-39, UK)*

## 4.2 Effectiveness and funding of public libraries

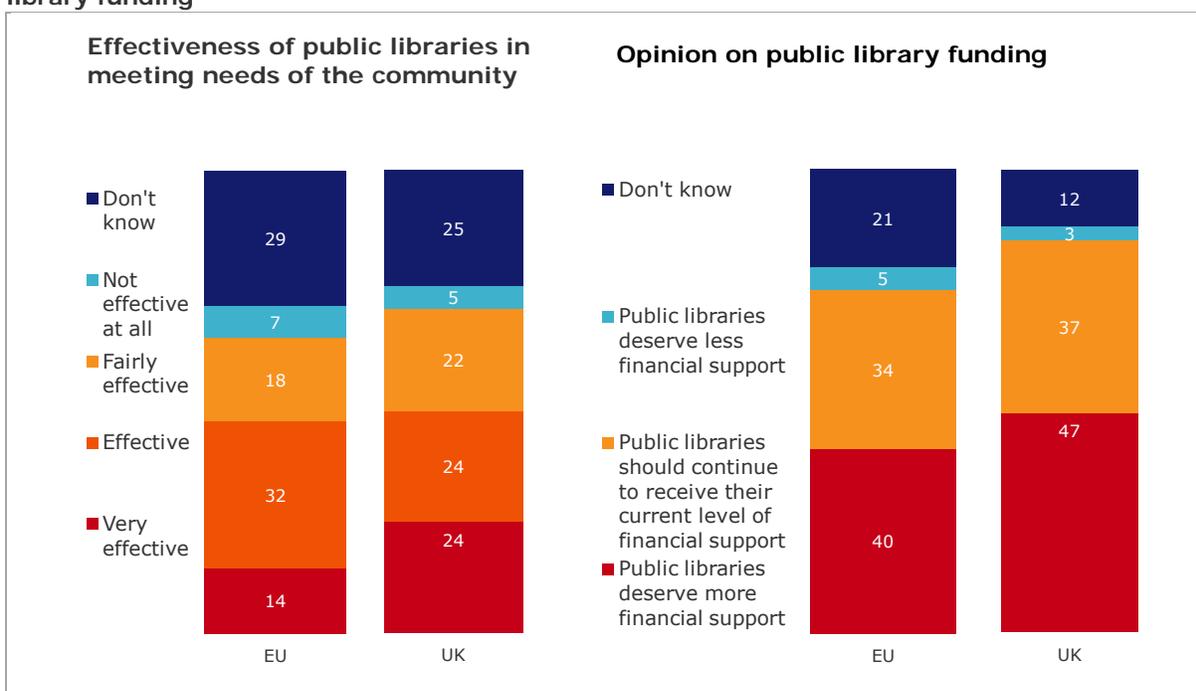
Over two-thirds (70%) of the UK general public (including both library users and non-users) felt libraries were either very effective, effective or fairly effective at meeting the needs of their local community. This was higher than the average across the 17 EU survey countries of 64%. The proportion saying libraries were 'very effective' was particularly high in the UK, at 24% against the EU average of 14%.

UK library users and PAC users were almost unanimous in their opinion that libraries were effective in meeting the needs of their local community – 94% of all library users felt they were effective, rising to 99% among PAC users.

Around half (47%) of the public in the UK felt that public libraries merited more financial support than at present, which was higher than the average of all 17 EU countries (40%). Almost all the remainder either felt that the funding should continue as at present (37%) or did not express an opinion (12%). Only 3% of the public in the UK felt that public libraries deserve *less* financial support. This is perhaps reflective of the level of cuts to public library services that have been experienced in the UK in recent years, and a feeling among the general public that public library services have been cut far enough, or even too far.

Not surprisingly, library users and PAC users were even more likely than non-users to say that libraries deserve more financial support – 58% of all library users, and 59% of PAC users, were in favour of more financial support for libraries.

**Figure 7: Effectiveness of public libraries in meeting community needs and opinion on public library funding**



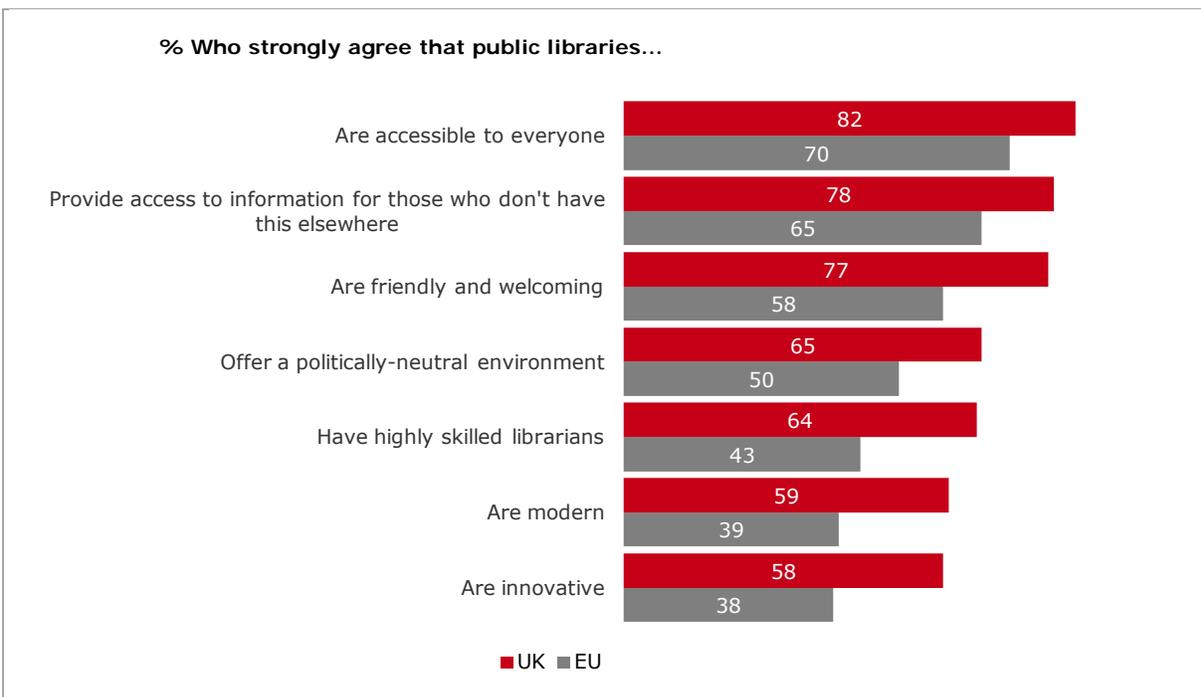
Source: Omnibus survey- Q6 How effective do you think your local public library is at meeting the needs of your community? & Q7 Which of the following statements represents most closely your opinion regarding the current funding for public libraries?.

Base: All adults - UK (1089); EU (17816)

### 4.3 Perceptions of public libraries

All library users were asked their opinions of public libraries, through a series of agree/disagree statements. Figure 8 shows the proportions in the UK and EU who strongly agreed with each of these statements. UK library users were more likely than the EU average to strongly agree with all of these statements, with the biggest differences from the EU average for 'Have highly skilled librarians' (64% UK compared with 43% EU). 'Are modern' (59% UK compared with 39% EU) and 'Are innovative' (58% UK, 38% EU).

Figure 8: Perceptions of public libraries



Source: Library survey- C29 How far do you agree or disagree with the following statements..  
Base: All library users. UK (1432); EU (24253)

## 5. Informal and non-formal learning

Public libraries are key players in the delivery of the non-formal/informal component of the European Commission's lifelong learning policy, particularly with regard to *inclusive* delivery. The role of libraries in providing education to users was explored through asking all library users whether or not they had taken part in any educational activities in a public library within the last 12 months.

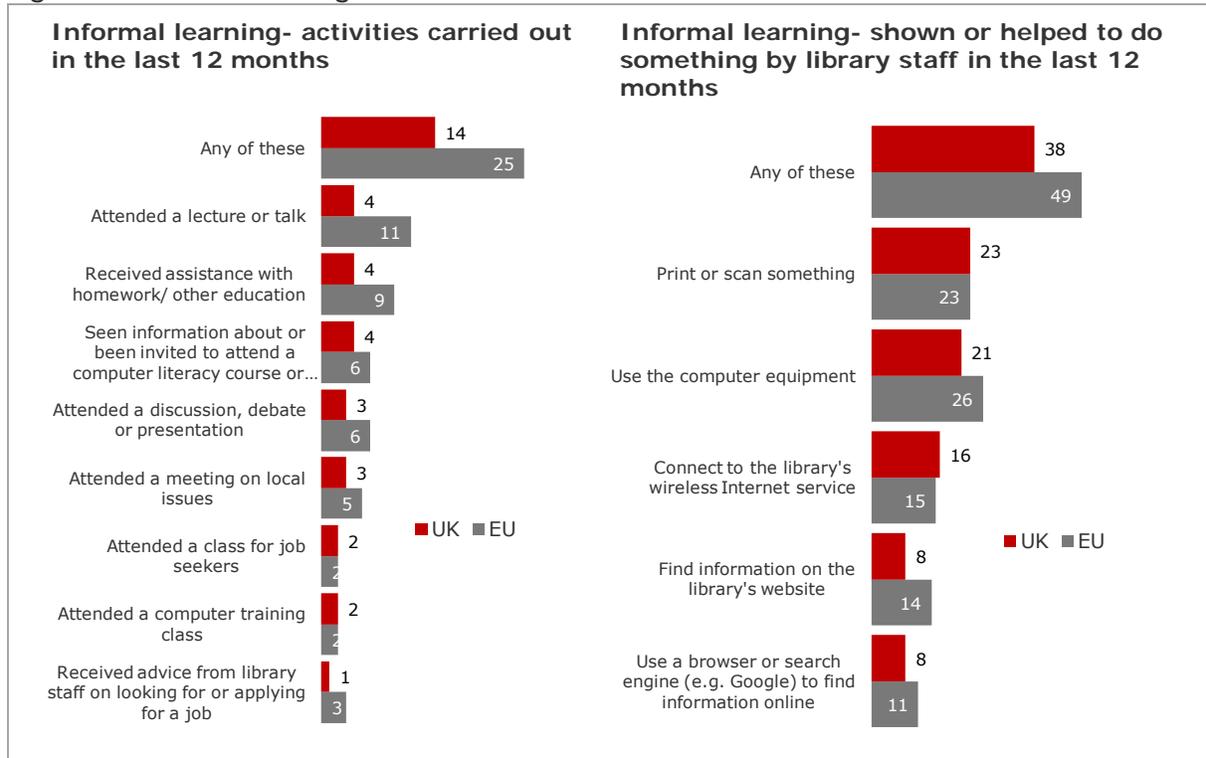
Overall, in the UK 14% had taken part in one of the educational activities in libraries asked about in the last 12 months, which was below the EU average of 25%.

Engagement levels in all educational activities in libraries tended to be lower in the UK than for the EU as a whole (Figure 9), including, among others:

- Attending a lecture or talk (4% vs. EU average of 11%)
- Receiving assistance with homework or other education (4% vs. EU average of 9%).

Two per cent of UK library users reported that they had attended a computer training class in the last 12 months – the same as the EU average. This means that c.320,000 adults in the UK attended a computer training class in a library in the last 12 months.

**Figure 9: Informal learning activities carried out or been shown to users in the last 12 months**



Source: Library survey-C16 In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following things in a public library & C17 In the last 12 months, have you been shown how or helped to do any of the following things by staff at a public library...

Base: C16- All library users - UK (1432); EU (24253). C17- All PAC users – UK (715); EU (11716).

As Figure 9 shows, public library staff play an important role in assisting library users in informal learning. Overall, two in five (38%) UK PAC users had been shown or helped to do something by a member of library staff within the last 12 months, which was lower than the EU average of 49%.

The most common ways in which library staff assisted library users were helping with printing or scanning, using the computer and connecting to the library’s wireless internet service.

In the qualitative research users were very positive about the support that they received from library staff. The majority had received some informal support, and most of the new users had additionally taken part in more structured ICT training at the library. Examples of informal support and advice included help with booking a flight, making a PayPal payment, help with printing, making text bigger on a document, and help with uploading a CV. Users found this informal support very helpful, enabling them to complete the simple tasks they needed to complete, but had struggled with themselves. The friendliness and approachability of the staff in providing this help also made a difference to users.

*"I came in to book a flight one day and I hadn't got a clue and one of the staff came over and went through it and helped me do everything, they got me from A to B...it was great!" (Recent User, F, 40-64, UK)*

*"They're easy to approach so there's no fear that you're stupid." (User, F, 40-64, UK)*

*"Libraries are seen as a non-threatening environment. It is all about the marketing and promotion we have carried out, the partnerships we have made, getting to know what people need and tailoring our provision to meet their needs. This has developed over time- through hard working staff, good promotion, external funding and good partnership working" (Senior Library Manager, Urban/Semi rural, UK)*

Several of the new users were taking computer lessons at their library, and were very positive about the way in which the library staff helped them throughout these. Staff had helped them overcome their initial fears, and facilitated learning together with others in the group in a fun, patient and unpressured way. They also mentioned that the classes were tailored to their needs.

*"That's the beauty of it, they really take their time to make sure, they don't make you feel embarrassed if you make a mistake or don't understand what they're saying." (Recent User, M, 65 and over, UK)*

The training environment and the small class sizes meant that users were able to reap many practical and psychological benefits from their training, such as a higher level of ICT skills, increased self confidence and a sense of achievement, equipping them with knowledge and enabling them to 'get up to speed' with modern technology.

*"Everyone takes it for granted no matter what you do...what's your email address? You feel left behind, an absolute dope...so this is just wonderful to be admitted into this world of modern technology." (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

More specific training was also offered at many of the libraries in question; managers described interest based classes and clubs on topics such as digital photography and ancestry, and audience-specific services in collaboration with other organizations such as Job Clubs and RNIB and RNID computer clubs. There was good general awareness among users of the basic training provided by their library (e.g. computer classes), but awareness of some of the specific sessions was limited. For example, some jobseekers within the groups did not know about their libraries' Job Clubs, and many did not know about the interest-based sessions, or had found out about them only recently. Many were interested in taking these up, particularly new users who had increased confidence in their basic ICT skills, which in turn had enabled them to participate in other courses.

Beyond the types of support and training to increase users' digital skills mentioned above, several libraries were offering interest-based classes on subjects such as ancestry and digital photography. One was developing several initiatives: a county wide Film Club, which allowed users to make and publish films; sessions allowing users tell stories through digital photography and voiceovers; a project called which buddied up a younger person with an older person to allow the latter to tell his or her story; and a History Portal which collected personal accounts of local people about historical events.

## 6. Use of PACs for employment and business

Public libraries have a role to play not only in providing a community gateway to higher level skills – but also to employment, and therefore the role of the public library in helping Europeans access employment opportunities was a key theme within the research.

A third (33%) of PAC users in the UK had used library computers in the last 12 months to support some employment related activity, in line with the EU average of 30%. This represents an estimated 1.2 million PAC users in the UK who had used PAC for employment related activity.

Overall, 18% of PAC users in the UK had used a PAC to apply for a job (either in the UK or in another EU country) in the last 12 months - this represents approximately 0.7 million adults in the UK. Of those respondents who applied for a job through PAC, 15% said that they were successful. This means that in all 3% of PAC users in the UK – or an estimated 0.1 million adults– applied for and got a job via a PAC in the last 12 months.

Public library staff have a role to play in supporting employment related PAC activities, as is shown in Figure 10; one in ten (11%) of UK PAC users indicated that they had been shown or helped to do some employment-related PAC activity (the same proportion as the EU average).

**Figure 10: Employment related PAC activities carried out in last 12 months**

Employment related activities - Used computers in last 12 months to...			Employment related activities - Been shown/helped to...in the last 12 months				
	%	UK	EU		%	UK	EU
<b>Any listed below</b>		<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Any listed below</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>11</b>
Find information about searching and/or applying for jobs	18	18	14	Improve skills needed in your current job	2	2	4
Search for jobs	18	18	13	How to write a CV	7	7	5
Write a CV or covering letter	20	20	12	How to develop skills needed to obtain a job	2	2	2
Improve skills needed in your current job	10	10	11	How to look for a job online (such as finding a recruitment company, searching for information about an employer)	3	3	3
Apply for jobs in this country	18	18	10	How to apply for a job online	3	3	2
Search for information about an employer	12	12	8	How to look for and apply for jobs in other EU countries	1	1	1
Find a recruitment company	8	8	5				
Use spread sheet/data	3	3	3				
Search for jobs in other EU countries	1	1	2				
Apply for jobs in other EU countries	1	1	1				

Source: Library survey-C18 In the last 12 months, have you used the computers available in public libraries to...& C20 In the last 12 months, have you been shown how / helped to do any of the following things by staff at a public library....

Base: All PAC users. UK (715); EU (11716).

PAC users were asked whether they had used PACs for a range of business-related activities in the last 3 months. Around one in ten UK users (12%) had used a PAC for finding information related to a business they worked in, which was below the EU average of 20%. Six per cent of UK PAC users had used a PAC for participating in professional networks, the same as the EU average. Three per cent in the UK, compared with 4% EU average, had used a PAC to find ways or places to sell their own products or goods.

The qualitative research found that libraries' activities regarding employment fell into three categories: informal support (e.g. formatting and uploading CVs); formal training and support in finding a job (e.g. the Job Clubs run by a number of libraries); and employability roadshows.

*"I've applied for loads of jobs, it's helpful for me also as I don't drive, so I just do it online, it's helped me a hell of a lot, I apply for a job every day, I couldn't be applying if I didn't have the computer." (Recent User, F, 40-64, UK)*

There was less activity regarding business support: managers had found it difficult to encourage employers to release staff for training; and the demand for support from sole traders and/or freelancers was thought to be low. One library had worked with people from a local shortbread factory to give them online awareness skills. But in general libraries found it difficult to get into employers due to the current economic climate.

## **7. E-government and active citizenship**

As part of the 'Connecting Europe' agenda, public libraries represent a network of public digital access points which can assist in the effective delivery of access to e-government. Computer users were asked about their interaction with public authorities using PACs, including obtaining information from public authorities' websites, downloading official forms, sending filled in forms, providing feedback/sharing opinions or perspectives with public authorities, and any other way they had interacted with public authorities online.

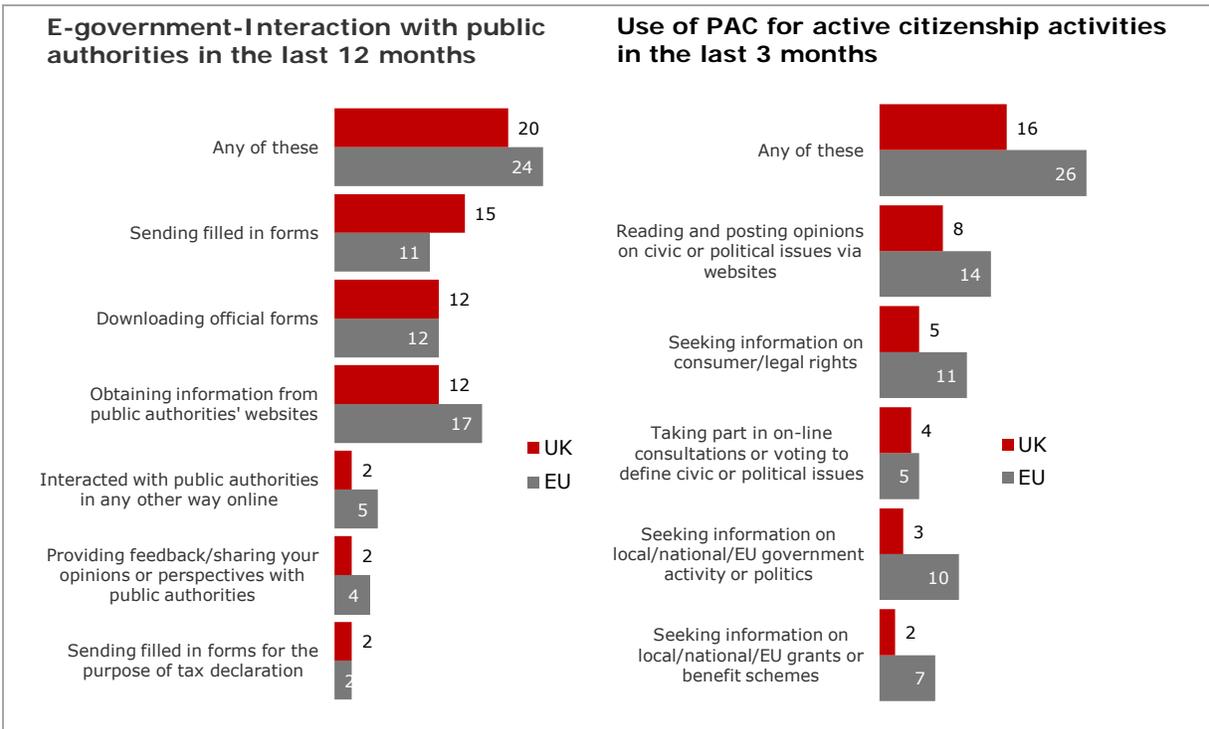
According to Eurostat data, E-government usage by individuals in the UK is on a par with the EU average - 40% of UK adults used the internet in the last 12 months to interact with public authorities, compared with 41% across the EU. UK citizens were slightly less likely than the EU average to use the Internet to obtain information from public authorities' web sites (28% compared with 35%).

The library survey found that one in five (20%) PAC users in the UK had used PACs to interact with public authorities in the last 12 months, similar to the EU average of one in four (24%) PAC users having engaged in E-government interaction, but considerably below the Eurostat finding for all UK adults. UK PAC users were more likely than the EU average to have used PACs to send in filled in forms (15% in the UK compared with 11% EU), and less likely to obtain information from public authorities' websites (12% UK compared with 17% EU).

Computer users were also asked about their use of PACs for activities related to civic engagement and active citizenship (Figure 11). This covered areas such as civic participation (reading/posting opinions, taking part in on-line consultations, petitions etc) and seeking information on consumer or legal rights, and on government activity or politics, or grants/benefit schemes. Overall, 16% of UK PAC users had used PAC for engagement activities in the past 3 months, lower than the average for users across the EU (26%). The two most common community engagement activities were reading and posting opinions on

civic or political issues via websites (8% UK compared with 14% EU) and seeking information on consumer/legal rights (5% UK compared with 11% EU).

**Figure 11: E-government-Interaction with public authorities in the last 12 months**



Source: Library survey-C23 Did you interact with public authorities over the Internet using a computer at a public library for private purposes in the last 12 months for the following activities & C10 For which of the following activities have you used the Internet on computers in public libraries in the last 3 months...  
 Base: All PAC users. UK (715); EU (11716)

In the qualitative research, library managers reported that some libraries collaborated with other organisations to provide E-government support. For example, in Northern Ireland, a library was collaborating with the government department DARD (Department of Agriculture and Rural Department) to run sessions for farmers to help them submit their farm payments online. Another library in Wales was embarking on supporting the public in the move to Universal Credit by helping people to understand electronic form filing. These initiatives were aimed at ensuring that people within the community were not left disadvantaged.

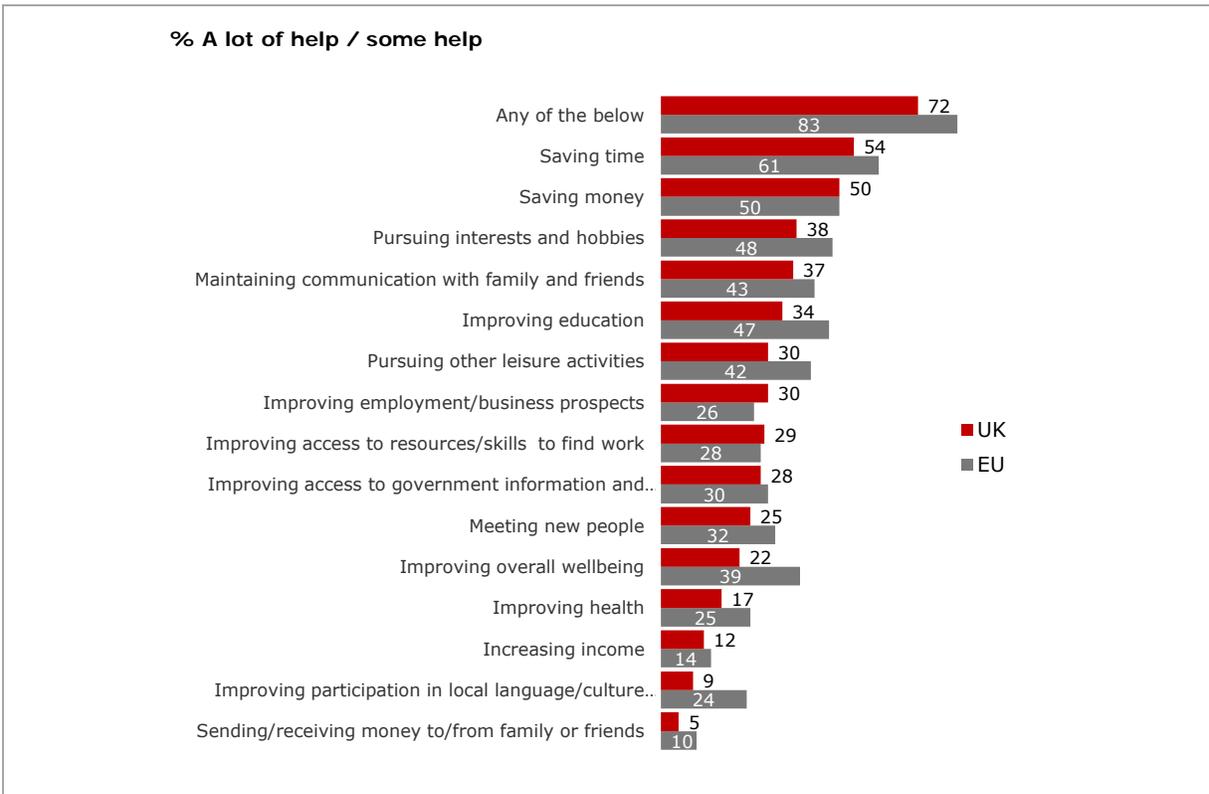
## 8. Impacts

A key aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of increased digital engagement through PAC use for users. This was assessed by asking PAC users how helpful using computers at public libraries had been for them in the last 12 months, across a wide range of areas including saving time and money, and increasing access to information and resources.

Overall 72% of UK PAC users said their PAC use had been helpful to them in at least one of the areas asked about, which although lower than the average across the EU (83%) represents approximately 2.7 million people in the UK.

Figure 12 shows the proportions saying PAC use had been helpful in each area, in the UK and across the EU.

**Figure 12: Impact of PAC for users**



Source: Library survey- C28 In the last 12 months, has using computers at public libraries been helpful to you in the following areas?

Base: C28- PAC users- UK (715); EU (11716).

As well as the general area of saving time (54% UK, 61% EU), PAC use was rated as helpful across a range of leisure and social areas such as pursuing interests and hobbies (38% UK, 48% EU) and maintaining communication with family and friends (37% UK, 43% EU). Half of PAC users (50%) in the UK and EU said PAC was helpful in saving money, which represents an estimated 1.9 million PAC users in the UK.

Overall it is estimated that in the UK, PAC usage in the last 12 months helped:

- 1.3 million people to improve their education
- 1.1 million people to improve their access to resources necessary to find work
- 1.0 million people to improve their access to government information services
- 0.8 million people to improve their employment or business prospects
- 0.4 million people to increase their income.

In the qualitative research, the benefits and impacts of using PACs that were reported by users were numerous and varied. Free access to ICT enabled many to communicate with friends and relatives living abroad; several new users felt more independent and able to do things (such as booking hotels and flights, paying bills and shopping online) for themselves as a result of ICT; jobseekers saw ICT as crucial

in helping them apply for and get a job - one user came into the library every day to apply, and another noted that it is vital to be able to present things 'formally' on a computer.

In terms of learning, new users especially were impressed with what the new things that ICT enabled them to see and do.

*"So many uses when you understand it and use it to its full potential. It's a world of information" (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

*"I even got a video up of the storm in America on the news, it's incredible" (Recent User, F, 65 and over, UK)*

Some used PACs and free internet access in order to learn formally – one did an Open University course online, another was learning Latin, and a new user was considering putting her new ICT skills to use to learn Spanish online. For others, the benefits were more practical: one had been searching the internet for information on how to keep winter colds at bay and slimming advice.

More generally, many new users simply felt more empowered and confident as a result of being able to access and use ICT in the same way as everyone else, and proud of the fact that they had learned new skills and were now able to use computers on their own.

*"I thought I was the only one slow at learning anything...since I've come in, the girl put me on the computer and said I'll give you a free lesson today and taught me the whole way through. Because I was dyslexic she said I'd pick it up quickly, she said you're not as slow as you think you are, it's having the confidence. She took me through it and said there was a course coming up and I was quite excited and I'm here now!" (Recent User, M, 40-64 UK)*

*"How good do you feel when you know you've got the right kit, and you feel empowered that you're as good as the next guy you're sitting beside." (User, F, 40-64, UK)*