Experience of the public library service in Northern Ireland

Findings from the Continuous Household Survey 2015/16
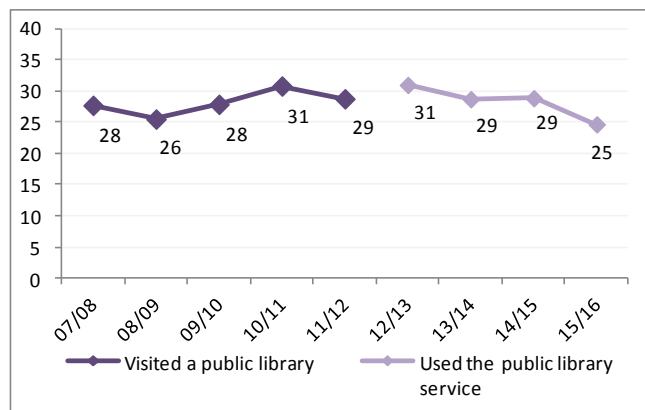
Main stories

- Overall, there was a decline in the proportion of adults using the public library service compared with the previous years' figures. Indeed, this was the lowest figure recorded in the overall trend and was driven by a decline in females using the service.
- 'To borrow / return / renew books', 'to use computers for personal use' and 'to look up information / do research' were the most popular uses of the public library service amongst adults.

Used public library service
Decrease from previous years' figures

Line chart showing "Visited a public library" and "Used the public library service" from 07/08 to 15/16. Used the public library service values: 28, 26, 28, 31, 29, 31, 29, 29, 25.

A quarter of adults used the public library service within the previous year which was a decease on previous figures.
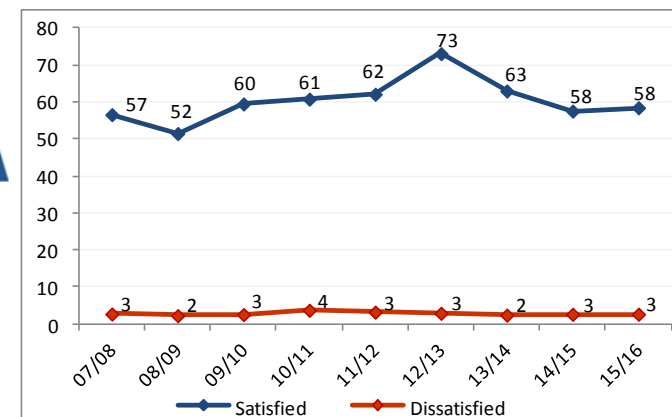
Reason for using public library service
Main reasons remain the same

Using the public library service to 'borrow / return / renew books' (61%) remained the most popular use among public library users followed by 'use computers for personal use' (23%) and 'to look up information / do research' (18%).

Satisfaction with library service
Satisfaction with the public library service remains similar.

Line chart showing "Satisfied" and "Dissatisfied" from 07/08 to 15/16. Satisfied: 57, 52, 60, 61, 62, 73, 63, 58, 58. Dissatisfied: 3, 2, 3, 4, 3, 3, 2, 3, 3.

A similar proportion of adults were satisfied with public library provision in 2015/16 compared to the previous year. The proportion of adults who were dissatisfied with public library provision has remained around 3% over the entire trend period.

Contents

Lead Statistician: Sean Mallon
Sean.mallon@communities-ni.gov.uk
DfC Press Office: 028 9082 9215

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Introduction

The Department for Communities (DfC) has overall policy responsibility for the public library service in Northern Ireland. DfC's overall policy framework and vision for public libraries is set out in its public libraries policy, 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' (DTL). DTL sets out firm guidelines and direction as to the type of library service that the community requires. It offers a vision for the public library service which is to provide:

> *'a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential'.*

As part of DTL, DfC monitors the overall quality of public library service provision through a set of 15 Public Library Standards. These standards act as a set of Key Performance Indicators and constraints to the public library service in Northern Ireland. They cover a range of activities such as public participation (including participation by people experiencing poverty and social exclusion), customer satisfaction, public access, provision of stock and effectiveness of Information Technology. The Continuous Household Survey will continue to be used to monitor some of these standards. The complete set of amended public library standards are accessible on the DfC website here. The most recent performance report can be found on the DfC website here.

Continuous Household Survey

This report presents the findings from the 2015/16 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to engagement with the public library service in Northern Ireland. More information relating to the CHS, methodology, definitions and the interpretation of the figures can be found in the definitions and technical notes section. Engagement with the public library service in 2015/16 is based on use of the public library service in the year prior to respondents being surveyed. Data tables are available in Excel and ODS format. The questions that were asked in the CHS 2015/16 are available here.
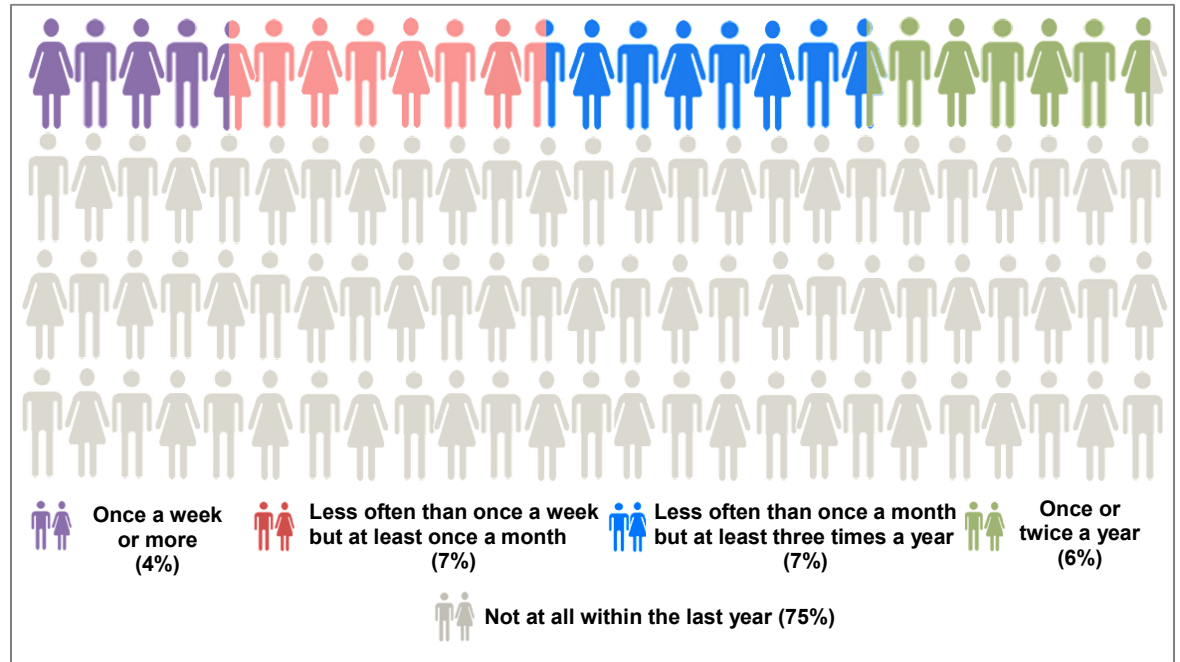
Revision note

In an earlier version of this report published online between 9.30am—1.00pm January 26th 2017 there was a typo in the age/ dependants section (page 6) which read '..a *lower* proportion of younger adults aged 16-44 years old have used the public library service each year... ' when indeed it should have read ..'a *higher* proportion...'.

Public library service usage 2015/16

A quarter of adults in Northern Ireland (25%) had used the public library service within the previous year, with just over one in every ten of the adult population (11%) having used the public library service once a month or more.

The majority of adult public library users (61%) had used the public library service for the traditional purposes of borrowing/ renewing/ returning books, making this the most popular reason for using the public library service by far. Following this, nearly a quarter of public library users (23%) cited 'to use computers for personal use' as the next most popular reason for using the public library service. 'To look up information' (18%), 'accompany children' (16%) and 'to use the photocopier/ printer/ scanner'(16%) were the next most frequently cited reasons for using the public library service among public library users.

Once a week or more (4%)

Less often than once a week but at least once a month (7%)

Less often than once a month but at least three times a year (7%)

Once or twice a year (6%)

Not at all within the last year (75%)

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

61%

To borrow / return / renew books

23%

To use computers for personal use

18%

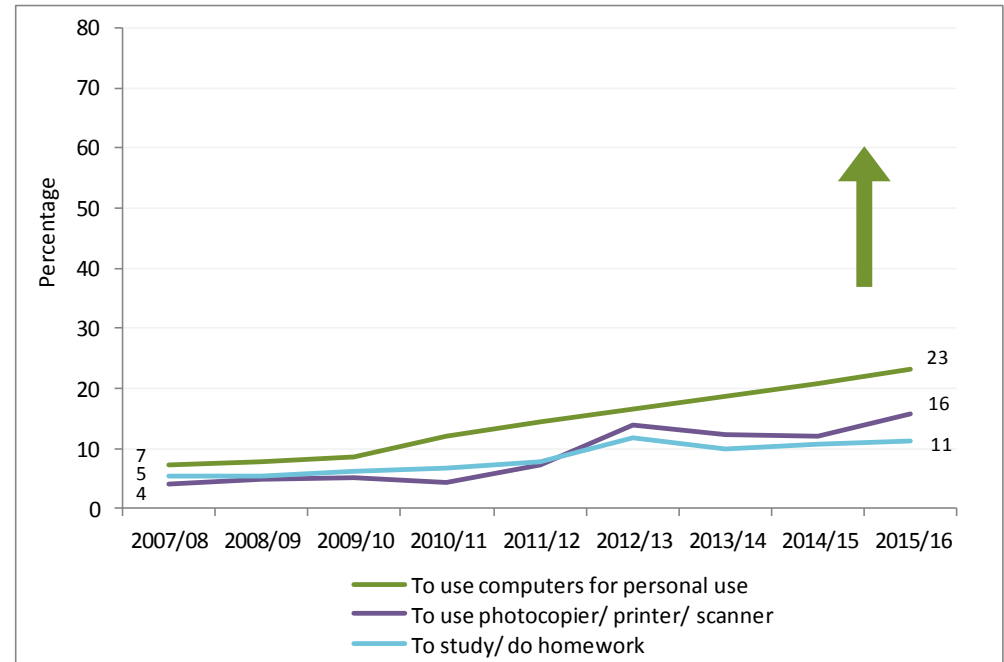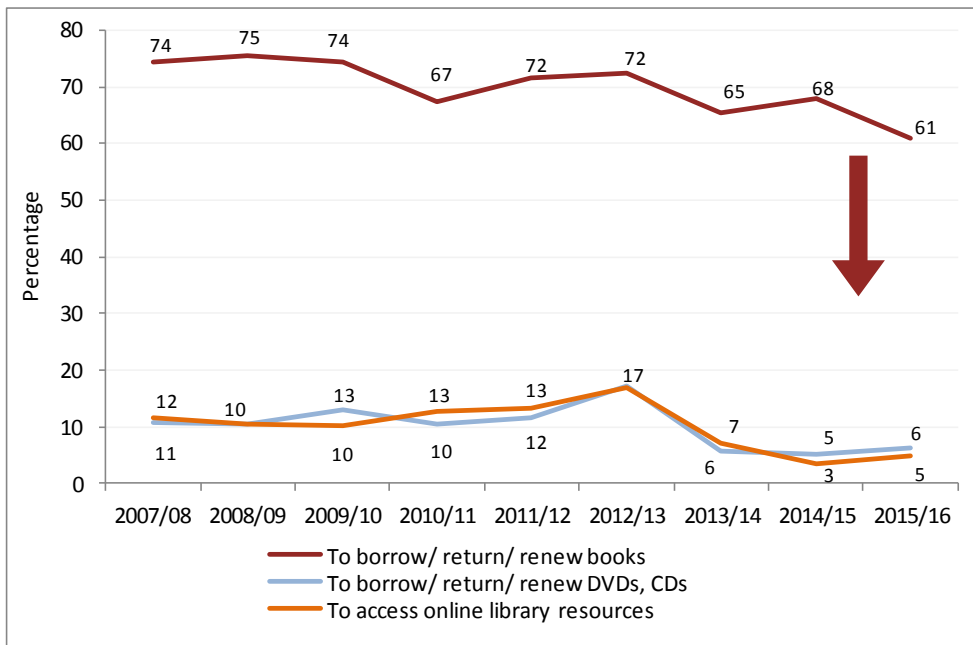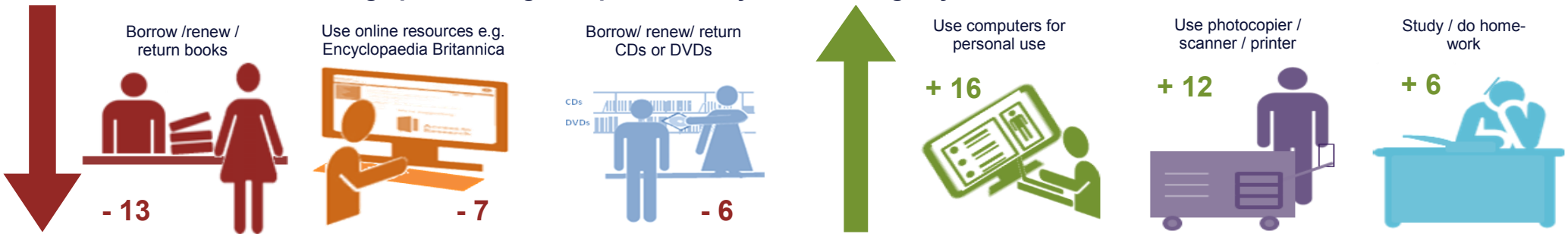**To look up information**

16%

Accompanying children

16%

To use photocopier/ printer/ scanner

Changing public library service usage 2007/08-2015/16

The reasons library users are using the public library service has changed over the trend period with traditional reasons for using the public library service such as 'to borrow/ return/ renew books' declining, although this remains by far the most cited reason for using the public library service. Other reasons for using the public library service such as 'to borrow/ return/ renew DVDs, CDs' and 'to access online library resources' are also in decline amongst adult library users. On the other hand, the proportion of adult library users using the public library service for such activities as 'to use computers for personal use' or 'to use photocopier/ printer/ scanner' have more than trebled over the trend period. Other less common reasons for using the public library service also appear to be on the increase with adult users increasingly citing such uses as 'to study / do homework' or 'to use other facilities like a cafe, toilets or meeting rooms'.

Percentage point changes in public library service usage by adult users 2007/08-2015/16

| Borrow /renew / return books	Use online resources e.g. Encyclopaedia Britannica	Borrow/ renew/ return CDs or DVDs		Use computers for personal use	Use photocopier / scanner / printer	Study / do home-work
- 13	- 7	- 6		+ 16	+ 12	+ 6

4

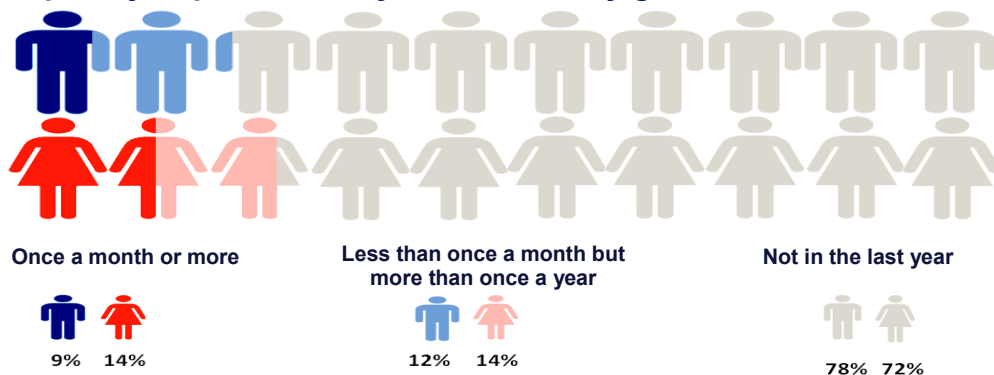# Gender and experience of the public library service 2015/16

Women were more likely to have used the public library service within the previous year (28%) than men (22%). Indeed, women have been more likely than men to have used the public library service in each of the nine years of the trend. The 2015/16 figure for women (28%) is the lowest figure recorded across the trend years whilst the latest figure for men (22%) is consistent with previous years' figures. The difference between the proportion of men and women using the public library service over the trend period has ranged from 6 percentage points (2015/16) to 13 percentage points
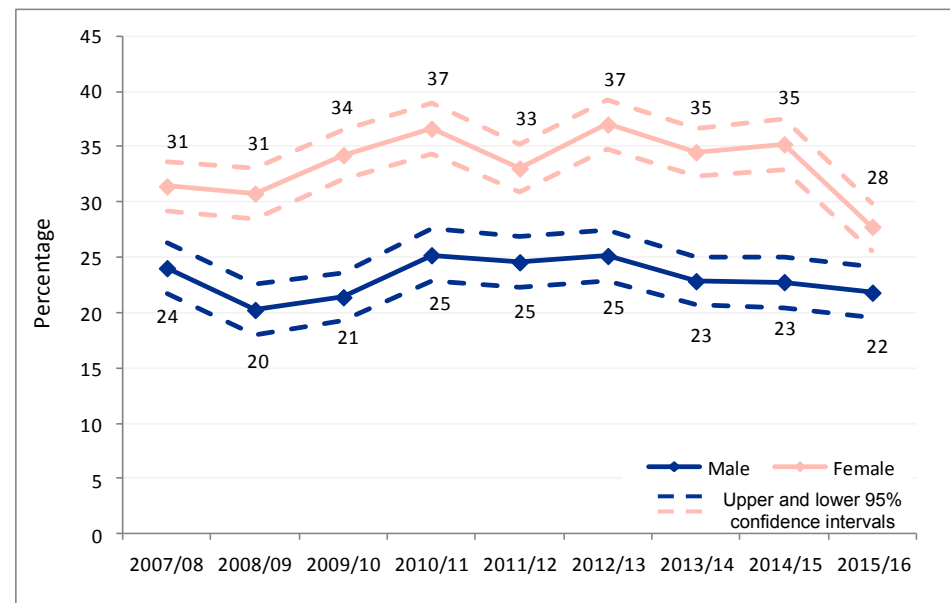
Frequency of public library service use by gender-2015/16

Once a month or more	Less than once a month but more than once a year	Not in the last year
9% 14%	12% 14%	78% 72%

Women were also more likely to have used the public library service more frequently than men in the previous year, with 14% of women having used the public library service once a month or more compared to 9% of men. Similar proportions of men (12%) and women(14%) used the public library service less than once a month but at least once a year.

Reasons for using the public library service use by gender-2015/16
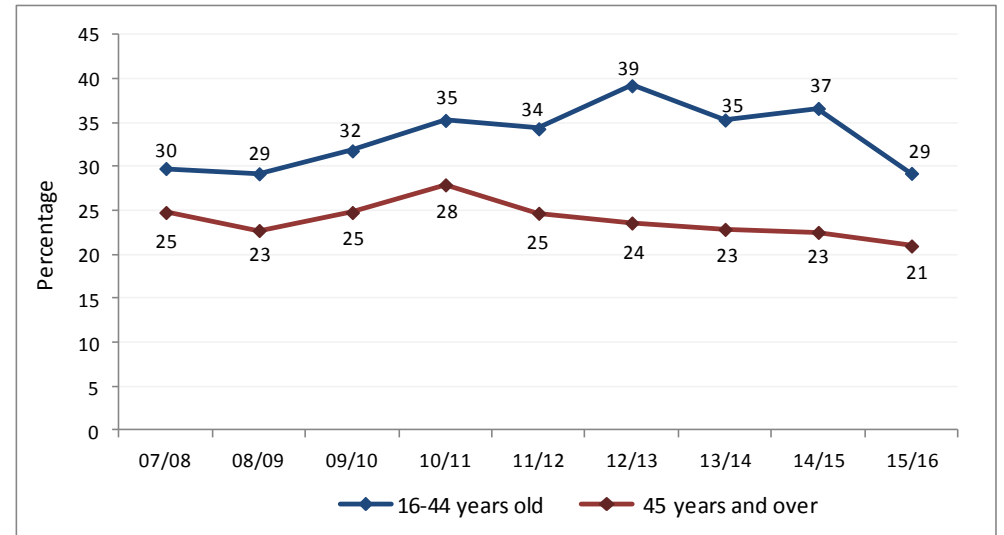
Considering reasons for using the public library service among men and women public library users, women were more likely than men to use the public library for the purposes of 'borrowing/ returning/ renewing books (67% v 53%) and accompanying children (23% v 9%). On the other hand, adult male public library users were more likely 'to use computers for personal use' (28% v 20%) and 'To access online library resources' (7% v 3%). Adult male library users were also more likely to use the free Wi-Fi at a public library (39%) than females (30%).

1. **Borrow / return/ renew books**
2. **Accompany children**

1. **Used computers for personal use' (28% v 20%))**
2. **Accessed online library resources'**
3. **Use PLS free Wi-Fi.**

Age, dependants and experience of the public library service by adults

Considering the use of the public library service over the trend period in terms of two general age groups, a higher proportion of younger adults aged 16-44 years old have used the public library service each year over the entire period of the trend than older adults aged 45 years and over. This differentiation has been especially notable since 2012/13. In 2015/16, 29% of younger adults aged 16-44 used the public library service within the previous year compared to 21% of those aged 45 years and over.

One possible reason for the higher proportion of adults aged 16-44 years using the public library service may be due to this group being more likely to have dependent children with members of this cohort accompanying and encouraging children to use the public library service. Indeed, adults aged 16-44 years old with dependent child(ren) are consistently more likely to use the public library service than those of the same cohort who do not have dependent child(ren). In 2015/16, for example, 33% of adults aged 16-44 who had dependent children used the public library service within the previous year, compared to 24% of those in the same age group who did not have dependent children. Interestingly, there was no difference found between the proportions of those aged 45 and over with dependent child(ren) and those without who had used the public library service within the previous year (23% and 21%, respectively).

Reasons for using the public library service by age 2015/16

Higher for 16-44 year olds

Use computer for personal use

(27% v 17%)

Accompany Children

(24% v 10%)

The reasons for using the public library service in 2015/16 differed amongst older and younger public library service users. Younger adults aged 16-44 years old were more likely than those aged 45 years and over to have used the public library service for the purposes of using computers for personal use (27%v 17%), 'to accompany children' (24% v 10%), 'to use photocopier / printer / scanner' (18% v 11%) and 'to study / do homework' (16% v 2%). As for older public library service users, those aged 45 and over were more likely to use the public library service for the purposes of borrowing / returning / renewing books (66% v 59%) and 'to browse / read books, newspapers, magazines' (17% v 11%).

Higher for 45 year olds and over

Borrow / return/ renew books

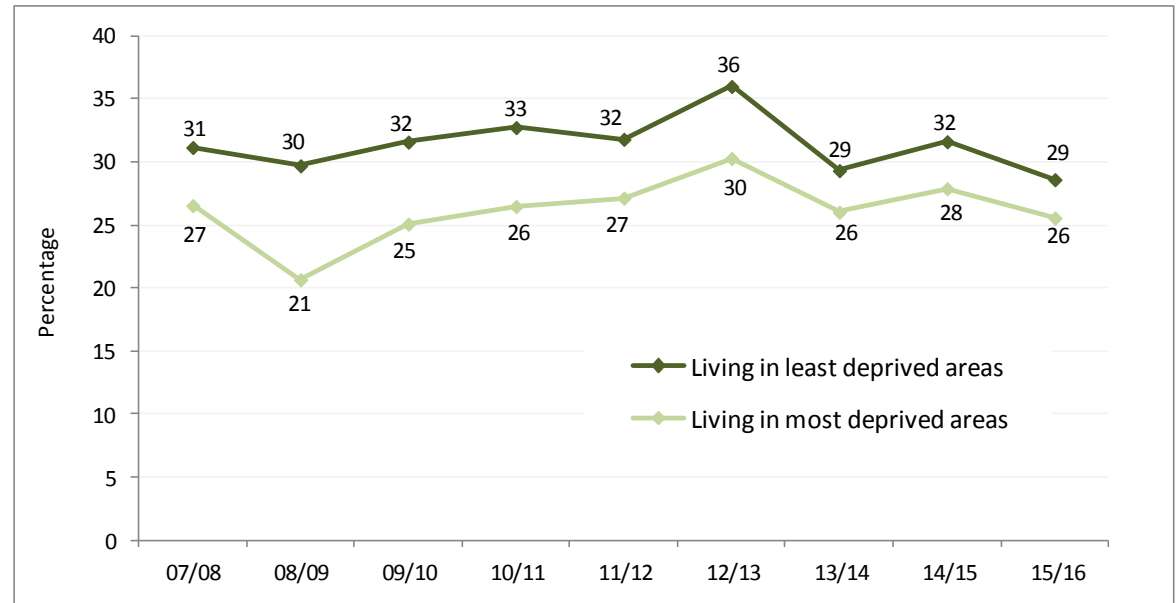**(66% v 59%)**

Browse / read books, newspapers,

(17% v 11%)

Deprivation and experience of the public library service

For the purposes of exploring deprivation and use of the public library service among adults, those who were living in the 20% most deprived areas and those who were living in the 20% least deprived areas were compared.

For most of the earlier part of the trend period, 2007/08 to 2012/13, use of the public library service was higher among adults living in the least deprived areas than among adults living in the most deprived areas. However, since 2013/14 there have been no statistical differences between these groups.

Chart: Percentage by year

Year	Living in least deprived areas	Living in most deprived areas
07/08	31	27
08/09	30	21
09/10	32	25
10/11	33	26
11/12	32	27
12/13	36	30
13/14	29	26
14/15	32	28
15/16	29	26

Deprivation and reasons for using the public library service 2015/16

Reasons for having used the public library service were explored among adults living in the most and least deprived areas. Those public library users living in the most deprived areas were more likely to use the public library service 'to use computers for personal use (e.g. internet, emails, word processing, spreadsheets, etc.)' (31%) than public library users living in the least deprived areas (20%) and were also more likely to have used free Wi-Fi at a public library (42%) than those public library users living in the least deprived areas (30%).

Used computers for personal use

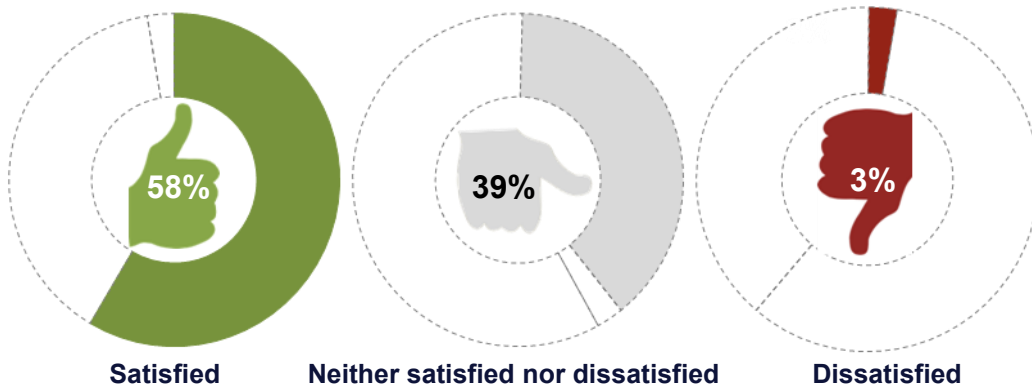Most deprived areas **31%**

Least deprived areas **20%**

Used free Wi-Fi

Most deprived areas **42%**

Least deprived areas **30%**

Satisfaction with public library service provision

Satisfied   **Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied**   **Dissatisfied**

58%   39%   3%

Almost three out of every five adults (58%) were satisfied with public library provision in Northern Ireland in 2015/16 with only 3% stating that they were dissatisfied. The remainder of the adult population (39%) stated that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with public library provision in Northern Ireland. These figures are similar to the previous year's figures.

Satisfaction with public library provision was greater among adults who had used the public library service within the previous year (89%) than it was among those adults who had not used the public library service within the previous year (48%). However, dissatisfaction among both groups was similar with 2%-3% of adults stating that they were dissatisfied with public library service provision.

Used the public library service — 89%, 8%, 3%

Did not use the public library service — 50%, 48%, 2%
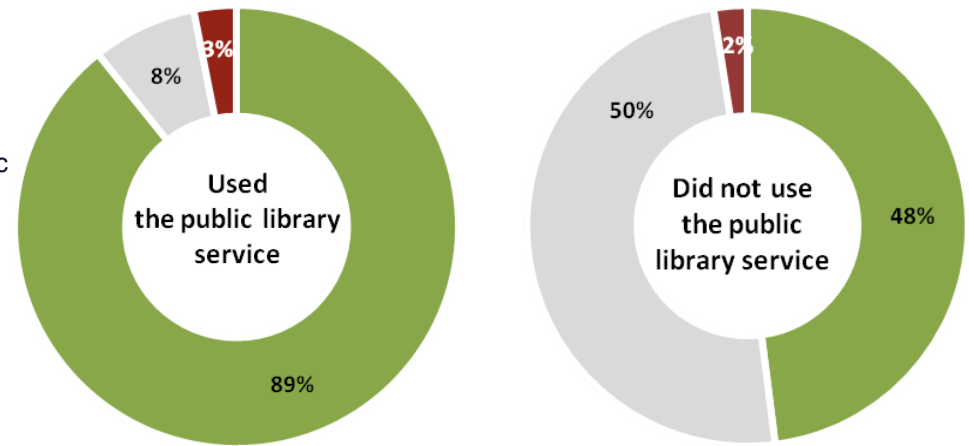
Satisfaction with public library service provision 2007/08-2015/16
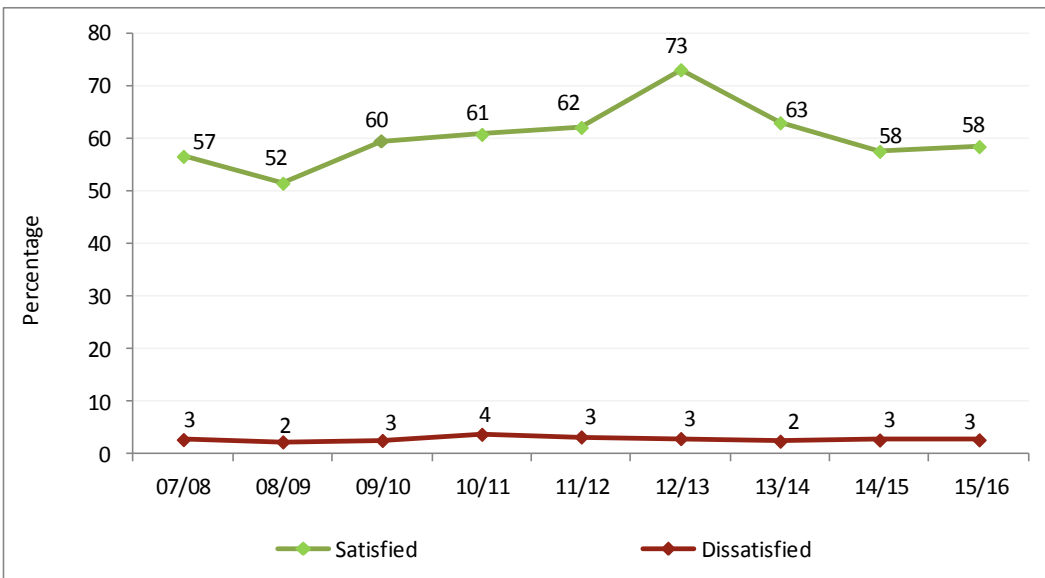

Satisfaction with public library service provision among adults in Northern Ireland has been fairly consistent throughout the trend period. The proportion of adults stating that they were dissatisfied with public library service provision has remained consistently low throughout the trend period at around 3% of adults.

Reading for pleasure and buying books

Other questions included in the survey provide context on the proportion of adults in Northern Ireland reading for pleasure and buying books. Figures show that more than half of all adults (52%) had read for pleasure in the last year, a figure which was a decrease on the 56% of adults recorded in 2014/15. This is the first notable drop over the trend period which has generally seen an increase in the proportion of adults reading for pleasure. However, the latest figure is generally consistent with the four years preceding 2014/15, which have followed an increase in the four years from 38% in 2007/08 to 51% in 2010/11.

Just less than one in three adults in Northern Ireland (31%) had bought or been bought a novel, or book of stories, poetry or plays in the last year. As with 'reading for pleasure', this figure was a decrease on that recorded in 2014/15 (35%) but was generally consistent with the six years preceding 2014/15, following an increase from 26% in 2007/08 to 31% in 2009/10.
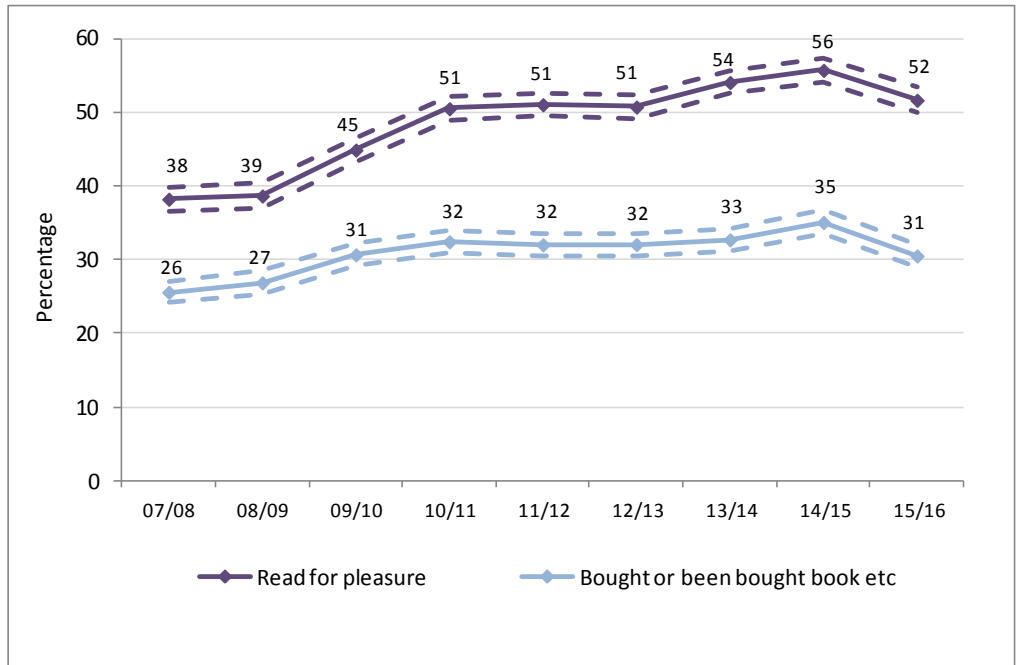

Reading for pleasure by gender
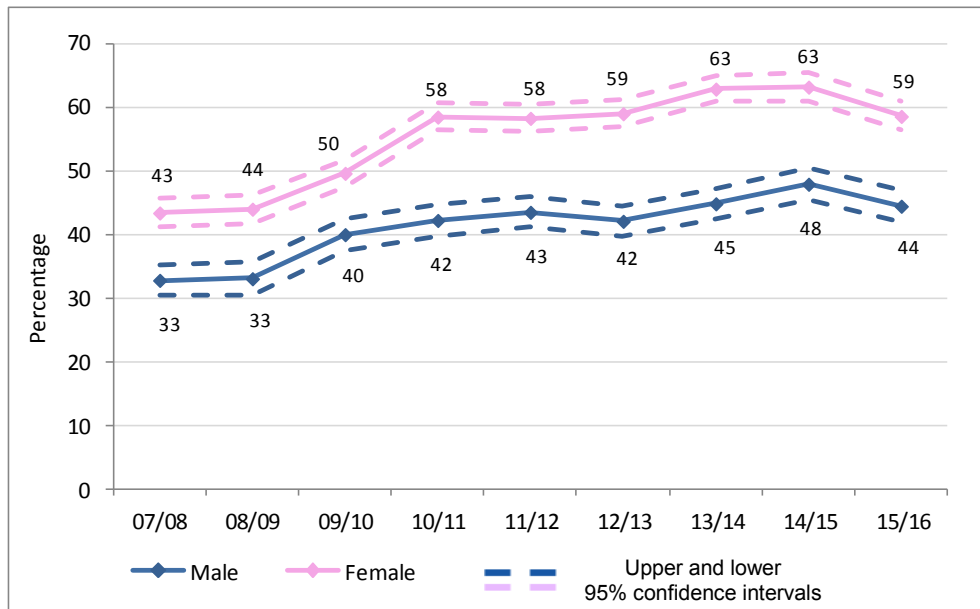
Women were more likely to have read for pleasure within the previous year (59%) than men (45%). Indeed, a similar story is seen across the whole trend period with women more likely to read for pleasure than men. The proportion of both men and women reading for pleasure both declined in 2015/16 from the previous year's figures, although both proportions have generally increased over the trend period (12 and 15 percentage points, respectively).

In 2015/16 a higher proportion of women had bought or been bought a novel, or book of stories, poetry or plays in the last year (36%) than men (25%). This has consistently been the case over the entire trend period.

9

# Children's experience of the public library service 2015/16
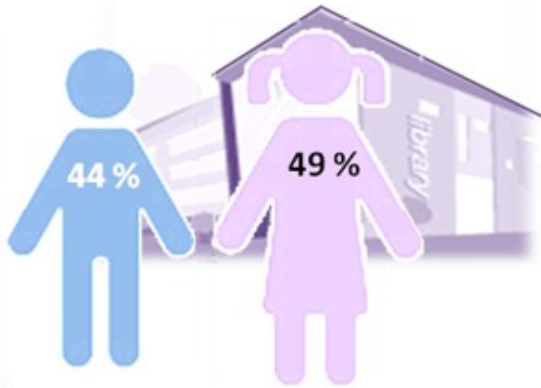
According to heads of households with a child(ren), less than half of children (46%) aged 4-15 years old had used the public library service outside of school within the previous year. There was no difference found between the proportions of girls (49%) and boys (44%) who had done so.

The main reason for using the public library service amongst children was 'To borrow / bring back or renew books' (40%)', with girls more likely to have done so (44%) than boys (37%). There were no other differences found with the reasons for having used the public library service outside of school between girls and boys. Other top reasons for using the public library service among children included 'To read books, comics or magazines' (11%) and 'To do homework or study' (8%).

44 %

49 %

40%

To borrow / bring back or renew books

11%

To read books, comics or magazines

8%

To do homework or study

Read for pleasure outside or afterschool

According to heads of households with a child(ren), less than half of children (48%) aged 4-15 years old had read for pleasure outside or afterschool within the previous year. The proportion of girls (54%) who had read for pleasure outside of school or afterschool was higher than the proportion of boys who had done so (42%).

54%

42%
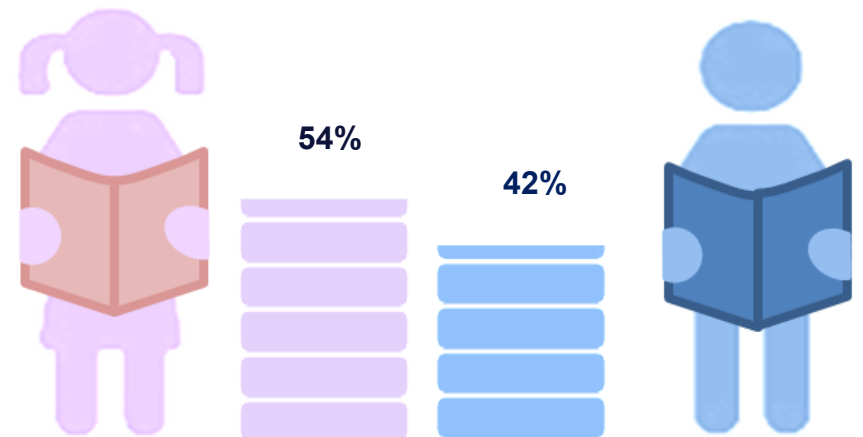
Definitions and technical notes

Used the public library service - Used the public library service at least once in the 12 months prior to the Continuous Household Survey, e.g. visited a public library or mobile library; used the Libraries NI website; attended a library event outside a library. Public libraries do NOT include school, college, or university libraries. A library event outside a library is an event run by Libraries NI which has taken place in a venue other than a library.

Disability – The questions used to ascertain whether or not a person has a disability are harmonised with the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010. This states that a disabled population is classified on the basis of having a long-lasting physical or mental health condition or illness which restricts day-to-day activities. The disabled population in this report are those who have answered yes to both the questions below:

- Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?
- Does your condition or illness / do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?

Dependants – A person is defined as having dependants if they have responsibility for either the care of a child, a person with a disability or an elderly person.

Deprivation – The data have been analysed by whether respondents are living in the 20% most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) or in the 20% least deprived SOAs. This is estimated using the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2010 which is a weighted combination of seven domains of deprivation. Rank 1 indicates the most deprived SOA, while rank 890 denotes the least deprived SOA.

Urban / rural – The data have also been analysed by whether respondents are living in SOAs that have been categorised as either urban or rural as set out in the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements report (2015)[2]. This report classified each settlement in Northern Ireland into one of eight bands (A-H) and recommended that Government and other users should consider defining 'urban' and 'rural' areas in ways which are appropriate for different programmes and projects. In the absence of a programme-specific definition, Bands A-E can be defined as urban and Bands F-H as rural. This definition was applied in the analysis in this bulletin.

[1] Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Report 2010

[2] Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements 2015 Report

Statistical significance in this report

Any statements in this report regarding differences between groups such as males and females, different age groups, religion, etc., are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and did not just arise by chance.

Other notes

The following should be noted when interpreting figures and tables:

Percentages less than 0.5% are denoted by '0' and where there are no responses, they are denoted by '-'.

Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Percentages may not add to 100% for questions where multiple responses are allowed.

Detailed tabulations are not provided where the number of respondents is too small to allow meaningful analysis.

The base number of responses to each question, which is shown in each table, is the unweighted count. The base may vary due to some respondents not answering certain questions.