

The Future of our libraries: a library development plan for Falkirk 2016-21 Consultation Response

1. CILIP in Scotland (CILIPS) ⁱ welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Falkirk plan. CILIPS is the professional body for library and information professionals. Our members offer a range of skills and competencies including:

- Ensuring access to a broad and balanced range of resources, both print and digital;
- Supporting development of digital skills; and
- Encouraging information literacy

We hold that that a good public library service is essential to the well being of communities, providing a positive experience for local people and demonstrating the value local authorities and Trusts place on the communities they serve. This is supported by evidence based research carried out by the Scottish Government which concluded that participation in culture is significantly linked to good health and life satisfaction. Our Professional Knowledge and Skills Base (PKSB) identifies the expertise and skills required by the library, information and knowledge profession.ⁱⁱ

2. Community engagement forms part of the public library's 'core business'. Libraries, like all public sector services should make the most of opportunities to work more efficiently and effectively with community partners. Therefore, we agree, in principle, with the proposal to develop libraries as community hubs provided the library's core functions are retained. As the ***National Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland***ⁱⁱⁱ makes clear, '*Public libraries in Scotland constitute a valued and trusted resource at the heart of local communities*' and public service hubs have proved a popular service delivery model. However, we believe the plan would benefit from further consideration of the synergies for delivery of coordinated activity and a consistent core offer as recommended in the National Strategy.
3. The plan recognises that Scotland's citizens are using libraries differently and we accord with the acknowledgement that metrics other than footfall and book issues will be needed to record the 'deeper, richer engagement' that is a stated aspiration within it. In this respect, locally collected library data could usefully be deployed to analyse impact and inform service development and delivery.
4. The UNESCO Public Library Manifesto clearly states '*The public library shall in principle be free of charge...and be an essential component of...strategy for culture, information provision, literacy and education.*'^{iv} Any proposal to charge for library services should therefore be weighed against the concept of social inclusion as it undermines the principle of equal access. Some examples of how libraries have used alternative strategies for raising income include Google ads in library catalogues, social enterprise cafes, managed workspaces and meeting space lets.^v

5. Evidence is available from a variety of sources on how libraries can attract a new generation of library users. This includes reviewing barriers to personal learning environments (e.g. blocking software, using internet filters etc) developing maker spaces and personalising digital services. Many of these have budget and staffing implications. The plan suggests that a new vision of libraries is one where fewer staff are available but more is invested in staff skills 'to facilitate deeper, richer engagement'. More detail on how this might be achieved against a background of continuing economic challenges and cuts to public finances would be welcome.
6. Libraries play a key role in supporting the current digital strategies in Scotland and across the UK by providing free access for people unable to get online at home. A clear vision linked to the public library's role as a place for promoting digital literacy as a core skill for digital inclusion would be helpful. To support that role, access to digital equipment, wifi and trained library staff with the skills and knowledge to teach and promote online engagement is a pre-requisite. CILIPS advocates use of the PKSB as a key learning tool for information workers as a means of achieving and certifying that knowledge.
7. In conclusion, the public needs and expects a modern, high-quality library service delivered by qualified library and information professionals.

ⁱ <http://www.cilips.org.uk/who-we-are/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.cilip.org.uk/pksb>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://scottishlibraries.org/advocacy/national-strategy/>

^{iv} <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html>

^v <http://locality.org.uk/resources/income-generation-public-libraries-learning-case-studies-national/>