

Young people and libraries – Have your say survey and focus group findings

Library Services and the needs of 11–18-year-olds in Bath and North East Somerset, April – July 2022

What did we do?

We asked young people aged 11-18 to take an online survey about our library services and held focus groups at two secondary schools to gather more in-depth findings.

What was it for?

We wanted to know what young people think about our libraries, what they know about our digital library and other services, and what might encourage them to visit. Young people have been greatly affected by the last two years of restrictions and the information gathered will help inform our offer to young people, keeping **all** our customers at the heart of everything we do.

Who took part?

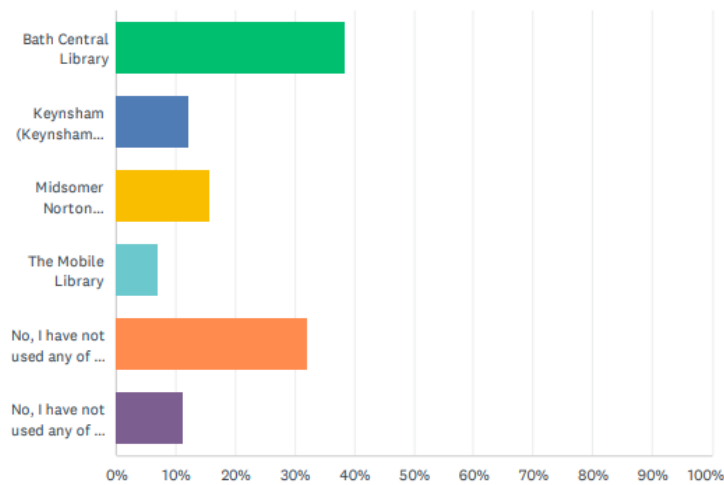
This survey was available on our website and was sent out to schools and colleges, promoted in libraries and on our social media. **141** young people completed the survey, and **59** young people took part in our focus groups- thank you!

We are very grateful to the staff and pupils of Somervale School and Norton Hill School for allowing us to visit and hold focus groups.

Visiting our libraries and using our services

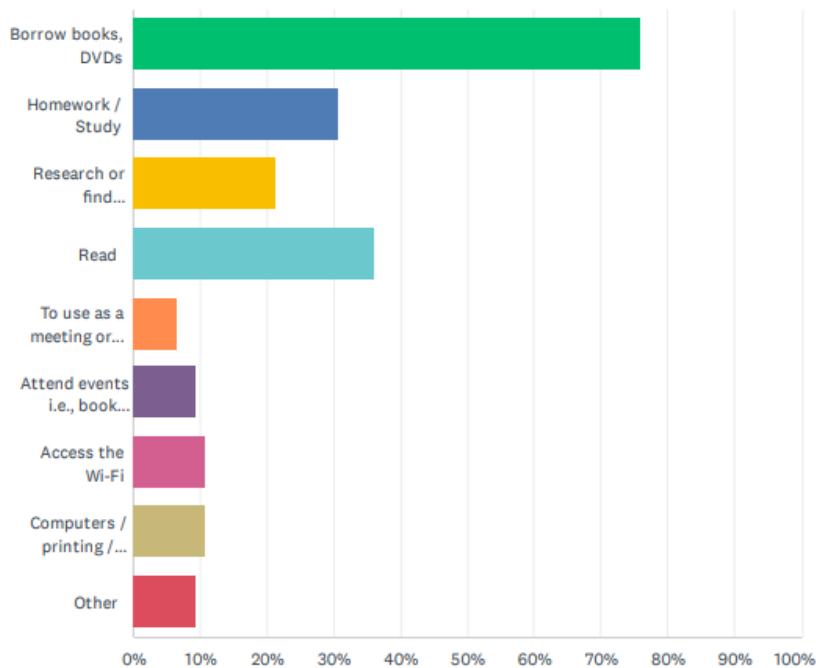
This survey and focus groups have given us insight into how young people are using our services coming out of Covid 19. **One third** of survey participants told us they had not visited a library in the last 12 months.

Have you visited any of these libraries or the mobile library in the last 12 months? Select all that apply



Of those who told us why they visited, **76%** borrowed a book or DVD, **33%** read and **31%** did homework or studied.

The survey shows that whilst most students use their school library to study in, more are using public libraries to borrow books and DVDs, perhaps because of the wider range and access to books via Libraries West.



Our focus groups have shown that where schools have well-used libraries with programmes in place to support the students, young people are comfortable studying in and enjoy using these spaces. Some told us they would feel happy to visit their school library alone or with friends but worry about the stigma of visiting a public library.

When asked what might put them off using libraries, **59%** of comments about environmental factors were about noise and **22%** about crowded spaces. Knowing this will allow us to think carefully about how we promote these spaces to young people, so they feel comfortable using them.

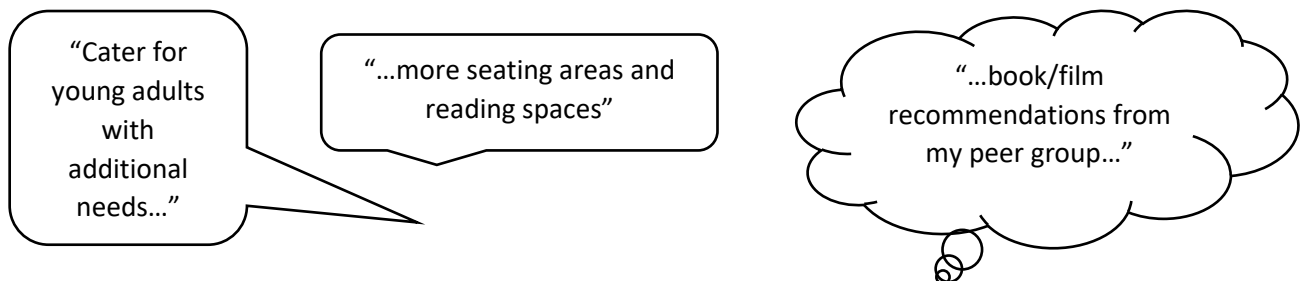
Young people told us they were worried about things including the pressure to get books back on time, fines and membership that might be too expensive. For more information about joining the library, our free services, renewal and borrowing please visit our [website](#).

What about our digital services?

A third of survey respondents said that they had used them and **57%** said they hadn't used them before, but they might in the future. In focus groups, many participants did not know about [Borrow Box](#) and [Libby](#) but were interested to hear about these free resources which offer comics, newspapers and other e-resources as well as audio books.

What do young people want?

When asked what they would like, the survey feedback included more online promotion, card payment for printing etc and more seating areas and reading spaces.



In focus groups, we were given recommendations about stock and how we can better promote what we have, to encourage wider use. We will review these within our stock team.

Comfortable, inclusive, and welcoming spaces and surroundings are important to many young people we spoke to. We did some myth busting in the schools around silence in the libraries, expectations around behaviour and learned some interesting insights about noise levels. Opinions about noise were varied, as some said libraries were too quiet; putting them off feeling comfortable visiting with friends or family, including younger siblings, whilst others said that libraries can be too noisy.

Despite this, many young people we spoke with told us that libraries are quiet and peaceful spaces - "books help you wind down".

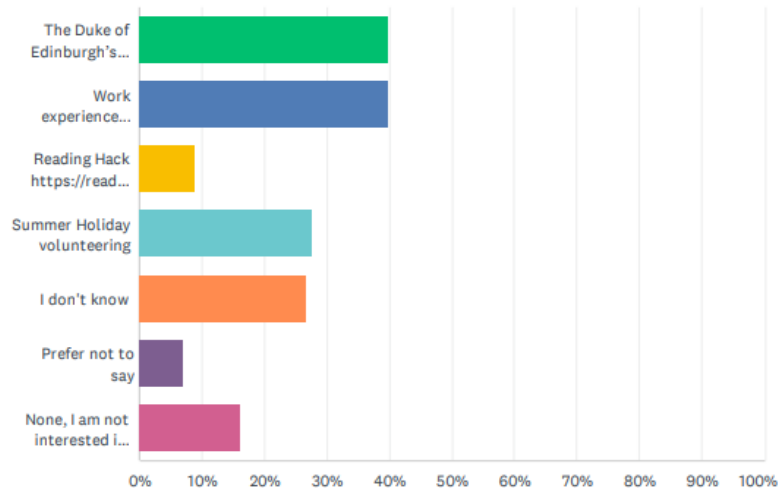
If we offered volunteering opportunities, which of the following would you be interested in? Please select all that apply

What about volunteering opportunities?

40% of respondents showed interest in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and work experience opportunities

27% were interested in summer holiday volunteering

With the introduction of a new [volunteer portal](#) it is now much easier to sign up or express an interest in volunteering.



What would encourage young people into libraries?

Book or author events were most popular when surveyed, at **48%** but cultural and creative events like musical events, arts workshops and digital activities were also popular.

Our focus group respondents told what would encourage them to use libraries including fun displays, recommendations for books and having comfortable areas to sit and read, whilst charging a device or eating and drinking.

Why don't some young people visit our public libraries?

The young people that took the survey are relevantly well engaged with our services with only **one third** of respondents not having visited a library in the last year.

51% of young people who aren't interested in using our services told us they read their own or borrow books instead. In focus groups, time and convenience were common themes and several participants told us they did not like the idea of borrowing a used book which might be dirty or unhygienic. The impact of Covid 19 may be an influence here and in these cases, we were able to suggest using our free, digital services instead.

In focus groups, some young people told us they see public libraries as spaces for younger children and older people. We want our spaces to feel welcoming to all ages and so understanding what would make them more comfortable has been valuable.

Next Steps

All the information young people have given us, along with findings from focus groups, will be an important part of the decisions we make over the next year or two. In the short term they'll feed into:

- **Bath Central Library refurbishment** – young people's comments and suggestions will be included in this project, and there'll be more opportunities for you to make suggestions in the coming months.
- **Activities & Events** – we're continuing to increase the number of activities and events we offer, and your comments and suggestions will help us focus on the things you most want to do.
- **Information & Promotion** – we'll work to make sure young people; education settings and parents know what we're doing and how to join in.
- **Developing our Spaces** after lockdown – we've already made a lot of changes to make our spaces more welcoming again after the restrictions of the last two years. The information from this survey and focus groups will help us understand what you want from our spaces as we continue to develop them.
- **Book stock** – all the stock related findings of this work will be shared with our stock team, who work to ensure that our collections are working for our residents. We take book suggestions from our users, and these do inform what we purchase and which library it is available in.