

FULFILLING THEIR POTENTIAL

A National Development Programme for Young People's Library Services

SUMMARY

Prepared by The Reading Agency
as Part of the Framework for the Future Action Plan
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Framework for the Future is the government's new strategy on libraries. It challenges library services to develop national programmes, locally delivered, which will create universally available and distinctive library services.

Framework must be a turning point. It offers library services an important opportunity to review and redefine their relationship with key target groups. A report called *Fulfilling Their Potential* focuses on services to young people aged 11-19 and is part of the action plan for Framework for the Future. It is structured around three main themes:

- The needs of young people aged 11-19
- The government's policy ambitions and the participation of young people in achieving them
- The strengths of library services in responding to these challenges.

The report and an accompanying Evidence File brings together a substantial policy audit, good practice case studies, consultation, research and forecasts of future trends. The evidence outlined shows why young people need to be a national priority for libraries and why they deserve equal access to the best libraries can do for them. The policy context describes the unique services libraries can offer. The consultation shows how libraries can make a real difference to young people.

The report:

- Examines the experiences of young people aged 11-19 and their needs
- Outlines their current social and educational context and predicts future trends
- Show how libraries can deliver against government policies for young people
- Examines the strengths and weaknesses of library services to young people
- Outlines the challenges for the future and makes strong proposals for the way forward

It comes to the conclusion that libraries have a distinctive role to play in improving the quality of life of all young people, with a particularly important role in relation to young people at risk. It identifies factors which have inhibited libraries' potential to address issues about young people's life chances but goes on to show how they can deliver on the government's agenda for improving the areas of young people's lives outlined in *Every Child Matters*

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Economic well-being

Fulfilling Their Potential outlines how libraries' work with young people can play a key role in joined-up local authority work to deliver on the Shared Priorities agreed by national and local government. It highlights the increasingly important participation agenda and challenges libraries to play a much greater role in involving young people in designing policies and services.

Good practice case studies are cited which show that many libraries already offer young people a powerful mix of learning, social and creative experiences. If this can be achieved in some authorities, the ambition of all library services should be to achieve the same.

The report aims to make systemic changes which will radically improve young people's experience of library services. It recommends new directions and defines minimum national offers from libraries to young people. These are challenging, but can be achieved progressively. It encourages libraries to be more responsive to young people's needs in designing services and more dynamic in delivering and marketing them.

The national offer to young people

A new co-ordinated approach is outlined to developing services within a quality framework which would equalize access and extend libraries' support for 11-19 year olds. The report proposes that a national programme, locally delivered, be developed which would offer young people access, wherever they live, to:

- The library as *the space* in the community for young people
- Inspiring, relevant reading including creative reading activities
- The chance to get involved and shape the library service
- The library as the place to participate in the wider community and in democracy
- The library as the independent place for information and study support

Each of these offers are illustrated with case studies to show that some library services are already working with young people to deliver these services.

A national development plan is outlined which involves a mixture of nationally led work with the creation of tools and support mechanisms to help local authorities make the offer a reality for any young person, wherever they live.

The report includes initial sample work on a progression framework outlining three levels of the offer to young people, with the minimum being the outcome all libraries would strive to achieve – the national offer. The aim is to achieve a baseline provision which ensures all young people have access to the same “offer” and to raise standards by supporting libraries in aiming higher once the minimum has been achieved.

The report is accompanied by an Evidence File containing a detailed policy audit and summaries of consultation sessions with young people, policy makers and library staff.

Recommendations for implementation at a local level

Library services should:

- Adopt the following research and planning methodology: complete a community profile of 11-19 year olds, working with the Youth Service or Connexions. Map that against library services provided; identify gaps in provision; consult with young people; create development plan to address needs and gaps; establish a young people's panel to oversee the process.
- Create opportunities for the involvement of as many young people as possible in planning their library services, including stock purchase, library planning and design
- Ensure that methods of collecting statistics about library usage allow this age group to be identified, so that a baseline assessment can be made and progress monitored
- Ensure that library staff have the relevant skills to respond positively to the needs of young people by initiating staff training and development, drawing on *Their Reading Futures*, the national workforce development programme for libraries' work with young people.
- Begin to build partnerships with other services and organisations, such as the Youth Service, Connexions and Youth Offending Teams, in order to harness the power of joint working to support young people, especially the vulnerable and hard to reach groups.
- Review opening hours to ensure that existing resources are being deployed effectively, in terms of the needs of young people.
- Examine the layout and design of libraries to ensure that they meet the needs of young people and become an attractive and compelling space to which young people will be drawn.
- Review how library services are marketed to this sector of the population and refocus marketing activity.

Recommendations for implementation at a national level

- The Quality Framework should, after further development and consultation, be adopted as the methodology for achieving the national offer for young people outlined by the strategy group. All library services should be supported in reaching the minimum level of service provision over the next three years, and to progress to higher levels as comprehensively as possible. This would constitute a 3 year plan of action, including pilot projects, roll out and evaluation.
- The strategy group should progress through the National Development Plan outlined. This could include the production of a quality framework linked to the Library Standards and an updated national resource bank on policy for the profession. Work would be done on collecting more meaningful data and on developing an advocacy campaign with policy makers. Further consultation would be done with young people and partners and tools identified and developed to help library services. Fundraising would be done for a young people's support network (following the model of the Early Years Network) and further avenues for training, research and marketing pursued.

Some Big Ambitions

Finally, the strategy group working on Fulfilling Their Potential feels that the potential for libraries to play a very significant role in improving young people's life chances has been curtailed by low expectations and lack of insight and investment by government and by library services themselves. It recommends that there should be an ambitious advocacy campaign, aiming to reach the policy makers who have a very limited view of libraries potential, if they have a view at all. The aim would be to seek further investment to create:

- A national staff training programme to bring library staff together with youth workers and Connexions staff, linked to the generic skills envisioned by *Every Child Matters* and *Their Reading Futures* to encourage truly integrated working
- A national on-line library website/area of the People's Network for young people. A national reading recommendations resource, created by combining the work of young people's stock teams in every authority, could be part of this
- Pilot libraries which would experiment with leading edge innovative services to the most vulnerable groups of young people
- A national makeover programme, led by young people, for library spaces for young people
- Research into how libraries can fulfil a local democratic role in supporting young people's community involvement and sense of place – through the use of existing resources, access to IT, photocopiers, meeting rooms etc.

Full copies of the report and the evidence file can be found at www.readingagency.org.uk

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