

# **Public Library User Survey 2002**

*A Summary Report*

November 2002



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## Conclusions

This first national survey of public library users was co-ordinated by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna to help assess the impact of changes and to provide information for further development. The key findings from the survey are as follows:

- There is a high level of satisfaction with the *knowledge, expertise and helpfulness* of library staff. Library staff also receive a high level of satisfaction for their services in relation to Internet facilities (*assistance and knowledge*) and from assisting visitors with their search for items of interest.
- Just over **3%** of all respondents were first time visitors and **74%** of respondents visited the library at least once every two weeks.
- Some **91%** of all respondents were registered users of the library and a quarter of all library visitors stated that they regularly visited another library. Of those that visited another library, **15%** stated that they visited another library in work, **28%** at college, **16%** at school and **51%** elsewhere.
- For purpose of visit, **71%** of all respondents visited the library to borrow/return or renew book(s) and females were marginally more likely to perform this activity (61% of males and 76% of females).
- Of all visitors to the library, **64%** borrowed at least one item (i.e. book(s), cassette(s), CDs, video(s) etc.) and of those that borrowed at least one item, over half of those borrowed three or more items.

- Approximately **19%** of respondents came into the library to borrow a specific book (or books) and **57%** of these found the book(s) they were looking for. Approximately **66%** of respondents came into the library in order to borrow any book (i.e. did not have any particular book in mind) and **83%** of respondents found a book to borrow.
- Approximately **40%** of respondents came into the library to *find something out* and they were fully successful in **75%** of cases and partially successful in **15%** of cases.
- Satisfaction with *opening hours* and the *range of books* was relatively poor. Students and Self-Employed respondents were particularly dissatisfied with the opening hours.
- Over **30%** of library visitors use the Internet facilities and the main reasons were for Study/Research (**66%**) and email (**65%**). Of those that use the Internet, **60%** stated that they used the facilities at least once a fortnight and males were more frequent users of the Internet facilities (**56%** of Females and **66%** of Males).
- Almost **10%** of all users borrowed / returned a book **and** used the Internet / computer facilities. **14%** of those who came to borrow or return a book also used the Internet / computer facilities
- In general, there is an under-representation of younger persons and an over-representation of older persons within the library user profile. An under-representation of those aged 75 and over raises issues of accessibility and possibilities for outreach services.
- Males account for **34%** of all respondents. The proportion of males is **30%** for the 25-44 age group (50% for national CSO estimates) and **43%** for the *Over 65* age group (43% for the CSO estimates).
- Approximately **39%** of all respondents live within a one-mile and **78%** within a five-mile radius of the library.

## **Section 1: Introduction and Background**

In the past few years, public library services have undergone major changes. A higher level of funding has led to better library buildings and a wider range of books, CDs, and other materials being made available to the public. In addition, the introduction of public access Internet terminals in nearly all branch libraries across the country has made the Internet more widely available.

This first national survey of public library users was co-ordinated by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, with funding from the Department of the Environment and Local Government to help assess the impact of these changes and to provide information for further development.

Phase one of the survey was to count visitors to all public library service points over a one-week period. The results were used to form a representative view of the population of library visitors throughout Ireland.

The second phase was to issue questionnaires for library users to complete at the end of their visit. The questionnaires were distributed in proportion to the total number of visitor and a separate sheet was also provided for individuals' comments. Local library staff carried out the visitor count and distributed the questionnaires. Questionnaires and publicity material were made available in both Irish and English.

In all, 28 of the 32 authorities throughout Ireland participated in the survey and a response rate in excess 75% was achieved by 25 of the 28 authorities. The four authorities that did not participate were from urban and rural areas and the overall results were considered to be representative of the general population of library visitors. The data were entered and analysed by IPF and weighted to take account of the visitor numbers at each authority. Insight Statistical Consulting subsequently presented the overall results.

## Aim and Objectives

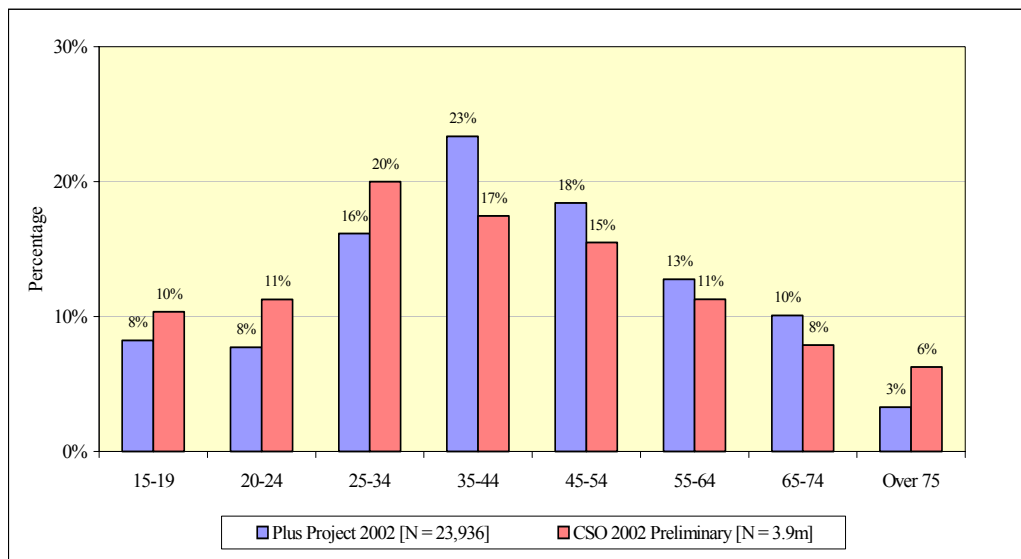
The purpose of the survey was to assess usage levels of the various services offered by public libraries, to ascertain levels of satisfaction with the services, and to collect demographic data relating to users. Each participating authority has received a report based on the responses from within their own area, which can be used to inform managers and prompt future developments.

## Profile of Respondent

The visitor count shows an annual projection of 12.3 million visits to the 331 public libraries of which 8.7 million were made by adults, and 3.6 million by children

The age profile of the respondents in comparison with the latest census figures from the Central Statistics Office 2002 (Preliminary Figures) is shown in Figure 1.1:

**Figure 1.1: Visitor age profile in comparison with national profile**

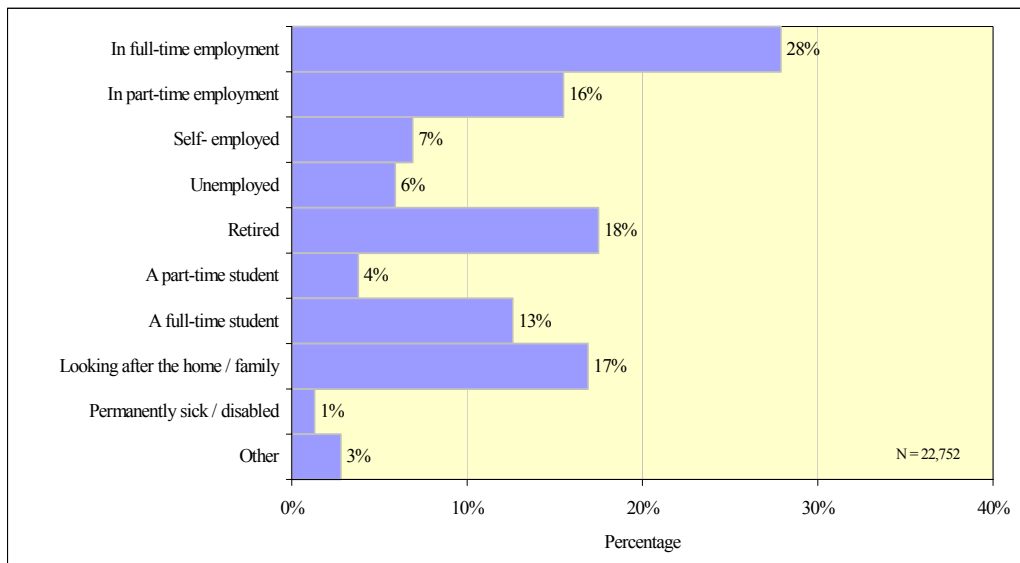


From Figure 1.1, when compared with the national age profile, there is a lower proportion of library users in the younger age groups and a higher proportion of library users in the middle/older age groups. There is an under-representation of library user in the *Over 75* age group.

In terms of gender, males account for 34% of all respondents. The proportion of males is 30% for the *25-44* age group (50% for national CSO estimates) and 43% for the *Over 65* age group (43% for the CSO estimates).

A profile of the employment status of respondents is shown in Figure 1.2:

**Figure 1.2: Employment status of respondents**



From Figure 1.2, the majority of respondents are either in *full/part-time employment* (44%), *retired* (18%), *studying* (17%) or *looking after the home* (17%).

There were a number of other questions in the survey relating to the profile of the respondents and the answers to these are summarised as follows:

- Approximately 3% of respondents were *first-time visitors* to the library and over 70% of respondents visit the library at least once every two weeks.
- Approximately 39% of respondents live within one mile of their visited library and 78% lived within a five-mile radius of the library.
- 91% of respondents were registered users of the library visited and a quarter of all respondents stated that they regularly visited another library. Of those that visited another library, 15% visited a library at work, 28% at college, 16% at school and 51% elsewhere.

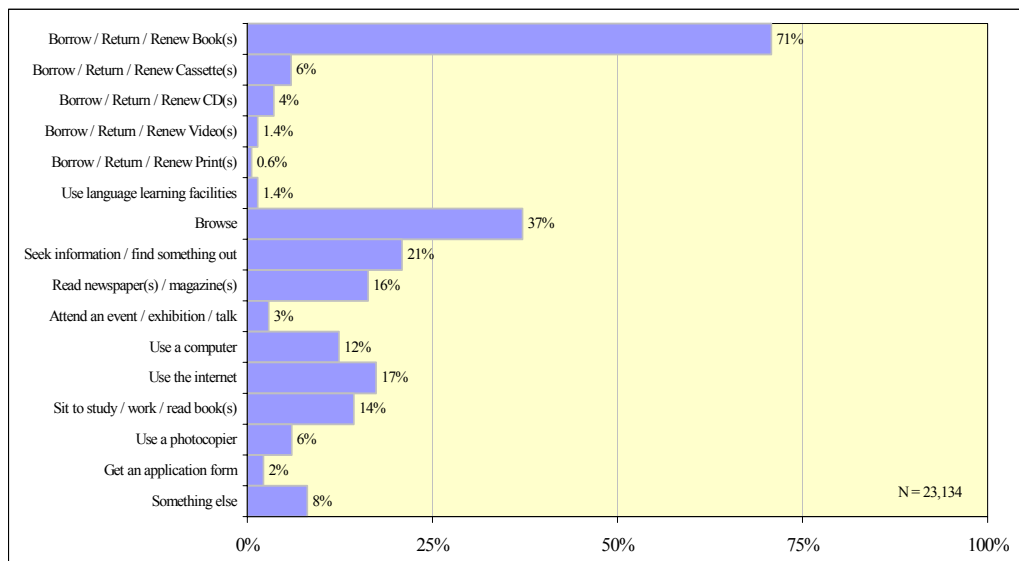
## Section 2: Overall Results

This section of the report summarises the results from the 2002 Public Library User Survey and each sub-section follows the order in which the questions were asked in the questionnaire.

### Purpose of Visit

The respondents were asked about what they did on their visit to the library. Figure 2.1 shows the percentage of respondents that answered a variety of reasons.

**Figure 2.1: What did you do on your visit to the library today?**



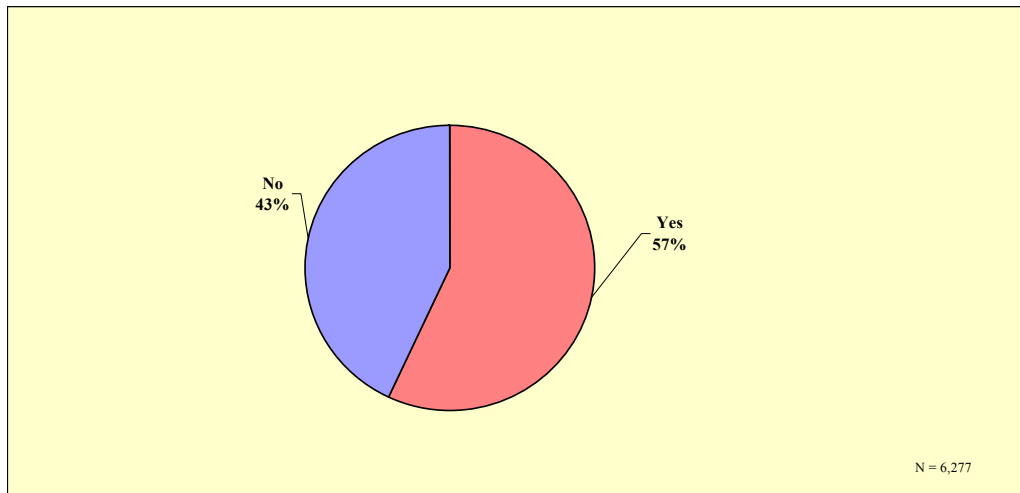
From Figure 2.1, 71% of respondents visited the library to *borrow/return or renew book(s)* (76% of females and 61% of males) and 37% of respondents visited the library to *Browse* (37% of females and 39% of males).

## Borrowed and Found

Respondents were asked about how many items were taken away from the library and approximately 64% of respondents took away at least one item (i.e. books, cassettes, CDs, videos, DVD's, etc.). Of the visitors that took away at least one item, 19% took away one item only, 27% took away exactly two items, 24% took away exactly three items, 14% took away exactly four items, and the remaining 16% took away five or more items.

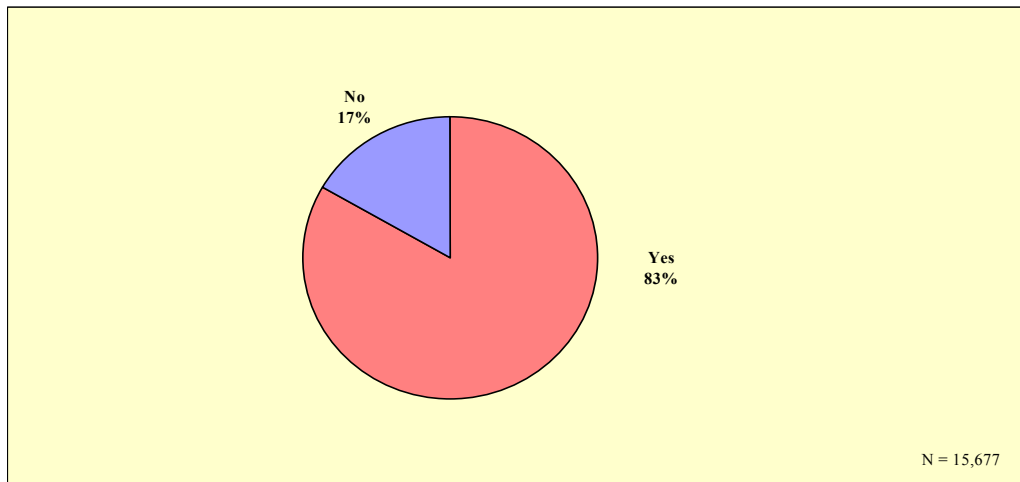
Approximately 19% of respondents indicated that they visited the library to borrow a specific book (or books) and Figure 2.2 summarises the proportion books that were found.

**Figure 2.2: If you were looking for one or more specific books, did you find them?**



Approximately 66% of respondents indicated that they visited the library to borrow a book of interest (i.e. not a specific book) and Figure 2.3 summarises the proportion that found a book.

**Figure 2.3: If you came to borrow a book of interest (i.e. not a specific book), did you find any to borrow?**



In summary, respondents found 57% of books when they had a particular book in mind and 83% of respondents found a book when they visited the library to borrow any book (i.e. not a specific book).

In addition to the above, respondents were asked whether they visited a library to borrow specific (and non-specific) of audio-visual items (i.e. cassette/CD/video etc.):

- Approximately 3% of respondents visited the library with the intention to borrow a specific cassette/CD/video and it was found in 41% of cases, and
- Approximately 24% of respondents visited the library with the intention to borrow an audio-visual item of stock (i.e. not a specific cassette/CD/video) and it was found in 44% of cases.

### **Information and Enquiries**

Approximately 40% of respondents came to the library in order to *find something out*. This information was found *In Full* by 75% of respondents and *In Part* by 15% of respondents. Figure 2.4 shows how successful they were in relation to whether a member of staff was consulted.

Figure 2.4: If you came to find something out, were you successful in finding it?

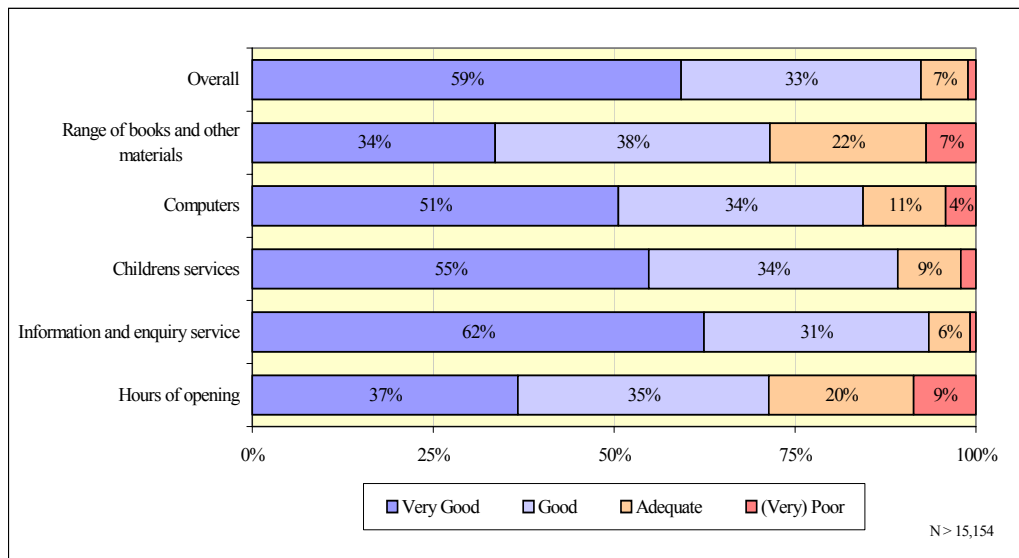
	Did you consult a member of staff?		Total	N
	Yes	No		
Yes	76%	24%	100%	6,065
In Part	64%	36%	100%	1,100
No	39%	62%	100%	720
<b>Total</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7,885</b>

From Figure 2.4, a member of staff was consulted in 76% of cases when the information was successfully *found*. Where the information was not found, a member of staff was **not** consulted in 62% of cases.

### Library Ratings

Each respondent was invited to rate a series of library attributes and Figure 2.5 shows the results:

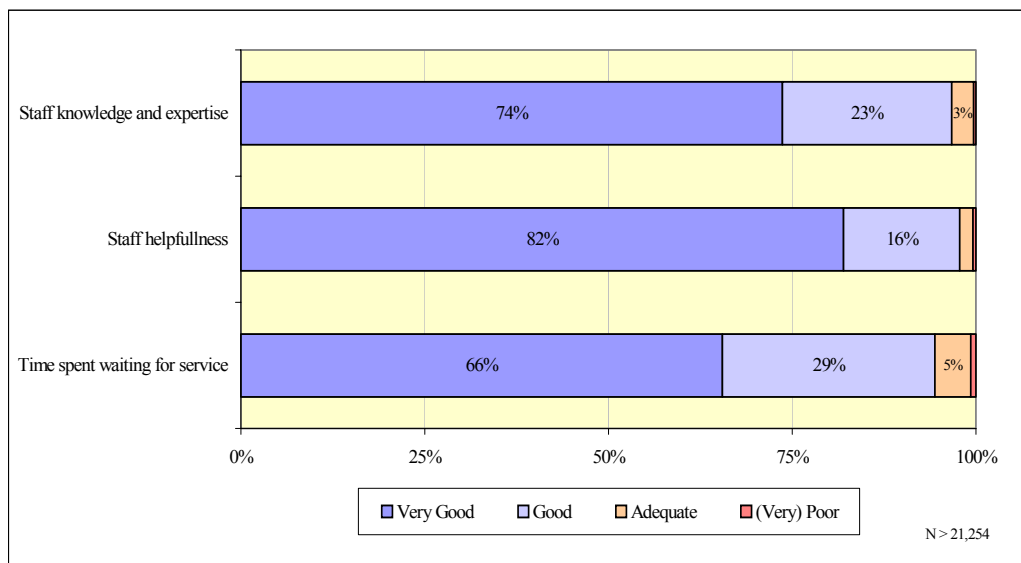
Figure 2.5: Please tell us what you think of this library:



From Figure 2.5, there is a very high *overall* satisfaction rate where 92% of respondents rated *Very Good* (59%) or *Good* (33%). The proportion of respondents that rated the *range of books and other materials* and *hours of opening* as being *Very Good* was below 40%. Students (full and part-time) and self-employed visitors were particularly dissatisfied with opening times.

In addition to the above, there were specific ratings for staff related issues and these are summarised in Figure 2.6 below:

**Figure 2.6: Please tell us what you think of this library:**



From Figure 2.6, library staff received a very high satisfaction rating for *knowledge, expertise* and *helpfulness*. The satisfaction level with *time spent waiting for services* is also high as approximately 95% of respondents rated this as *Very Good* (66%) or *Good* (29%).

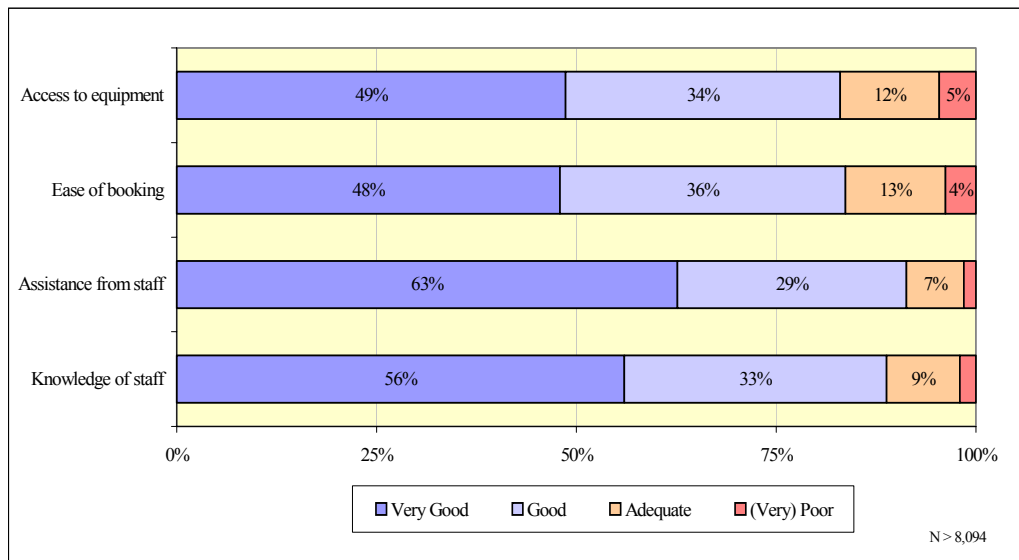
## Internet Facilities

Approximately one in three respondents visited the library to use the Internet facilities and the main reasons were for Study/Research (66%) and use of email (65%). Of those that used the Internet, 60% stated that they used the Internet in this library at least once a fortnight and males were more frequent users of the internet facilities (56% of Females and 66% of Males).

Almost 10% of all users borrowed / returned a book **and** used the Internet / computer facilities. 14% of those who came to borrow or return a book also used the Internet / computer facilities. In the region of 30% of Internet / computer users also borrowed / returned or renewed a book during the course of their visit.

The Internet facilities within the library were rated and Figure 2.7 shows the results.

**Figure 2.7: How would you rate the Internet facilities in this library?**



From Figure 2.7, *staff knowledge* and *staff assistance* received high satisfaction ratings with over 90% of respondents stating this service as *Good* or *Very Good* (consistent with general library ratings). However there is room for improvement (for some authorities in particular) in *the ease of booking* and *access to equipment* where 17% of respondents regarded these aspects of the Internet facilities as being just *Adequate* or *Very Poor*.