



The value and impact of Scotland's public libraries

Executive summary

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3 June 2025

Report presented by
Scottish Book Trust

scottishbooktrust.com



**Scottish
Book Trust**

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Background

This report is a result of Scottish Book Trust undertaking independent research into the value and impact of public and school libraries in Scotland, in partnership with the National Library of Scotland (NLS), the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland (CILIPS). This research took place between late 2023 – officially launched in Libraries Week (2–8 October) – and early 2025.

Scotland's school libraries (primary and secondary) have no legal statutory duty for adequate library provision. Although Scotland's public libraries do have a statutory duty 'to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area', they have no uniform standard for what that must offer¹.

As a result, across the public and school library sector, Scotland's communities face a lack of equitable access².

Aims

Scottish Book Trust works across every local authority in Scotland, striving to offer opportunities for all people to share their stories; as such, Scottish Book Trust is uniquely positioned to bear witness. Following an initial literature review, four banner themes were chosen:

- Reading for pleasure
- Learning opportunities / closing the poverty-related attainment gap
- Digital inclusion
- Active citizenship

Through these themes, the sheer breadth of the profound impact that Scotland's libraries have on their communities can be explored, as can the ways they bridge the gaps left by the inaccessibility of – and barriers to – other services as a result of, for example, the cost-of-living crisis³, digital inequality⁴, the consequences of the Covid pandemic⁵, poverty⁶, and wealth inequality⁷.

This report investigates how public libraries address inequality across these four research themes, and through many intersections of Scotland's communities.

[Separate reports on the impact of school libraries are available on the Scottish Book Trust website.](#)

Methods

This report compiles findings from four methods of evaluation:

1. **Open surveys of public librarians** (October 2023 – January 2024)
Across every local authority in Scotland (315 responses total)
2. **Open survey of public library users** (January – June 2024)
Across every local authority in Scotland (1,933 responses total)
3. Quantitative data gathering from **existing FOI requests** and **public domain** information on local authority websites (Autumn 2023 – Autumn 2024)
4. **Research interviews** (March – May 2024)
11 librarians from public settings, and two external experts

Preliminary findings arising from the public and school librarian surveys have already been published and are available on the Scottish Book Trust website⁸.

A note on the term 'librarian': in this report, this term includes both qualified librarians and any other library staff seeking to support their service. The breakdown of qualified and unqualified librarians in the quantitative research serves to indicate those who have had specialised training in information management – it is not a value judgement on the quality of any one service. As such, 'librarian' in this report indicates any library worker.

Furthermore, this research does not specifically cover the value and impact of mobile libraries in Scotland, though these are vital access points, particularly in rural areas. Nationwide studies of mobile libraries and their importance were published by SLIC in 2018⁹ and 2024¹⁰.

Findings

Love for libraries

Scotland's population evidently puts a premium on the public library, which was **the nation's most frequently visited cultural event or place** in 2022¹¹.

Libraries were described in the same research as a 'lifeline', playing a key role in community cohesion and enabling people to come together, learn new skills, and spend time in an environment without the pressure of spending money¹².



Why our libraries are important

'I can't tell you how many times I have found sanctuary in a library. Having somewhere warm to go where I can use the bathroom and curl up in a chair with a book for a few hours is so important to me. No matter where I am, if I have a few hours to kill there is a library to welcome me. In the depths of winter when I couldn't afford much heating I could go to the library to warm up (some even offered free tea and coffee). The warm, welcoming and friendly atmosphere of a library is so precious to me.' – Library user

The conclusion of the library user survey offered an unlimited comment box with the prompt, 'please tell us anything else here about why your library is important to you (or your family)'. 1,508 responses were submitted.

These responses comprise **the heart of this research**, demonstrating in clear and practical terms the value and impact of the library service. Whether disabled, LGBTQ+, neurodivergent, single parenting, old, young, seeking asylum, unhoused, a refugee, or in an area with high or low rates of deprivation, **the public library welcomes and caters for you.**

Regardless of your status, the public library offers inclusive and accessible means to look after, inform and advance yourself and your family.

Many library users declared their **emotional connection** and lifelong reliance on their local library, as well as **the value of their librarian:**

- 'It's hard to put into words how important a space a library is. I feel quite emotional when I think of the support it offered me as a new parent, Bookbug Sessions were great fun, and a social connection, I couldn't afford the fancy children groups but I could always join the library sessions and frequently did. My grown children still regularly visit the library and use its many resources. Their reading ages are far beyond their actual age and I think the regular library connection has contributed to this. The staff are outstanding, and deserve recognition, and possibly a pay rise!'
- 'I have grown up in my local libraries, as will my young family. Local libraries do more than anything else to engender social conscience and collective responsibility, to say nothing of access to books, essential digital services and excellent information professionals dedicated to public service.'

More commented on the direct impact of libraries as a lifeline that **supports mental health** and **access to both learning and recreation:**

- 'As a queer, long-term disabled, housebound person, I feel isolated from society. This has been, and continues to be, very difficult to deal with. The library is like a sunbeam in all of this. Free access to literature is an absolute lifeline for me. It's provided me with innumerable hours of enjoyment and learning.'
- 'Please don't take our libraries away from us. It's the one place people can come to in order to escape the daily grind and it helps with mental health and

wellbeing in such a huge way. It helps families entertain kids at little or no cost.'

More again reported the importance of their library for providing a **safe space to people of marginalised identities**:

- 'Our library is awesome. The staff have changed lots in the last few years... we know where the old staff are (other libraries in [the local authority]) and we are introduced to new staff as we are regular visitors (at least once a week or more)... we love that they know us by name, even the 5yo and that we are welcomed. I wear hijab, I'm Scottish and a wheelchair user, my husband is Black and Bangladeshi... we are still welcome. This matters in a diverse Scotland!'

Unfortunately, there were also multiple comments concerned with the **imminent or recent closure** of their library, and the indelible void it leaves behind:

- 'Our family love our local library [...] It has inspired a love of reading in my 6-year-old and rekindled my love of reading. Sadly, it is being closed at the end of this week. We are devastated.'
- 'The reason I've answered not at all is because [my local] council shut six libraries and because I have a disability I cannot get to an alternative branch, for the last two years since they were shut, I've not been able to access any of the great services a library should provide. I've registered for home delivery but you don't get all the fringe benefits with that. Just a bag of books each month that the library choose for you. I feel I'm missing out and excluded. I feel it's unjust and probably illegal.'
- 'My son recently attended Bookbug Sessions, which he absolutely loved. It was his first exposure to a library and he's just at the age of being read stories for the first time. This library was recently closed as part of a budget issue at [my local] council. The next nearest library had already been closed a few years prior. The loss of this has been very sad and has made it harder for us to get him to book-based events and sessions. We waste so much money in this country and it always comes at the expense of art, culture and the

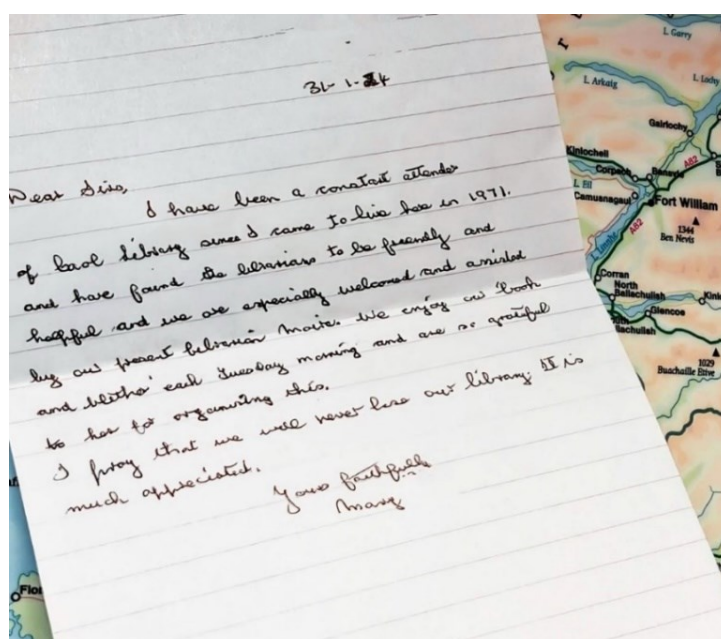
environment. I think we are hugely poorer for it. My library *was* important, but sadly I can only answer this question like this, as it is no longer open and will never be again.'

Direct testimonials

Scottish Book Trust received handwritten letters over the course of this research project from Scottish citizens wishing to offer testimonials on the importance of their local libraries – such as Mary from Fort William:

'I have been a constant attendee of Caol library since I came to live here in 1971 and have found the librarians to be friendly and helpful and we are especially welcomed and assisted by our present librarian Moira. We enjoy our "book and blether" each Tuesday morning and are so grateful to her for organising this.

I pray that we will never lose our library. It is much appreciated.'

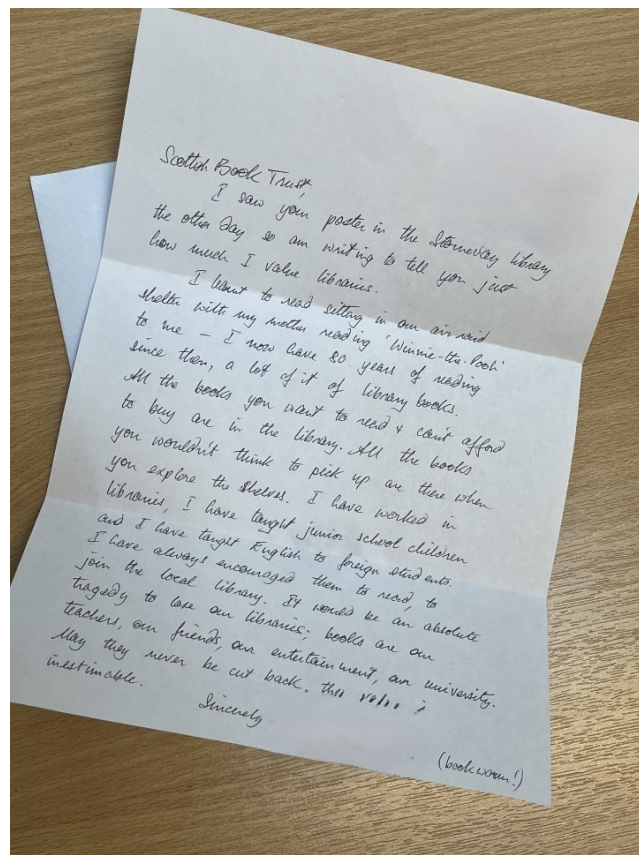


Another letter, from one E. Hayes on the Isle of Lewis, staunchly advocated for the preservation of the library service:

'I saw your poster in the Stornoway library the other day so am writing to tell you just how much I value libraries.

I learnt to read sitting in an air raid shelter with my mother reading "Winnie-the-Pooh" to me – I now have 80 years of reading since then, a lot of it of library books.

All the books you want to read + can't afford to buy are in the library. All the books you wouldn't think to pick up are there when you explore the shelves. I have worked in libraries, I have taught junior school children and I have taught English to foreign students. I have always encouraged them to read, to join the local library. It would be an absolute tragedy to lose our libraries; books are our teachers, our friends, our entertainment, our university. May they never be cut back, their value is inestimable.'



Scottish Book Trust,
I saw your poster in the Stornoway library
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how much I value libraries.
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teachers, our friends, our entertainment, our university.
May they never be cut back, their value is
inestimable.
Sincerely
(bookworm!)

Reading for pleasure

'The library makes a huge difference to me and my family. The opportunity to try out new authors and genres is huge but all the other things that the library provides is immense. It is a safe space for many. We would be lost without it.'

– Library user

Scottish Book Trust, and many others, have published findings on the importance of reading for pleasure for tackling poverty¹³, improving pupil attainment¹⁴, increasing self-esteem at a young age¹⁵, greater mental wellbeing¹⁶, building resilience¹⁷ and enhancing empathy¹⁸. Studies show that adults who read 'for just 30 minutes a week are 20% more likely to report greater life satisfaction'¹⁹.

Librarians and library users each reflected on reading rates, recommendations and activities in their local library service, indicating the necessary provision and access in order for any of the benefits of reading for pleasure to be felt.

In the open survey of library users, respondents self-reported high **rates of reading for pleasure**, averaging at 4.6 stars ('daily / multiple times a day') out of 5, or, 68% of responses.

Public librarians, when asked a similar question about how much time they spend offering reading recommendations, were split almost equally between 'daily / multiple times a day', 'often / multiple times a week' and 'occasionally / weekly'.

By far the **most popular activities** reported by library users are author visits (44.04% of responses) and Bookbug Sessions (43.03% of responses), followed closely by the Summer Reading Challenge (33.77% of responses).

This correlates to reports from librarians, who cite the most popular activities in their libraries as: Bookbug Sessions (96.73%), craft sessions (89.39%) and reading challenges (83.67%), followed closely by Book Week Scotland activities (78.78%), book clubs / cafés (73.47%), and author visits (67.35%).



Library users, when asked how their library supports reading for pleasure, provided 1,586 responses that illustrated the immense affection, gratitude and reliance they felt for their local libraries.

Overarching themes and concerns from library users include:

1. Accessibility of the library
 - i. Importance of high-quality stock
 - ii. Lack of commercial interest means stock is trustworthy, verifiable
 - iii. Ability to reserve titles
 - iv. Access to special collections, archives, newspapers
 - v. Online access to ebooks and audiobooks
2. Affordability
 - i. People reported being otherwise unable to access books or resources, due to cost
 - ii. Lack of cost at the library means people can widen their reading and explore something they couldn't justify buying
3. Welcoming and knowledgeable staff
 - i. Recommendations help steer people in the right direction
 - ii. Encouraging and friendly staff build and sustain community
4. Literacy is crucial – not just a hobby

i. Reading is empowering

Library patrons placed a particular emphasis on the **affordability** of the library, enabling members of the public to access books and materials that would otherwise be financially impossible – for example:

- 'I love going to my local library and the staff are always so warm, welcoming and friendly and nothing is too much trouble for them. It's a lovely warm space to spend time in. There is always a wide variety of books of all genres and always a selection of newly published books too. As I'm on a low income and can't always afford as many books as I'd like, it's valuable for me to go to my local library and get the books I want. I also find it's a way to discover authors I hadn't heard about before. The library has also got a very good general reference section as well as a local reference section which contains valuable out of print books, both of which I've been able to look at and read books in.'

Intrinsic in this one library user's response is the direct impact that a welcoming librarian and well-stocked library has on individual learning opportunities: by providing a pathway to reading for pleasure, there is a direct route to further learning opportunities (which will be discussed further in the next section of this report).

Library users also stressed the direct influence that reading for pleasure has on **supporting mental health and wellbeing** by sustaining community and providing a family-friendly space. They also underlined the importance of library staff for maintaining and encouraging these supports:

- 'Librarians have found many books for me, suggested titles, recommended books. More than that chatted and were constantly friendly and helpful in times when I felt bad. The library is a haven, a sanctuary from upset and hardship. More than once I have felt that I was saved from real misery by having the library close [by].'
- 'As a carer for my disabled husband I feel very isolated much of the time. I am in a book group and some months going to the library is the only time I get to socialise and speak with people. Our library staff is great at helping me find

books that suit my interests and the fact that they take a minute or two to speak with me helps me feel better about life in general.'

Though only a snapshot of the huge volume of responses in the survey, these accounts reflect a Scottish populus that significantly benefits from a library service for more than simply books or resources, but who see them as a stalwart defence against isolation, a reliable support for family growth and community development and a crucial safe space for anyone who needs it.

One library user also shared their experience of the affordability and community generated by their local library, contrasted heavily with the **impact of closures**:

- '[My library supports with...] access to books that I couldn't afford to read if I had to rely on buying them. My local library was an absolute lifeline when my children were very young. Somewhere welcoming and enriching I could take them where we could bump into other local parents. I find libraries to be a peaceful relaxing environment which is a vital resource to manage my anxiety. I am so sad that our local [...] library has not yet reopened. A massive loss to the community.'

It is perennially difficult to gather data on the material impacts to a community in the wake of library closures, due to an absence of comparable spaces which provide such wide-ranging and supportive amenities. In the quote above, a library user indicates succinctly the reliance they have on a library to provide access to books they cannot otherwise afford, to meet with neighbours and friends, to support children and young people and to offer a quiet place for wellbeing.

Learning opportunities

'In the past libraries were viewed as just a place to borrow books from, but it's so much more than that now. We allow for people to come in and check their emails, for children to come in and use the PCs that they may not have access to at home, to complete their homework. People come in and do CVs or job interviews. We've even had people come in and do online exams, to come in and use the computers to learn English. There's such a huge, huge volume that we do for the community and especially for learning development.' – Public librarian

Constraints around literacy and learning opportunities have far-reaching implications for both children and adults: in Scotland, over 1 in 4 adults might face challenges and limited opportunities²⁰ in their day-to-day life due to their low literacy skills. The average worker in the UK with very low literacy will earn approximately 7.1% less than if they had a basic level of literacy²¹.

Establishing what public libraries offer for learning opportunities and further education illustrates part of their much broader long-term impact.



When asked to reflect on the importance of the library in providing further education / learning opportunities – on a scale of 1 to 5 – librarians overall averaged at 3.7, i.e., 'moderately' to 'quite important'.

Library users, however, indicated that a library's provision of **further education / learning opportunities is 'very important'** (68.02% of responses), to an overall average of 4.5 out of 5.

Of the 1,223 comments that library users left to indicate the importance of learning opportunities through their library service, three primary themes emerged:

1. Importance of digital devices and Wi-Fi
 - i. To source and submit job applications
 - ii. To research and self-educate
 - iii. To participate in online learning
 - iv. To build a specific skill set, whether as career or hobby
2. Barriers of poverty, cost-of-living crisis or the expense of third-level education
3. Lifelong reliance on the library for further education and learning

Qualitative responses illustrate the significance to individuals and community through this provision. A great number of respondents noted the **vital support** that further education and learning through **the library afforded them** and their families' progress:

- 'The dyslexia accessible books for children encouraged my son to read. Without them, he'd have struggled far more to enjoy reading. All my children benefitted from reference books when they were in school and further education. They loved the summer reading challenges. There are so many more things we've not investigated yet, but will!'
- 'I joined the library at five years old and am now 75. I have used the libraries as lifelines e.g. for the first years of my daughter's life I had to live in one room. The libraries were hugely influential in my escape from poverty. That boosted my esteem. I left school in 1963 with no qualifications but now have a BA degree and an adult teaching qualification. That would have been impossible without access to libraries. Reading has helped me throughout my life in many areas: socially, emotionally, intellectually. Without the LIBBY app I do not think I would have coped with the isolation of the Covid pandemic. I have passed on my love of reading to my family who are all avid readers. I believe libraries are very much underrated.'

- 'I have taught myself how to code using books from the library and have now published apps as a result.'

Library users also reported the library's importance for **access to healthcare information**:

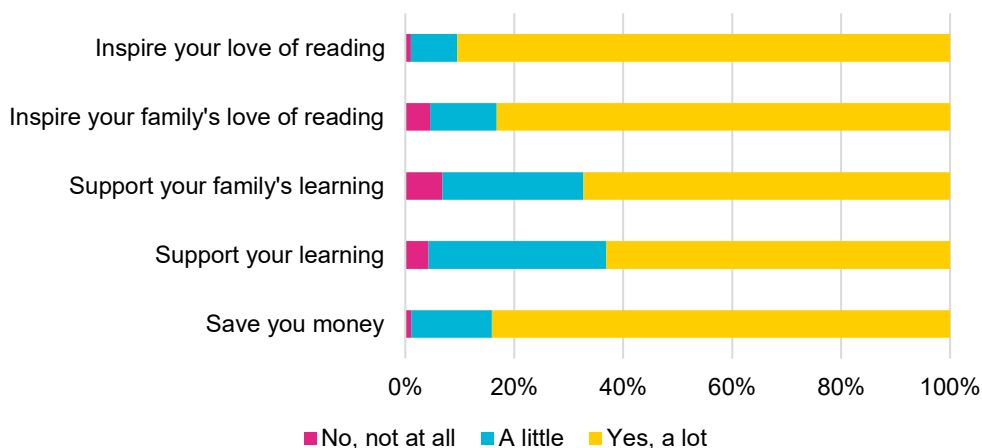
- 'I have used library books to educate myself about how to manage to live better with Long Covid in the absence of such information from the NHS. This has been critical and lifesaving for me.'

Other library users also noted the **negative impact** on their community **when the library service is reduced**:

- 'It seems like a long time ago but the public library had so much to offer the residents of the local community. With the change in dynamics and restructuring, the library is no longer open so those that work can access their local library. They are hardly open at all. The range of activities are no longer available.'

To what extent do you feel libraries help with any of the following:

(Library users: 1,623 respondents)

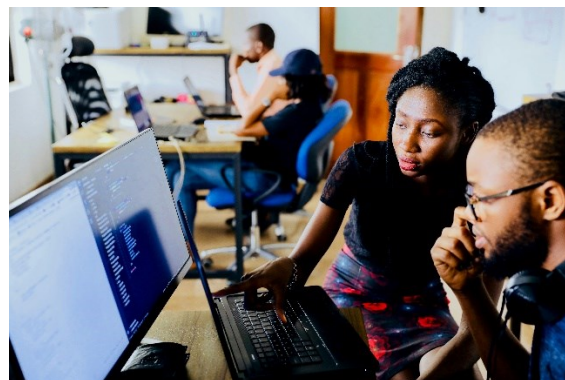


To complete reflections on learning opportunities, library users were prompted to rate how libraries help with inspiring a love of reading, supporting learning and saving money.

The quantitative data was distinctly positive around the library's provision, where respondents reported **their library inspires their love of reading** or their family's love of reading 'a lot' (respectively 90.43% and 83.20% of responses).

They further noted that it **supports their family's learning** (67.29%) **and their own learning 'a lot'** (respectively 67.29% and 63.12% of responses).

Remarkably, the vast majority of library users **reported their library saves them money 'a lot'** (84.08%).



The importance of the library in offering further learning opportunities to adults cannot be overstated. A clear indication of this impact is best illustrated in this moving reflection from a public librarian:

'It's very important but we don't do it as we don't have the resource. The people we see are the 30–40% of people who have zero digital skill, no email, no phone. Sometimes no ID, are unable to read. Let's say for example a reformed character who was released from prison. We are the first place that people come when they need help, possibly the only place in a landscape of shrinking services. When we are gone then these other agencies will need to foot the time bill and the mental health crisis we are averting. The prison guy? We helped him get an email. As he had an email, he was able to apply online for funding. He ate that weekend and had lecky. He comes to job club now. Often, we hear talk about pathways, directions, signposts etc. What are libraries if not a way station. A levelling-up factory that sends people in the positive direction.'

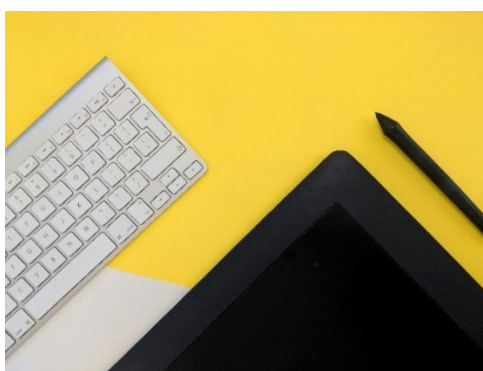
Digital inclusion

'I'm studying a post grad diploma as a mature student part time. I'm financially constrained by my additional costs to study. When my laptop broke halfway through my final year of study, the library became an essential resource for me to get through my degree. If it wasn't for two late night openings; I'd have dropped out!' – Library user

Digital poverty is defined as 'the inability to interact with the online world fully, when, where, and how an individual needs to'²² and includes people without access to a laptop / smart phone / tablet, or affordable, reliable internet.

In 2020, Inspiring Scotland reported that approximately 800,000 people are estimated to face digital inequality²³ – close to 15% of the whole population. They also estimated that '19% (c.1 million) of Scottish people do not know how to use digital technology and, as of 2017, an estimated c. 400,000 do not live in areas with 4G coverage'.

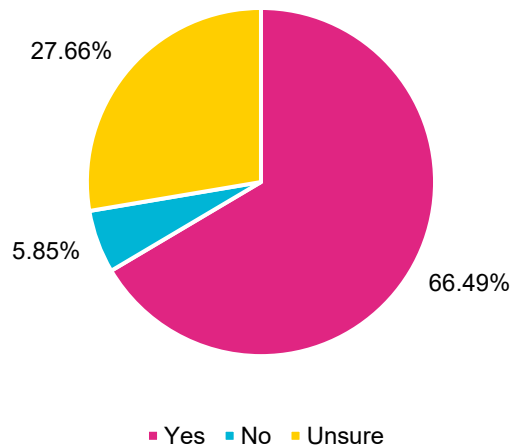
As an illustration of these stats: the 2017 Get Digital heatmap highlights the extent of digital inequality across all 32 local authorities: it indicates that **19 local authorities have a high likelihood of digital exclusion**, and only three with low likelihood: Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow²⁴.



When public librarians were asked whether or not their local community **faces digital poverty**, an overwhelming majority said 'yes' – 66.49%.

Does your local community face digital poverty?

(Public librarians: 137 responses)



Libraries are bridging the divide posed by this digital poverty across Scotland: 96.28% of librarians reported that their library offers **access to Wi-Fi**, 98.94% to **computers with internet**, 70.74% to **ebooks / eReaders** and 95.74% to **photocopying / printing / scanning**.

This is corroborated by library users' feedback: the vast majority noted they have made use of their library's computers with internet access (65.70% of respondents), photocopying / printing / scanning (64.56% of respondents), Wi-Fi (56.85%) and ebooks / eReaders (50.09% of respondents).

Library users were asked to reflect on **ways their library supports them to get online**, use digital technologies and access digital services – **and how important they feel this is**. 1,121 responses to the open comment box, of unlimited length, reflected how libraries are crucial:

1. For many rural communities to get online
2. To develop and sustain digital literacy and access
3. To provide a vital quiet space for work/study with free Wi-Fi
4. To get disadvantaged people back on their feet

Library users were overwhelmingly in agreement that **their library provides a lifeline to them and their community**. Their comments included personal stories of previous unemployment, disability or financial hardship that only the library supported and improved:

- 'When I was unemployed, I couldn't afford the internet or heating to look for jobs, so my library was a vital place for me to job search and stay warm.'
- 'I've in the past used library resources to help find work and kickstart my career; browsing job sites on library computers and printing off CVs and documents such as proof of address (access to these resources also helped me when I was looking to rent a home for the first time) [...] support from library staff with job searches, choosing further education courses, and social security applications can be the difference between accessing these avenues for bettering one's circumstances and not [...] Services libraries provide to help people improve their digital skills are incredibly important for this reason and for allowing people to meet job requirements, stay connected with friends and family, and generally participate in public life and discourse which increasingly takes place primarily online.'
- 'I'm long-term housebound because of disability and am unable to access the library in person. Digital resources, especially eAudiobooks (and to a lesser extent eBooks), are an absolute lifeline for me. Without them, I'd have no access to literature.'

Rural communities – particularly in those 19 local authorities with high likelihood for digital exclusion²⁵ – often **rely on the library** for essential access to Wi-Fi:

- 'It's vital. When I first moved to my remote and rural location, the only way I could get online to look and apply for houses and/or professional support was through digital access in my library. The equipment was provided free and staff were happy to help.'
- 'I regularly visit the building as a quiet inspiring place to work, study and relax. It is one of the few places one can still access without the need of paying, booking, or feeling pressured to consume something. The fact that there is in-

person support available from friendly helpful staff is also a great support. [...] I sometimes work in town, 27 miles from my home office, and without the library I simply would not be able to do this.'

More library users emphasised the value of their library's digital inclusion because of **a lack of digital devices at home, or poor digital literacy:**

- 'Supported me through first modules of an Open Uni course with audiobook versions of set books (I'm dyslexic) and computer / printer access for assignments. I'm now BA(Hons) and first of my family with a degree.'
- 'I've worked home full time since Covid and it's had a significant impact on my health. There is a very restricted opportunity to get a desk in the office now so being able to work from the library and use the Wi-Fi has been a godsend.'
- 'My local library provided training classes for beginners in using a computer, then further training in using a computer, I consider this help / training an essential support for my old age, I am connected to the world, it is a lifeline for me.'
- 'My local library is extremely important to me with enabling me to do things online. If there's something I'm unable to do at home or I'm worried about something I go to my library and the staff are able to advise me or show me what to do in future or do it for me. I'd be really stuck if this service no longer existed as I have no younger members in my family, and I'm a senior citizen.'

There were also comments from those library users not facing hardship or illiteracy, but who nevertheless **depend on their library for essential digital services:**

- 'This is extremely important. I am fortunate enough to have a PC at home, but I still use the library ones for many things, including printing CVs, job searches, learning new things. My children love to access online learning here too, sometimes school related [...] but also their own learning [...] I don't think there is another resource in our society which could offer all the library does, we must not lose them, I believe they should be a priority for funding and seen as the multi-faceted amazing resource they are for our community.'



A major barrier posed by digital poverty is not only access to digital infrastructure, but a lack of digital or media literacy. Public libraries can help their communities to parse disinformation (deliberately false data) and misinformation (false data, usually not deliberate), and understand how to keep their personal data safe online.

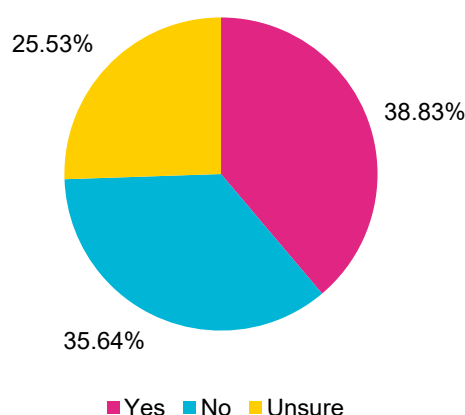
Librarians in interview commented on the further impacts of the Covid pandemic on digital literacy in their community:

'Especially since Covid – I think a whole swathe of people are being left behind. It's something that really, really angers me because I saw it before I began working at the library and I now see it daily when I am working at the library.

People who are expected to fill in a form online who don't know how to use a computer, sometimes they don't even have an email address, so they can't even get started with what they're expected to do without setting up an email address first. And then they don't know how to set up an email address, so we have to support them with that. And it really, really angers me that so much of our lives are now expected to be online.'

In the interests of improving digital literacy, Scottish Book Trust asked librarians in the survey if their library currently supports the local community with those skills:

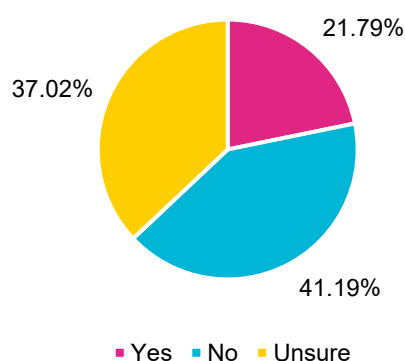
Does your library currently support the local community with media/digital literacy skills?
(Public librarians: 188 responses)



Librarians were almost exactly split in their responses. 2 out of 5 librarians (38.83%) reported that their library does support their local community with media / digital literacy skills. Just over 1 in 3 (35.64%) disagreed.

The library user survey similarly asked respondents if they felt their local library helped them understand online information and media. The responses were split – 1 in 5 (21.79%) respondents chose 'yes', 2 in 5 chose 'no' (41.19%), with a further 37.02% 'unsure':

Do you feel your local library has helped you to understand online information and media?
(Library users: 1,583 respondents)



From 828 comments, respondents agreed that libraries are a **trusted source of impartiality and safety**, particularly librarians:

- 'A scammer posted my Facebook profile picture on his page which had me really worried so I went to my library and they were able to advise me what to do and to reassure me. They take the stress out of being online for me.'
- 'Our library stocks books about information literacy and media which we would otherwise have to pay for. My grandmother has attended a PC course which taught her how to protect herself online, ex: safe passwords, identifying untrustworthy websites and spam emails.'

Some library users also conveyed a concern that their **local library is currently unable to provide this kind of support**:

- 'School librarians in [my local authority] are excellent at this and they educate our children through a compulsory programme; however, I do not see much of this organised in the public libraries. When there was a seminar with a leading speaker it was capped at low numbers, rather than allowing a large audience and was not recorded.'
- 'I think I am savvy enough when it comes to disinformation but it's clear from comments I see on X and elsewhere that there is a huge part for libraries to play here.'

Unfortunately, one respondent noted the importance of their library for information literacy – now lost:

- 'Yes, our local library was very good in all ways until they shut it!'

Active citizenship

'I love the way the library welcomes all people, as seen every time I visit. There are many elderly, children, families, people accessing books in other languages (such as Ukrainian) and there is always a wide programme of activities and events.' – Library user

As the final theme of this research, 'active citizenship' investigates the library's role in supporting communities to be informed about their democratic rights and access, to be empowered to voice their concerns and decisions, and to engage with their local authority, all with the goal of shaping local and national services to their needs.

Research from SLIC²⁶ and CILIP²⁷ shows that libraries:

1. Reach a strongly diversified audience across all protected characteristics
2. Ensure equal access to information, education and support
3. Offer safe spaces for people to remain indefinitely, without expectation of payment
4. Provide access to trusted, accurate information which empowers communities to make informed decisions

Scottish Book Trust therefore asked questions of both library users and public librarians to gather further evidence on each of these points: (1) reaching a diverse audience; (2) equal access to information; (3) safe spaces; and (4) democratically engaged and informed communities.

Reaching a diverse audience

'As an elderly person I feel known and recognized at my library. The staff is always welcoming, informative, helpful with issues I need assistance with.

There is a place to go into to quietly read and be in the presence of people.'

– Library user

86.67% of public librarians agreed that their library reaches a diverse audience (whether across race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, class, language, religion, disability, age, education).

Some librarians further commented on the barriers and challenges to access they are attempting to overcome:

- 'We see a heavy usage by people who have recently come into the local community, of refugee or immigrant status – whether Ukrainian, Somali, Syrian, Thai, or otherwise. These people tend to use the library service, heavily, as adults, in order to learn and to help their children, who in turn, are encouraged to use the library – often more heavily, from a cultural, or necessary, point of view, than most resident Scots families will do.'
- '[My library] is well placed geographically in the town centre and is regularly accessed by a diverse audience including student, tourists and locals alike. However there is no disabled / wheeled access so this greatly reduces our ability to serve the whole community.'

Two neighbouring libraries, within 2–3 miles, have parking, wheeled access and public toilets. This does not stop us having to turn people away on occasion which is a great regret and a real problem.'

- 'This library is in a village with a strong class divide. We cater to everyone, bringing people together particularly in crochet club. I have worked hard to counter anti-trans talk in the village and am happy to have made the library feel like a safe place for LGBTQ+ youth. This is undermined by reduced opening times meaning that teens can only access the library on holidays.'

Library users reaffirmed the importance of the library to cater to diverse communities:

'Our community is incredibly diverse. Many members struggle with language and cultural differences. The library is a fantastic safe place for them to learn and feel welcome.'

Equal access to information

'Librarians are good at helping to find resources which can pinpoint how to tell what is genuine and what is fake news; their skillset is very important for people as they can help to promote trust in trusted news sources.' – Library user

The overwhelming majority of librarians agreed that their library provides equal and free access to trusted, accurate information for the local community: 87.22% of all respondents.

Library users provided further evidence of their libraries offering **free and equal access** to accurate information – and trust in their librarians to help:

- 'Yes, my local library has significantly helped me understand online information and media. [A] member of staff is always ready to help to make things easier.'
- 'Libraries provide access to a wider range of opinion and perspectives than I would otherwise experience. The curation of the library's collection and resources based on professional principles is more readily trusted than those from places with commercial or political objectives.'

Safe spaces

'That's key, just securing the future of libraries, and making councillors and politicians aware of all the different services that we provide. Without them, it's

not just the loss of a cultural space, it's the loss of a learning space, it's the loss of a social space, it's the loss of a safe space, a neutral space.'

– Public librarian

To better understand the role of libraries as safe spaces – that is, a place that provides a physically and emotionally safe environment for a person or group of people, free of fear, bullying or harassment – Scottish Book Trust asked both library users and librarians to what extent, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), they agreed that their library offers a safe space. Both groups averaged at **4.6 out of 5** ('strongly agree').

Those librarians who felt their library did not or could not offer a safe space expanded on their reasons:

- 'If our library closes as is a possibility our villagers will have no access to everything mentioned in this survey. If our opening hours are reduced this will have an impact, but not as much as is if the library was to close permanently. Potential for it to be an 'open library' with no staff, does concern us as this could result in antisocial behaviour and a risk to health and safety for any library users who may injure themselves or become unwell in an unattended building.'

Library users shared stories of how their public library offered **a safe space, particularly crucial for those with protected characteristics** and at greater risk:

- 'As a disabled adult, I've lived on a very tight budget and could not have afforded to buy books with any regularity. The library has provided me with so much information and entertainment (something everyone deserves to have access to) – and all this for free. The library has a wide range of LGBTQIA+ books, eBooks and eAudiobooks (both fiction and non-fiction). Every request I've made for a queer audiobook to be added to the library's catalogue has been honoured, as long as the book is available for purchase. This has made me feel safe and welcome at the library as a queer person, especially as one

who grew up under Section 28 and didn't have access to explicitly queer books as a young person.'

- 'Vital. For me as an autistic person, the local library is one of the few public indoor spaces where I can find a quiet, stress-free environment. It also feels like a welcoming place for different groups of people, a place for the whole community. In other words it's not exclusive or intimidating.'
- 'Not everyone has a safe space at home or school or at work, having somewhere in the community that is definitely going to be is incredibly important and unfortunately very necessary. That is why I get so upset that quite a lot of libraries are enduring abuse and horrific behaviours from groups of youths and getting no support to tackle it. The streets are not safe for a lot of people either so safety in the libraries should be a priority. Hubs for warmth, a hot drink, and access to opportunities is vital to all.'

They also commented on the library as a crucial **support for their children, and for them in raising a family**:

- 'Library has been a lifeline for somewhere free to go with the kids. Just wish they were open more at the weekend.'
- 'It is also a place for getting together. When I had my baby two years ago the Bookbug Session at our local library was the first place I ever took him on my own. He was two weeks old and as a first time mother I had a lot of anxiety about going out in case he was crying or something happened. Everyone at Bookbug was so nice and it was lovely to be around other parents. It gave me the confidence to go out more and be more sociable.'
- 'Vital! Children can't go into pubs or, often, even into cafes, and lots of people can't afford to keep buying coffees etc. Cafes tend to close about 3 or 4 so there is a dead spot in late afternoon, early evening where kids (and others!) have nowhere to go – libraries are vital! There are few other safe spaces, even community centres tend to be only for groups that have booked rooms – no place for just 'hanging' or doing homework etc. Nowhere for women to be safe.'

Many library users noted the **restrictions their local libraries face**, whether reduced hours or outright closures:

- 'It's very important, there are fewer and fewer safe spaces as community centres shut. Libraries are expected to take on a lot and staff are expected to assume a higher level of responsibility than they are paid for to safeguard vulnerable customers and manage anti-social behaviour.'
- 'A safe space for the community is incredibly important. Libraries are the only public space where different groups of people (ages, background, socio-economic status, ethnicity etc.) can share for free. The tragedy is that this opportunity is being taken away from communities because libraries are closing or having opening hours reduced.'

Democratically engaged and informed communities

'Reading a book is a form of self improvement and education. Every book a person reads adds to their sum knowledge of the world, of humanity and of art. The library provides democratic access to this knowledge unaffected by an individual's class, affluence or formal education.' – Library user

Library users indicated a relatively high rate of informed debate / decision-making, where over a quarter (28.63%) reported it happens 'daily / weekly' or 'regularly', and a further 46.67% 'on occasion'.

By comparison, 51.67% of responding librarians reported informed debate / decision-making happens 'rarely' or 'never' in their library, with only 16.11% reporting it happens 'daily / weekly' or 'regularly'.

More generally, across the library user survey, there were numerous anecdotes of the library as a central 'community hub':

- 'Libraries are community hubs. As a new immigrant it's helped my wellbeing immensely.'

- 'Our library is home to the galleries / museum, library and cafe. I think anywhere there's a hub in the community for art, education, reading, and safe socialisation that these spaces are vital for nurturing minds.'
- 'It's the hub of the community that everyone can access and use as much as they need for various reasons. Libraries are the heartbeat of a community it's essential for a healthy area.'
- 'Our library is everything to us. A hub after school, a cafe and read when kids are away, a place for a rainy day, a place to borrow books with no fees for kids. It's just magical and we love it.'

Library users also commented on the centrality of librarians for helping signpost and cater to public enquiries:

- 'Library staff (as familiar, friendly faces) support their users in making informed choices about what we read, and in staying safe online.'

Librarians also reported a lack of awareness among the general public that libraries are more than book repositories or quiet study spaces; they are unique local hubs with huge provision in terms of social inclusion, digital access and community wellbeing:

'Most days, we get people in who are surprised by what we offer, surprised by what we do, surprised by what they're able to do within the library service.

I think there's so many users out there that think, "well, that's not for me. I don't need that", that don't realise what we can offer – not even just to them as individuals, but as community groups and spaces and charities and whatever it might be.

Also you would hope, it could also raise awareness for what we potentially could be, about what we can grow into being. In the current climate of so many local authorities struggling to provide resources for their communities, what could the library go on to achieve (if we increased budget or worked in partnership or whatever it may be) to bring those ideas across Scotland? It's quite exciting.'

There is increasing stress enacted on librarians where the strategic goals of libraries – as safe spaces where people can be treated with equality and respect, access important documents and paperwork, socialise with their community, and empower themselves through free access to information – are overwhelmed by the insecurity of the sector. Librarians are reporting how much their role is becoming an attempt to bridge the gap between the reality of short staffing, restrictions, cuts and precarity, and the inaccessible goals of the library's full potential:

'For a while, we were a really big part of our community. A lot of people were noticing how integral we were becoming, how much we changed, how much they appreciated and enjoyed it.

Sadly, that's been changing a lot over the past few months.

When we were that [...] community space it was really enjoyable, made me proud to work in my library, proud to be able to help my community to be able to offer so much to people to make such a difference in so many people's weeks.

That was why I took the job, why I wanted to get in the library service. And over the past few months, obviously with the changes, it's really, really disheartening. It's not the job I went into and it's really disappointing.'

To participate in informed debate or decision-making, librarians and their patrons both have to be in a place where their immediate and urgent needs are met. This is not currently the case in the majority of local authorities across Scotland.

Settings and roles

In a survey of 315 public librarians across every local authority, Scottish Book Trust found that **30%** were **qualified librarians** – someone who holds a qualification obtained from a CILIP-accredited course or has a level of CILIP Professional Registration such as Certification of Chartership.

Freedom of Information requests submitted to each local authority have revealed that between 2015 and 2021, Scotland's **librarian numbers were cut by at least 32%** – this statistic does not include figures from Angus, Edinburgh or Argyll and Bute, as these local authorities did not provide any information for the requests²⁸.

When asked more specifically about their role, almost half (45%) of responding public librarians identified themselves as 'library assistants' – only 7% of these were also qualified – and barely a quarter (24%) of responding public librarians described their role as 'library manager'. Just 6% identified as 'head librarian'.

Compared to the survey findings outlining how long librarians have been working in the sector – over half (54%) had worked for 10+ years, and a further 18% for 6–10 years – their self-identified **job titles** clearly **do not represent or recognise that experience or seniority**.

A note on librarian salaries: an independent report on Information Management salaries in 2019 noted an average salary of £27,000 p.a. for a library assistant, £32,000 p.a. for a library manager and £53,500 p.a. for a head librarian²⁹.

These figures are dependent on qualifications, experience, location, library size, team structure, chartership and, crucially, local authority (different authorities have different pay scales).

Moreover, there is a significant gender pay gap, with women earning **on average 20% less** than men, though women make up 73% of the workforce³⁰.

Therefore, despite 72% of respondents having senior-level experience, they are overwhelmingly relegated to a role and salary that does not remunerate them for it.

In the survey of public librarians across every local authority:

- 1 in 3 responding librarians reported their **whole service is at risk of reduction or losses**
- 82% – or, 4 in 5 responding librarians – reported a restriction on their funding and resources
- 1 in 3 responding librarians reported loss of dedicated librarians and other library staff

In addition to ongoing cuts faced by the library sector, librarians reported a widespread lack of understanding from their local authorities about the social, long-term impact of their service:

'I think always, always at the back of our mind is that, as your local community who appreciates your library, your main issue is always advocating to the Council and the local authority, to justify your existence all the time.'

Already librarians face a lack of capacity, funding and recognition for their work; having to set aside what little they do have in order to 'justify [their] existence' indicates the extent to which the library service is undervalued.

Funding restrictions enact further pressure on library services to prove their achievements in financial terms. However, as one librarian shared, a cost-based approach fails to capture or quantify the value of libraries:

'Councils like to divide the headcount by the cost of running a library to tell us why they are cutting funding. The social impact of someone using the library, whether to read, broaden their knowledge, apply for jobs, study, and then contribute positively to the local economy/society is not quantifiable. This doesn't suit the easy headcount divided by cost approach. And this doesn't even take into consideration the positive impact on families, literacy, the positive mental health aspect libraries provide.'

This is a key issue cited almost unanimously across surveys and interviews.

Librarians are expected to report on the achievements of their work and service in terms that often fail to evidence their true impact. Moreover, the headcount of a central library in Aberdeen or Edinburgh will naturally be larger than a

small library in the Highlands, or a library that's in decline due to annual budget cuts. A cost-based approach prioritises more populated areas by default and continues to isolate rural areas that are often the most in need of their local library for utilities like bus passes, digital devices or Wi-Fi.

The longer-term impact of these funding restrictions is clearly illustrated in one librarian's anecdotal recounting of their service's **managed decline**:

'It's the [...] financial pressures that make doing my job really difficult. I started a couple of years ago and we were really pushing outreach and engagement. But over the past six to nine months, I think with financial pressure across all the arts, there's been a sharp U-turn on engagement, and we are becoming more of a place to come and put your books, and we're really struggling with getting staff in because we don't have budget. We're not able to do everything that makes the job fun or rewarding and makes the library more of like a hub for the community.

I think that's what's I'm really struggling with on a daily basis where we've been having to close a lot more, things like that. It's really disappointing.'

Closures, opening hours, population and funding

Between 2010 and 2022, according to *The Scotsman*, more than 1 in 8 public libraries in Scotland were forced to close³¹. Funding over the same period was cut by 30%, even though annual visitor numbers increased by over 40%.

In terms of specific numbers of library closures, the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) have verified that 53 public libraries have closed in Scotland between 2014 and 2024³².

No other public source of information is available to tally or monitor the numbers of library closures aside from what high-level statistics are published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). CIPFA have cited that in 2008, 604 libraries were open in Scotland, decreasing to 521 in 2018³³ – however, these figures are unreliable, as they are not comprehensive of the library sector, they do not have a rigorous definition of service points, and they do not offer a specific breakdown of what public libraries are or are not included.

With this caveat, Scottish Book Trust recognises that the figure of 604 libraries in 2008 is the only available data point stretching back that far as a basis for comparison.

Quantitative research undertaken by Scottish Book Trust in summer / autumn 2023 and again summer / autumn 2024 indicates that (taking CIPFA figures as the standard) **the total number of public libraries in Scotland has decreased by 97 between 2008 and 2024** – that is **more than 1 in 8**, correlating with the statistic published by *The Scotsman*.

This means that **16% of public libraries have closed in Scotland** between 2008 and 2024 – see Appendix 1 for a breakdown of further information.

(These figures are not comparable to the above verified stat from SLIC, as the basis for comparison with CIPFA is unavailable.)

What is clear from these multiple sources of data is that there is a need for uniform, accessible and clear tracking of public library service points in Scotland.



There is no comprehensive picture available of Scotland's public library expenditure, staffing, stock and footfall, despite being public data that should be freely accessible.

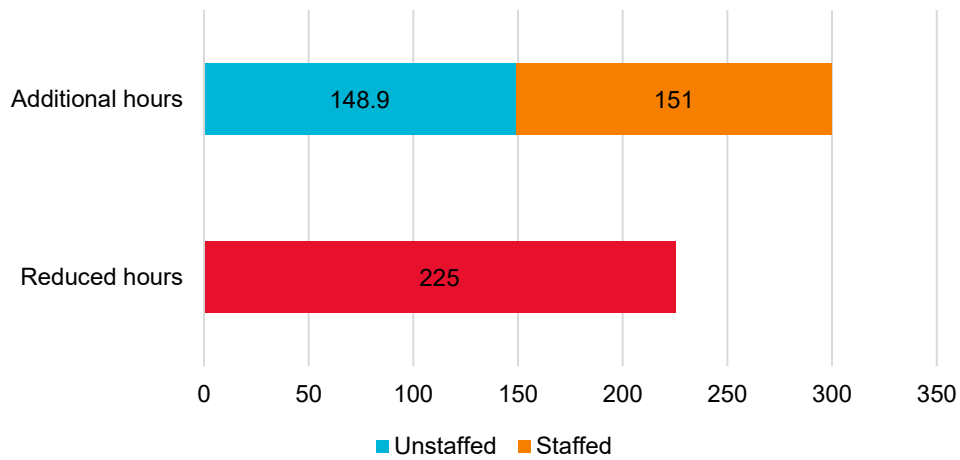
This research project cannot provide analysis regarding Scotland's public library funding per local authority, except by citing ongoing reports from local authorities regarding proposed cuts or restrictions to service.

Further discussion as to why there is a dearth of evidence is included in the section 'public library funding information' in [the full report, available on the Scottish Book Trust website](#).

Local authorities are obliged to advertise their public libraries' opening hours, and as such, the information published on their websites should be a reliable indicator of the most up-to-date and correct reflection of their public library service.

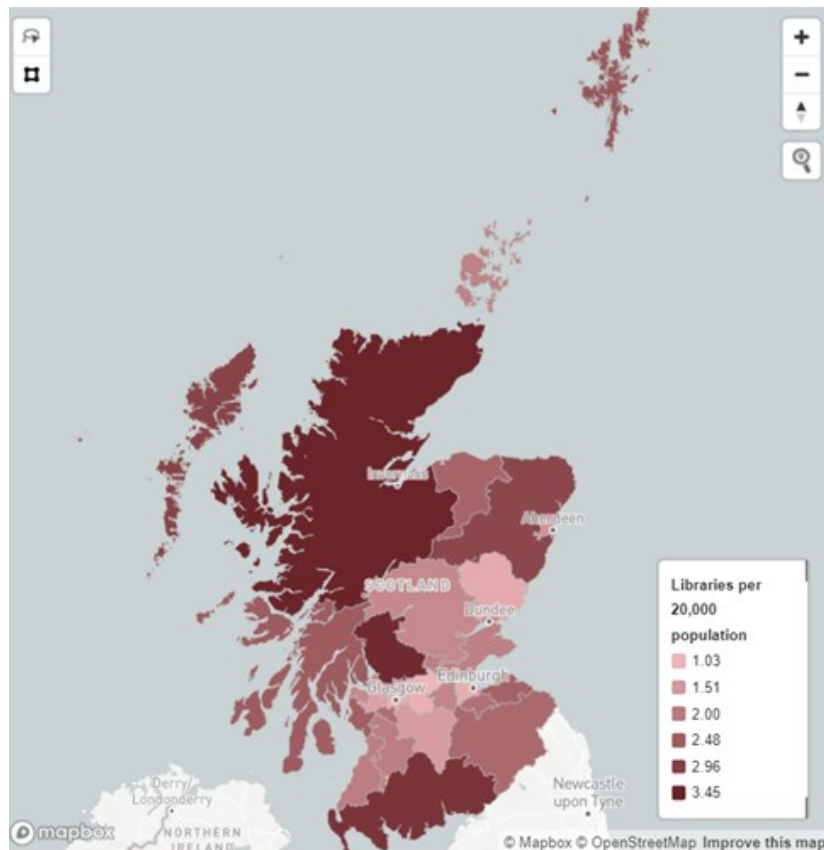
The same quantitative data therefore found a noticeable **decrease in staffed public library opening hours**:

Change in opening hours across Scotland's public libraries 2023/24



Looking at the total reduction and total additional staffed hours together, there was **an overall reduction of just over 76 hours per week** in staffed opening times of Scotland's public libraries between 2023 and 2024. (See Appendix 2 for a breakdown of further information.)

The importance of staffing libraries appropriately cannot be overstated: trained staff are vital to help the general public access information, provide ad hoc digital support, offer reading recommendations tailored to their needs and ensure the space is kept secure, safe and fit for purpose.



The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), as part of their 2021–2025 Public Library Strategy³⁴, launched a Community Planning Insights Tool³⁵ in 2023, which correlates the number of public libraries per 20,000 people in the population, mapped out by local authority.

The above map gives a clear and helpful snapshot of the lived experience of people across Scotland: in both the capital city of Edinburgh (population as of 2022: over 514,000³⁶) and the largest city, Glasgow (over 620,000³⁷), there is effectively one library for every 20,000 people. The same is true for Aberdeen, with its 224,000+ inhabitants³⁸, and just 1.62 library per 20,000 people.

What is hidden in the healthier stats – showing 2+ libraries per 20,000 people in rural areas such as Moray, Argyll and Bute, Aberdeenshire, Shetland, Western Isles, Dumfries and Galloway and Highland – is the digital inequality in many remote areas³⁹, insufficient public transport links⁴⁰, limited opening hours and staffing across the library sector⁴¹, all of which will make access to the library and its provision far more difficult.

Conclusions

'This is what we can do despite no investment. Just think about what we can do with investment.' – Public librarian

The evidence gathered clearly shows that public libraries have a profound, wide-ranging impact across all four themes examined in this research – reading for pleasure, learning opportunities, digital inclusion and active citizenship – and that they are crucial in removing inequity across all intersections of Scottish life.

This report identifies three key messages arising from this research across the public library sector:

1. **97** of Scotland's **public libraries have closed** (a total of 16%) between 2008 and 2024 – that is more than 1 in 8
2. Library staff are prized by their community for going **beyond the call of duty** to help everyone who comes to their library
3. The library is **the last haven left** for anyone vulnerable, disadvantaged or in need

Closures

The total number of public libraries in Scotland has decreased by 16% since 2008 – more than 1 in 8.

This means that **at least 97 public libraries have closed in Scotland** between 2008 and 2024. (See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of further information.)

Despite the fact that public libraries are deemed essential – as safe spaces; as providers of digital utilities; as non-judgemental information centres; as community hubs, this report shows that decades of funding cuts have already taken a toll on both the library service and the communities they serve:

- **1 in 3 librarians** reported that their whole service is **at risk of reduction or losses**
- 82% – or, 4 in 5 librarians – reported a restriction in their funding and resources
- 1 in 3 librarians reported loss of a dedicated librarian and other library staff

Libraries are adapting as best they can to ever-increasing demand among ever-increasing funding cuts – e.g. providing shuttle services to/from the space, facilitating crucial additional learning groups for jobseekers, carers, or people in Sheltered Housing, and offering alternative formats like Large Print, audiobooks, or ebooks – all for free.

One librarian also reported the struggle of articulating and advertising what the library can do:

'I think for a long, long time there's been a huge stereotype that libraries have to be quiet and you just come in and borrow books and then you leave them and that's it. And it's not like that at all anymore. It's a welcoming space. You can spend all day in if you want to. There's so much that we do for babies, for toddlers, for children, for teenagers, every single age possible, there's something there for everyone. I don't think, as much as we try and promote it and as much as we try and use social media to showcase everything that we're doing, it's just not enough.'

Librarians – beyond the call of duty

The survey of public librarians, with responses from every local authority, indicated that only 30% of respondents were qualified librarians. Almost half (45%) were 'library assistants' (7% of whom were qualified), barely a quarter (24%) were 'library manager' and just 6% 'head librarian'.

Compared to the survey findings outlining how long librarians have been working in the sector – over half (54%) had worked for 10+ years, and a further 18% for 6–10

years – their self-identified **job titles** clearly **do not represent or recognise that experience or seniority**.

From both sides of the service, however, there is an overwhelming amount of data indicating the ways that librarians go above and beyond their remit to serve and support their locality. One librarian shared an example of an invisible pastoral aspect of their role as a trusted community worker:

'Another older customer, he lives across the roads. He has no nearby family. [...] He's been having some serious health concerns. He comes in almost every day and we chat to him, we make sure he's OK. I don't know if my boss's boss would have approved, but when he was just out of hospital, couldn't get out of bed, my colleague did his shopping for him [...] So my manager was just like, "yeah, go and get him his milk".'

Through and beyond the lengths that public librarians in Scotland go to in order to promote reading for pleasure, provide learning opportunities, ensure digital access and literacy, reach a diverse audience and cultivate a safe space, they clearly earn and maintain the trust of their communities.

In a nation where public libraries are not simply catalogues of books, public librarians are not simply information managers – they are on the front line of every community, without adequate support, without job security and without recognition, save for from the communities who rely on them.

The last haven left

Libraries are filling their communities' unmet needs in the wake of social cuts, deprivation and digital poverty, particularly for the isolated or immobile aging populus. The evidence from this research is definitive:

- Libraries are key to addressing literacy issues among children and adults, primarily due to their **affordability** in promoting reading for pleasure and their provision of equal access to accurate information.

- Libraries in smaller or more remote communities are often the only place for people to find community and support; shutting these libraries down, particularly when based on incomplete statistics such as footfall numbers, fails to recognise the whole and real impact on those that do use the service.
- 60.59% of responding librarians, 88.48% of responding library users, indicated that libraries were 'quite' or 'very important' in **providing further education / learning opportunities**. Many of those responding librarians noted, 'more could be done'.
- 2 in 3 responding librarians (66%) reported their community faces **digital poverty**. Library users continually referred to their library as a 'lifeline' for digital access.
- **The vast majority** of responding library users **reported their library saves them money 'a lot'** (84.08%).

Perhaps most sobering from these reflections is the example provided by one librarian in a local authority with a large rural population:

'Wi-Fi is available outside the building and we often have people hanging around there when the library is closed. There is a space that is covered and I'm arranging to get a bench put there so at least they have a seat to access the Wi-Fi any time they need, rather than crouching on the concrete.'



Research clearly shows that public libraries operate as anchor institutions⁴² for communities – in other words, public libraries reach diverse audiences, empower

individuals with trusted, accurate information, offer safe spaces, and promote democratically engaged and informed communities^{43,44}.

This report shows that public libraries reach a widely diverse and inclusive group of Scotland's people, including but not limited to:

- Adult learners
- Children and young people
- Disabled people / people living with ill health
- Families
- LGBTQ+ people
- Neurodivergent people
- New parents
- Older people
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing mental ill health
- People experiencing poverty
- People living in rural areas
- People moving to a new community
- People out of work
- People with caring responsibilities

However, the librarians who keep these spaces open, running and relevant in and for these ranges within community have to bridge gaps for which their role has had to expand without sufficient support or resource.

Nowhere else in modern life, whether urban or rural, is there a public space where anyone can enter and remain without the expectation of payment or labour. Nowhere else is there a public space where people can access information, combat digital poverty, learn new skills, socialise with others, express themselves creatively, and seek to self-improve, entirely for free. These institutions are vital for every person in Scotland, and they are endangered.

Recommendations

These recommendations derive from evidence provided to Scottish Book Trust through this research project, *The Value and Impact of Scotland's Public Libraries*, and have been reviewed by key library stakeholders.

1. That **Scottish Government** publishes a clear legal definition of the parameters required to provide an 'adequate' public library service, thereby ensuring a uniform standard of high-quality provision across the nation.
2. That **Scottish Government** empowers local authorities across Scotland with sufficient funding and resource to uphold the standard as aligned with the guidelines and as a minimum.
3. That **local authorities** or their associated leisure trusts appropriately train and support their librarians to deliver a progressive and accessible library service.
4. That **local authorities** or their associated leisure trusts publish annual reports of data that detail their library provision, e.g., expenditure and income, staffing, service points open to the public, book stock and audio visual and electronic stock, annual issues, inter-library loans, requests, enquiries and footfall.
5. That **public libraries** are supported and funded to develop a balanced and qualitative service improvement culture, which embeds consistent data measurement and self-evaluation practices, to align with the requirements of a legally designated 'adequate' service.
6. That more **members of the public** engage with and explore their local library, and that **public libraries** are sufficiently funded to promote and advertise their services in their local communities.

Appendix 1 – Total number of public libraries in Scotland

	2008	2018	2024
Number of public libraries	604	521	507
	(incl. mobile libraries)	(incl. mobile libraries)	(470 + 37 mobile libraries)
Source	CIPFA ⁴⁵	CIPFA ^{46,*}	SBT review & SLIC 2019 report on mobile libraries ⁴⁷

	% reduction	No. of closures
2008 to 2024	16%	97

Between July–Oct 2023 and Oct 2024:	
Library closures	8
New libraries	5
Reduction in number of libraries	3

* A caveat is necessary for citing statistics from CIPFA: there is no breakdown available of how they calculate their totals, which library services they count or discount and whether or not their numbers are comprehensive. Despite this unreliability, they are the only available source of historic statistics. To best mitigate any inaccuracies, key sector stakeholders have been consulted and have advised on this analysis to ensure it is as robust as possible.

(not including mobile libraries)	
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Local Authority	Total libraries (not including mobile libraries)		Closed / opened	Notes
	As of Oct 2023	As of Oct 2024		
Aberdeen City	11	11		
Aberdeenshire	35	33	2	2 closures
Angus	7	7		
Argyll and Bute	8	10	-2	2 new libraries
Clackmannanshire	5	5		
Comhairle nan Eilean-Siar	4	4		
Dumfries and Galloway	24	24		
Dundee	14	14		
East Ayrshire	11	9	2	2 closures
East Dunbartonshire	8	7	1	1 closure
East Lothian	12	13	-1	1 new library
East Renfrewshire	10	10		
Edinburgh City	27	26	1	1 closure
Falkirk	8	8		
Fife	35	35		

Glasgow City	32	31	1	1 closure
Highland	40	40		
Inverclyde	7	7		
Midlothian	9	9		
Moray	11	11		
North Ayrshire	15	15		
North Lanarkshire	18	19	-1	1 new library
Orkney	2	2		
Perth and Kinross	12	13	-1	1 new library
Renfrewshire	12	12		
Scottish Borders	13	13		
Shetland	4	4		
South Ayrshire	11	11		
South Lanarkshire	23	23		
Stirling	16	16	1	1 library closed (replaced with mobile library)
West Dunbartonshire	8	8		
West Lothian	15	15		
Temporarily closed/under construction	5	5		
TOTAL	472	470	3	

Appendix 2 – Change in opening times of Scotland's public libraries, between Oct 2023 and Oct 2024

No. of libraries with additional hours	22
No. of libraries with reduced hours	40

Total additional hours	299.91667	299 hrs 55 mins
Additional staffed hours	148.91667	148 hrs 55 mins
Additional unstaffed hours	151	151 hrs

Total reduced hours	225.00	225 hrs
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Temporary closures	5
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	Additional staffed hours	Additional unstaffed hours	No. of libraries with additional hours	Reduced hours	No. of libraries with reduced hours	Temp closure due to RAAC	Temp closures due to refurb
Aberdeen City	18		3				
Aberdeenshire	3.75	0.5	2	9	5		
Angus							
Argyll and Bute	26.5	77	3				
Clackmannanshire				0.5	1		

Comhairle nan Eilean-Siar	5		1	1	1		
Dumfries and Galloway	21		1	6	2		
Dundee							
East Ayrshire	3.167	73.5	4	0.33	1		
East Dunbartonshire	19		2			1	
East Lothian	6		1	48	8		
East Renfrewshire				20	4		
Edinburgh City	10		1			1	1
Falkirk				48	8		
Fife	7.5		3	14	3		
Glasgow City						1	1
Highland				27	3		
Inverclyde							
Midlothian							
Moray				3	1		
North Ayrshire							
North Lanarkshire							
Orkney							
Perth and Kinross							
Renfrewshire							
Scottish Borders	28		2				
Shetland				33.167	1		

South Ayrshire							
South Lanarkshire				12	2		
Stirling							
West Dunbartonshire				3	1		
West Lothian	1		1				
Total	148.917	151	24	224.99 7	41	3	2
<div> <div>148hrs 55mins</div> <div>225hrs</div> </div>							

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