

PRESS RELEASE

15 Dec 2006

A Survey of Library Services to Schools and Children in the UK 2005-06

LISU has just published its seventeenth annual report on the provision and use of public library services to schools and children. Supported by the Museums Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) and its predecessors, the series has always acted as an invaluable management tool for both public and schools library services, allowing comparison and benchmarking against other authorities and the wider national picture. The MLA has now withdrawn funding from this survey as part of its current review of its research and evidence strategy. If alternative funding cannot be found, this report will be the last in the current series.

The situation for schools library services continues to be diverse, with many clearly affected by the organisational changes which have taken place over the last ten years particularly in England. Direct funding from schools has now become the norm in England and so schools library services have experienced a need to market themselves – many services have been successful in this endeavour, however, two fewer were included in the survey this year and one more is known to have closed during the year. In addition, pressure on school budgets continues to affect schools library services and the percentage of LEA pupils served overall has once again fallen as a result. There has been a 5% decrease in the number of professional library staff working in schools library services. Those services which remain are diverse; no two offer the same selection of services to schools in their area and there are also a number of specialist services available in some areas. New and innovative strategies to support both schools and other groups are being developed by many services, together with a varied range of loan and advisory services and new and original collaborations.

Although more than half – an estimated 55% – of UK children are registered as members of the public library, less than one-third (28%) actively use the library to borrow books. This is down from last year. Conversely, the total number of books issued has increased since last year, which must be an encouraging sign for the service as a whole. Again, there is a diverse range of activities and services being developed to cater for children both individually and in specific groups, and children's satisfaction with their local library is high. There are notable differences between the various public library sectors (counties, metropolitan districts, unitary authorities and so on) both in the overall level of service activity and in the trends over the last five years. The picture is not particularly optimistic overall in any sector. It is clear that variations are to be expected in the trends for individual library services as local circumstances dictate, however, the degree of variation observed on a sector-wide scale can be argued to raise concerns for both schools library services and the public library service for children.

The report gives a summary of trends in both services over the last five years; examines the role and numbers of staff working with children; considers service provision, resources and expenditure in public library services to children; and details service provision, financial arrangements and use of schools library services. Detailed tables are given listing the information provided by each authority and service, and estimates for the overall position in the UK are included in the commentary. A supplement is also available, reproducing the main tables of the report organised for eight of the English Government Office Regions (London is included as a separate unit in the main report, as are Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

Both the main report and the regional supplement are available to download free of charge from the LISU website www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/dis/lisu/pages/publications/sch-chil06.html.

Print copies are also available – main report: £32.50 (ISBN 13: 978-1-905499-10-6, ISBN 10: 1-905499-10-8, pp 323 A4),

regional supplement: £16 (ISBN 13: 978-1-905499-11-3, ISBN 10: 1-905499-11-6, pp 156 A4) from LISU, Loughborough University, Leics LE11 3TU.

Tel: 01509 635680, Fax: 01509 635699, Email: lisu@lboro.ac.uk and through TeleOrdering.

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Note to Editors

For further information contact

Claire Creaser, Deputy Director and Senior Statistician, LISU, Holywell Park, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leics LE11 3TU. Tel: 01509 635682, email: c.creaser@lboro.ac.uk

About LISU

LISU is a national research and information centre based in the Research School of Informatics and the Department of Information Science at Loughborough University. LISU comprises a team of experienced Information Managers, Statisticians, Researchers and Administrators focusing on the analysis, development, interpretation and dissemination of statistics, performance assessment measures and related management data as well as advising on their application and exploitation in the real situation. It has an established reputation as an independent authority in its field fulfilling a key role in supporting managers of information and library services amongst others.