

International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres

United Kingdom and Ireland Branch
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Blueprint for Excellence : IAML(UK & Iri) response

IAML(UK & Iri) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this timely document. We believe that it is vital to revisit the purpose and values of the public library service. In our own field in particular, specialist collections and services are at risk for a variety of reasons and only a nationally supported initiative can deliver a unified and respected service throughout the country. Our comments follow the headings contained in the short questionnaire and show how music services contribute and add value to public libraries.

Proposition one. The main purpose of the public library.

- **Skills and joy of reading.** This requires provision of various formats, including audio books. It may give the impression that librarians are teaching reading; we encourage literacy but are more likely to work with partners for teaching. The service also promotes other skills, including the fields of music and IT. Music teaching is supported through provision of tutors (both scores & lists of teachers), support for music teachers, and special initiatives such as back-up for *Play it Again*.
- **Knowledge in all forms, including print, audio, visual & digital media.** This should also specify leisure & culture which, of course, includes music. Music enriches lives and statistics show that people listen to music more than they read. Specialist collections and staff are an asset to the library, rather than the burden which some library managers perceive.
- **Information, learning, knowledge for life.** This should be expanded to allow for pure enjoyment. Music is an engagement activity for all ages, particularly younger, hard to reach groups and, given the right resources and staffing, can attract non-users. Adequate choice should be provided for music users as it is for lovers of fiction.
- **Involvement in social, learning, creative life of the community.** This should include the business life of the community. Music is often an asset to the local economy, as well as nationally. It is essential that staff have the expertise to deliver services.
- **Library should be at the heart of the community, engaging with local people, offering informed guidance, supporting their needs, interests and aspirations.** Libraries provide community spaces for activities including music. They are socially inclusive, neutral, safe spaces, which should provide access to dedicated staff in specialist areas to meet varying needs. Music services support community activity, for example in the provision of performance sets which benefit not only the players and singers but the many people who make up the audiences.

For others: library users need

- Learning spaces for study & reference; social & meeting spaces
- Leisure & entertainment as well as educational material
- Relevant opening hours
- To have access to a broad range of stock, easily found, and providing resources not easily found elsewhere in a market-driven society
- A constant supply of new items in particular subject areas; users have broad expectations which must be reflected in stock & services
- Stock and services which are more about enriching lives than making money
- Consistent services across the country: people travel to find good service. Provision of performance material, for example, is very patchy
- Trained, diverse & experienced staff who can understand what's needed

Proposition two. The key roles of the public library

Three main roles are set out for the public library:

- **Community place for all the community to read, learn, discover. Provision of resources & staff support.**

This contains the heart of what people need from their library. As community spaces, libraries are probably undervalued as mini-venues, partly because of the stereotype as dry, studious places. They need to provide a broad range of stock, with music as part of the specified core service. In order to attract non-users we must publicise the concept of libraries providing material they cannot get elsewhere (e.g. broad range of music materials; music and the community form a natural partnership). Again, reading and listening for pure enjoyment should not be under-valued. Libraries cannot stand on their own: inter-library loans and other co-operative arrangements are vital in providing access to whatever people need. User education should also be addressed more thoroughly than at present, to help people find what they need but also to guide them to other fields of interest. Users should not be regarded as active only when they borrow something: satisfaction is not all about issues; just being in the library using the space and resources is valuable.

- **Development agency – developing skills & knowledge with partner agencies.**

This works on several levels: regional, national, cross-sectoral. Music libraries across the UK work with each other daily to provide materials; they also work with education authorities and national and local music organisations. Library staff should be alert to spotting opportunities in the area. Newer opportunities now arise with commercial providers such as online music and reference companies, which are very interested in working with libraries. A national strategy for this will help to equalise services across the country. There is a need to break down administrative and technical barriers to allow this to happen.

- **The digital Library – 24/7. Interactive access to trusted resources with expert help.**

This is widely accepted as the future of libraries, though education of decision-makers in local councils should make the point that not everything can be solved by using Google and Amazon. Music is a fundamental part of the digital library, with access to streaming/download sites as well as physical stock. The concept of an online music enquiry service would be greatly welcome, but staffing may well be an issue as fewer specialists are in post.

For others: library users

- Services should be provided both for individuals and groups. Families and children are always quoted as being of paramount importance; it should not be forgotten, however, that more people than ever before live alone, either through choice or circumstances, and they should not be excluded from initiatives for improvement.
- A digital service is important, but it should not replace more traditional roles which are still relevant. There have been several examples of music libraries being turned into IT centres, resulting in a diminution of stock and service.
- Users are less worried about the structure of authorities and library services and are more interested in the actual service & having access to trained staff. Stability is affected by continual restructuring and loss of experienced staff. Interlending is affected through difficulties in dealing with requests for music because some authorities have 'lost' their music specialists and rely on hard-pressed inter-library loans staff. Staff support should encourage expertise, which makes librarians feel more confident and encourages interaction with users. Another authority reports that "the librarians are non-music-specialists and they rely on the public for music knowledge".

Proposition three: possible improvements.

A recent seminar for public music library staff included discussion of the following lists. The agreed 5 priorities are highlighted and comments added where relevant.

1. **Funding - for effective, responsive services**
This really goes without saying, but funding must be sustainable: day-to-day not project-based. Lack of funding is the most frequently expressed reason for dispensing with specialist staff and resources.
2. **The library working together with other services**
Working with other agencies is important, provided they are the right ones. Too often libraries are made part of other departments which are either not relevant, or are so large that services are endangered. Ways in which music can contribute to co-operation are stated above.
3. **Improved buildings and access with the right services**
4. **What users want - to meet demand and need**
Users do not always know what they need, so it is important to have broad stock & expert guidance.
5. **Online catalogues, services and staff help**
6. **Trained staff able to deliver the services you need**
This is absolutely crucial; staff should be 'enabled and empowered': trained, experienced and knowledgeable, but also from diverse backgrounds and with different interests.
7. **Modern approaches to service delivery for changing needs**
New ways are not necessarily better, for example restructuring away from specialisms.
8. **Celebrating successful service – evidence to bring new users, support and funding**
This is important, but needs to result in actual improvement rather than short-lived publicity. Statistical collection needs addressing: see final section.

Proposition five. *Blueprint for Excellence* has a list of what will make the service “excellent”. Which 5 are most important?

1. **Inviting services that meet need both in the community and online.**
Again, this should go without saying.
2. **Increase in library use across all services.**
We need well thought-out indicators for ‘use’ – not just issues.
3. **A wide agreement on the library’s role and core service.**
Danish libraries are required by law to provide music materials in all library services, free at the point of service. Adoption of this requirement would transform music services across the UK.
4. **Books, other materials and media and digital resources of quality and range for all users.**

To achieve improvements, licensing needs to be regularised (e.g. BPI/CILIP agreement for sound recordings). Stock should be selected and maintained by knowledgeable staff. It should be accepted that not all stock can be dealt with in the same way as books; evidence has shown that replacement targets have worked against material which has more long-term use such as standard piano scores.
5. **Attractive well located libraries that are a source of community pride.**
6. **Staff able to make the most of libraries to enrich people’s lives and support communities**
‘Enabled and competent’ staff are vital ingredients. Unfortunately, many specialist staff (and not just in music) are often made to feel that their knowledge is surplus to requirements. Their expertise is wasted by being forced into other areas and they are therefore de-motivated. This does nothing to enrich users’ experience of libraries.
7. **Increased efficiency and ongoing improvement.**
This is a constant requirement from central and local government. Unfortunately it is all too often a mask for enforced cuts in funding; in general, council staff do the very best they can with the resources available.
8. **The libraries as part of local authority plans (LAAs) for children and young people, safe communities, older people, and the economy.**
Libraries do their best to fit in with local plans. It can lead to a higher profile within the council, but libraries are too often side-lined and their contribution ignored, especially by larger departments such as education.
9. **Contributing to excellent local authority performance and citizen satisfaction.**
10. **Recognition of the value of libraries by national, regional and local policy makers**
Staff locally do their best to improve recognition of libraries’ value. More, however, needs to be done nationally with the help of MLA and CILIP. Time and again we discover that national initiatives, particularly in music (e.g. the Music Manifesto), have no mention of the contribution which libraries can make. IAML does what it can once news is received, but intervention at an early stage by those ‘in the know’ could make all the difference.

What else would you like from your library services?

The following points require discussion and action at a high level to ensure adoption nationally.

- Ensure music provision in all relevant formats is legally defined as part of the core service to be provided by all library authorities.
- Move away from music and AV being purely income generation – they should be provided because they are the best way of giving access to culture. It is nonsensical to charge for, say, a Beethoven or Hendrix recording and not for Shakespeare or a Dan Brown book. Other income streams/ provision should be made available on a sustainable basis to ensure the continuation of provision.
- Licensing needs to be regularised (e.g. BPI/CILIP agreement) to widen the scope of collections. We recommend that MLA should negotiate national rates for online music providers (similar to reference works). Action should also be taken to ensure that access to such resources is not prevented by local authority firewalls and protocols.
- Selection & stock maintenance should not be tied to assumptions relating to standard book provision.
- Incorporate music and AV as essential reporting element in statistics and standards, CIPFA surveys etc. Reporting at present is patchy. CIPFA should also return to the practice of counting items within performance sets collections as individual loans.
- We propose the development of national music library surveys, both for service provision (e.g. Co-South/MLA SE survey of performance sets), and to reflect user satisfaction and views on a larger scale.
- In an ideal world, libraries should move away from continual restructuring; we need stability & encouragement to retain specialist staff and to provide consistent services. Surely each authority should have at least one specialist librarian for the major subjects (including music) as a permanent member of staff.
- If public library standards are no longer to be numerically based centrally, but more locally determined, how can consistent services and quality be assessed and enforced across the country? Libraries should respond to local agendas but also need to live up to national standards: if one can rely on Sainsbury's, for example, to deliver an expected level of service throughout the country, why not libraries?

We have naturally concentrated on the need for and impact of music services. We believe, however, that music services should be an integral part of libraries and that staff should work together for overall improvement. Music services are not elitist; on the contrary, they are inclusive and forward-looking. We trust that Blueprint for Excellence will ensure consistent, fair treatment for all specialisms within library services in the future. IAML(UK & Irl) will be pleased to participate in any relevant discussions taking the Blueprint forward.

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