



Reading Matters!

Report of a pilot qualitative survey to measure
Generic Learning Outcomes among
adult readers in Bunclody public library, County
Wexford

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**Wexford County Council
Public Library Service**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bunclody library readers get what they need from their reading selections. They read what they borrow. They believe they benefit significantly from their reading and they are very satisfied with library service in areas of the collection choice and ease of use. These are some of the findings from a survey of adult readers in spring 2009 where the contributors assessed their general learning outcomes from their use of the book collections in Bunclody library.

FINDINGS

By reading fiction and non-fiction, readers felt they benefited very significantly in areas of entertainment, learning new facts, challenging attitudes and motivational support. Not surprisingly learning new facts was more significant for factual books as was the challenge to established attitudes, but the entertainment factor was high for both categories of reading. Every fourth reader said their reading helped them develop new skills and every fourth reader also said their reading helped them plan for the future. Within the learning outcomes above, the distinctions between fiction and non-fiction reading are significant.

Readers had a very high level of satisfaction with their reading experience. 41% got everything they wanted and another 49% got almost everything they wanted from their selected book.

Personal enjoyment was the main motivation for reading. Private study was the next most important reason, higher among non-fiction readers. People also read to share with others.

79% read the complete book and another 13.5% read most of the book they had borrowed. The complete read was very high for fiction [94%]. 83% of respondents read the all or almost the total book was in the case of non-fiction.

The survey was based on adult readers' assessment of books they borrowed during March and April 2009. The ratio of fiction : non-fiction was 65 : 35 and the preference was for standard format books, Most readers [c90%] found it easy to find the book they wanted and they found the range they wanted on the library shelves.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall this was a successful pilot. It should be extended to other libraries. The methodology should be amended to attract more contributors and there is capacity to refine the survey to collect more specific responses or focus on narrower areas of stock. User education programmes should be extended to assist readers find the information they need more easily.

INTRODUCTION

Reading Matters is a report of a small-scale, pilot survey run in Bunclody library in March and April 2009. Adult readers self assessed the benefits they gained for their reading choices and measured their experience of the public library as a reading resource.

This survey was focused at collecting information on borrowers' experiences with their self-selected library loans, rather than on their total library experience. However respondents were asked to offer thoughts / suggestions on the library stock and service.

The fact that that learning was self assessed by the individual library borrowers allowed us to look at the impact of informal life-long learning taking place using library stock. The survey attempted to measure the outcomes of the lending service rather than the outputs. It measured the lending service qualitatively rather than quantitatively

BACKGROUND

The inspiration for the Bunclody project came from **Reading a Difference” the impact of adult lending books on Generic Learning Outcomes**¹. This qualitative research was carried out in the UK, managed by Colin Bray during 2005. One of the reasons this piece of research was so refreshing is that it looked at finding concrete evidence to show that public libraries are important as both a social and community institution. One of the important factors of the UK survey was that learning was self assessed by the individual library readers.

In Devon readers' experiences of both fiction and non-fiction books were examined and both gave very different results. Readers were asked which if any of the following Generic Learning Outcomes were met when they read a book:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Activity behaviour and progression
- Enjoyment inspiration creativity
- Attitudes and values
- Skills

In the initial pilot project 18% of surveys were returned. The data obtained allowed learning about library stock, understanding of public attitudes and information to demonstrate just how useful public libraries are.

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BUNCLODY

Bunclody is a small market town in rural, north west County Wexford. The population of Bunclody is 2,325² and the rural hinterland supports 7,311³ population.

Bunclody library opened in June 2007. It has 2,285 registered members, which represents 31% of the total catchment population. The library has integrated well with the local community and offers a variety of services during 47 opening hours over six days each week.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Taking the inspiration from the UK research, we focused on the impact a book made on the individual who read it:

- How useful had s/he found the chosen book?
- How, if at all, did reading the book change or influence the reader?
- How important and useful was book lending to library users?

A paper based questionnaire was drawn up and distributed. It was planned to be brief, simple and accessible. Eight questions were asked and a comment box invited more general contributions. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the survey. Accessibility was addressed with in the survey content and design elements, e.g. e.g. font and font size, and also available formats.

Forms were distributed with books at point of issue – one form per borrower. Borrowers were asked to fill out the form with reference to any one of the books they borrowed. Forms were received back on return of books.

The survey ran for six weeks during March and April. This covered 37 days and 247 hours of public service. 175 adults were invited to participate. 2,595 items was the total number of adult issues during survey period. 1468 items were fiction and 1127 items were non-fiction. Total number of visits during survey period was 5,892: this would of course include children.

² 2006 Census of Population, Ireland www.cso.ie/Census : Newtownbarry population 2,325

³ 2006 Census of Population, Ireland www.cso.ie/Census : The following electoral divisions were included: Ballycarney, Castledockrell, Kilrush, Moyacomb, Newtownbarry, Rossard, St Mary's and Tombrack. Clonegal (including Carrigduff and Kildavin) and Myshall were included from Co Carlow. Ballingate, Carnew, Co Wicklow was also included. Total population: 7311

The response rate was as follows:

- Of 175 survey forms distributed, 52 completed forms were returned. Thus there was a response rate of 29%. Responses were anonymous
- The survey was open from 02/03/09 to 17/04/09. Originally it had been planned to have it open for three weeks i.e. the normal lending period. However it was decided to extend the survey period due to low numbers of initial responses, partly due to the fact that St. Patrick's Day and Easter public holidays fell within that period.

Data from each form was entered electronically on the survey monkey website– www.surveymonkey.com Distribution of forms and entering of data was not very time-consuming – e.g. there were five sessions of entering data which took up 90 minutes of staff time.

Comments on the management experience

The survey technique allowed us to collect information easily and inexpensively. By nature surveys are limited in scope and may be interpreted differently by participants.

Although effective and inexpensive, by distributing forms with issued books at point of issue it is recognised that this provides generalised outcomes in relation to lending not a statistically representative sample of learning outcomes. It is recommended that when conducting surveys a “random sample” system is used, and to also ensure only one survey per person.

Demographic data was not collected as the survey was book not participant focused. Demographic data is very useful, as it allows further examination of trends that may occur within similar groups e.g. age, race, gender. This could be considered for a more extensive study

Recommendation

Participation levels could be improved if the survey was re-distributed at point of book return or in the absence of suitable touch screen units, if staff or an outside agency interacted with the public and entered the data straight onto computer. The latter could impact on the Questions asked in terms of the likelihood of getting reliable answers to library service questions and this would need to be considered.

RESULTS

Q1: Book Format – standard or large print

| | Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|-----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Standard format | 88.5% | 100% | 85.3% |
| Large print | 5.8% | 0% | 5.9% |
| CD | 5.8% | 0% | 8.8% |

The majority of books chosen are in standard format. The 0% take up for other formats in non fiction would largely be due to the lack of alternative formats within the stock.

Q2: Book type: is the book fiction or factual?

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| Fiction | 65.4% |
| Non-fiction | 34.6% |

Responses were higher for fiction at 65.4% and lower for non fiction at 34.6%, which would imply that fiction stock is more widely used in public libraries. However in comparison with the overall borrowing figures for the survey period [1468 fiction: 1127 = 45% non-fiction] note the survey was filled out for a higher % of fiction books.

Recommendations

- The survey should be carried out in other locations to see if trends are the same county wide.
- The survey could be modified to provide more detailed information if required, however it needs to be kept simple to encourage participants to fill it in.

Q3: Depth of reading: how much of the book did people read?

| | Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Read all of the book | 78.8% | 50% | 94.1% |
| Read most of the book | 13.5% | 33.3% | 2.9% |
| Read some of the book | 5.8% | 16.7% | 0% |
| Didn't read the book | 1.9% | 0% | 2.9% |

As could be expected in relation to non-fiction fewer readers [50%] read the entire book compared to fiction readers 94.1%. Some non-fiction are reference type books and others are very specific in their purpose.

Q4: Impact of the reading: of those who read the book, they said the book

| learning outcome - most extensive | Non fiction | Fiction | Overall |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1 st | Helped them learn new facts 100% | Entertained 96.8% | Entertained 95.3% |
| 2 nd | Entertained 91.7% | Helped them learn new facts 63.2% | Helped them learn new facts 77.8% |
| 3 rd | Challenged their attitudes 87.5% | Challenged their attitudes 46.2% | Challenged their attitudes 63.6% |
| 4 th | Motivated or inspired them 81.8%. | Motivated or inspired them 37.5%. | Motivated or inspired them 57.1% |
| 5 th | Changed their opinions 77.8% | Changed their opinions 30.8% | Changed their opinions 50% |
| 6 th | Helped them to plan for the future. 55.6% | Helped them to plan for the future. 7.7% | Helped them to plan for the future 26.1%. |
| 7 th | Helped them to develop new skills 50% | Helped them to develop new skills 7.7% | Helped them to develop new skills 25% |

Reading brought multiple benefits with learning outcomes across a range of learning areas.

Interesting and some unexpected results came back from this question.

While it would be expected that non-fiction books would help people learn new facts [100% response], a relatively high % of readers [63.2%] said they also learned new facts from fiction reading.

While fiction could be expected to be entertaining [96.8%], an almost equally high % of respondents [91.7%] were entertained by their choice of non-fiction book.

A high % of readers who borrowed non-fiction [87.5%] said that the book challenged their attitudes, which is not surprising. However, a significant % of fiction readers [46.2%] also said their attitudes were challenged. This may point to the challenge to established perceptions and an important role for fiction in challenging accepted social norms.

Every fourth non-fiction reader was helped to develop a new skill. Every fourth non-fiction reader was helped to plan their future.

The order of learning outcomes was almost the same across fiction and non-fiction

Recommendation

- This question was a **Yes** or **No** tick box; no degree of strength of feeling was sought. If included it would give a more graded result.
- A fresh approach to the marketing of fiction could be beneficial, e.g. promoting its sometimes unseen value in challenging attitudes.

Q5: Benefits from reading: when asked if they got what they wanted from the book

| | Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|----------------|------------|-------------|--------------|
| Yes completely | 41.2% | 44.4% | 42.4% |
| Yes mostly | 49% | 50% | 45.5% |
| Yes partly | 7.8% | 5.6% | 9.1% |
| No | 2% | 0% | 3% |
| Not sure | 0% | 0% | 0% |

For both fiction and non-fiction, readers' satisfaction with their expectations met were to a similar standard.

Recommendation

Respondents should be invited to comment specifically on their chosen book, this would allow for greater clarity in deciphering the perceived "usefulness" of the chosen book.

Q6: Purpose and motivation : respondents said the book was borrowed for

| | Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Private study | 13.7% | 33.3% | 3% |
| Personal enjoyment | 90.2% | 77.8% | 97% |
| Sharing or teaching with others | 7.8% | 16.7% | 3% |
| Some purpose other than those listed | 3.9% | 11.1% | 0% |
| School | 0% | 0% | 0% |

Across both non-fiction and fiction people said they took the book out mostly for personal enjoyment. While this would be expected for fiction books, it highlights the pleasure of learning across non-fiction as well as fiction reading.

Q7: Was it easy to find the book you wanted? Yes?

| Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|---------|-------------|---------|
| 87.8% | 94.4% | 83.9% |

This high satisfaction rating is excellent. The slightly lower level for fiction could indicate that the current popular titles are rarely to be found on the shelves due to demand.

Recommendation

- Focus groups including members of the public could be set up to tease out possibilities for improvements.
- Improved signage
- Increase user education sessions in general library use and in the on-line catalogue

Q8: Stock: did the library have a good range of books in the area you were interested in? Yes?

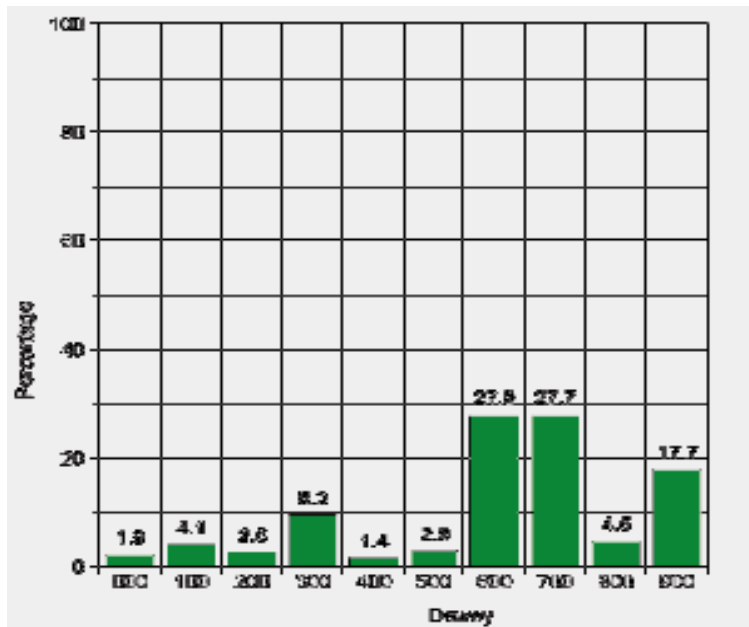
| Overall | Non fiction | Fiction |
|---------|-------------|---------|
| 88% | 82.4% | 90.9% |

This is an excellent rating, as the library has a total area of 272m2 and therefore limited capacity for stock.

Recommendation

- Publicise actively the resources we have through the Wexford County Council local library network, Borrow Books and the British Library Loan Scheme.

Non-fiction: 1127 items borrowed : % Items borrowed per Dewey class



As would be expected the most popular areas of non fiction borrowing were in Technology [600's], Arts and Recreation [700's] followed by History, Geography and Biography [900's]. Science is 500s and Social Science is 300s. 100s is philosophy, 200s is religion, 400s is languages, 800 is literature and 00s is a catch-all area that includes computer science & IT.

Recommendation

- Although we know how many non fiction books were issued in the period, we do not know which surveys relate to which subject area, it would be highly advantageous to ask participants to fill in the first 3 Dewey digits on the survey, to allow better assessment of our stock in specific subject areas.

COMMENTS FROM RESPONDENTS

People were asked to comment on the library stock / service.

Library stock

- “Suggest putting together lists of the various authors in different fictional areas, e.g. Crime thrillers – Michael Connelly etc. Chick Lit – Cathy Kelly etc. Then readers of particular types of fiction have a ready reference of writers whose books they can try.”

- “Very pleased with the service from Bunclody Library. Staff very helpful, service excellent in terms of getting books requested. I’d like to see more ‘alternative’ books e.g. Masaro Emoto’s ‘Water’ books, Doreen Virtues Angel books.”
- “Bunclody Library is based in a community with a large number of travellers. Thus it might be nice to have some books on this community and culture.”
- “I would be interested if the library stocked more history of art books.”
- “Please more biographies and reference, also art criticism – for instance I particularly enjoyed Hilary Spurling ‘Matisse the Master’ and would happily reread ‘The Unknown Matisse the early years 1869-1908’.”
- “More mysteries and thrillers in book CD form would be welcome.”
- “More books on economics, particularly macroeconomics.”
- “Supply all books in the series, not just part of the series.”
- “I enjoy the CDs when I’m driving as some journeys are long and tedious.”
- “New books like ‘Twilight’ appear to be only in a stock of one or two throughout the county library service, if at all.”
- “The library is great but there are not enough books on certain items e.g. planting veg – beginning to work a garden, crafts – how to make curtains basic stuff. All the books are for advanced curtains etc.”
- “If a book isn’t available at Bunclody Library or any other Co. Wexford library it should be possible for it to be ordered through Bunclody Library from another library in the country. This would ensure maximum use of the country’s literature. Also there seems to very little information on specialised issues e.g. cerebral palsy affecting adults/older people.”
- “Would like to see more sports books i.e. horse riding. Travel guides.”
- “You have no books on Irish inland waterways!”

General

- “Very happy with the service.”
- “A very professional, friendly service is been given by the staff to the public.”
- “The library staff are friendly and helpful.”

- “Library stock appears to be adequate. Library service is excellent – cordial, compliant and helpful.”
- “Library great asset to the town. Staff very helpful. Would recommend to everyone to join the library.”
- “Perhaps some more seating for the main library?”

Recommendation

Respondents should be asked to comment specifically on their chosen book, this way we would get an inside and more detailed viewpoint of the effect on the individual of their chosen book. We would then also be able to tie the comments back more concretely to the survey questions.

NEXT STEPS

A more in-depth survey which will focus solely on Adult non-fiction reading will be rolled out in 2010.

This survey will be more extensive. It will be distributed to the public through the five branch libraries in County Wexford.

It will be made available both online and in hard copy. This assessment of adult non fiction stock will allow detailed study of all subject areas if interest.

Findings from this quantitative research will help to inform future decisions on the adult non fiction stock purchased.



Reading Matters?

We would like to know what our books mean to you...

Please take a moment to answer these questions:

Q1 Is this book:

In standard format

Large print

On CD

Q2 Is this book:

Fiction

Non-fiction/factual

Q3 Which of the following most applies:

I read the entire book

I read most of the book

I read some of the book

I didn't read the book

Q4 If you read all or part of the book did this book:

| | Yes | No |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Motivate or inspire you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Help you develop skills? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Change your opinions? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Help you learn new facts? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Challenge your attitudes? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Entertain you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Help you plan for the future? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q5 Did you get what you wanted from this book?

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Yes, completely | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes mostly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes, partly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q6 Did you borrow this book for:

Private study

Study for school/college/university

Sharing with or teaching others

Personal enjoyment

Other

Q7 Was it easy to find the book you wanted?

Yes

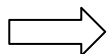
No

Q 8 Did the library have a good range of books in the area you were interested in?

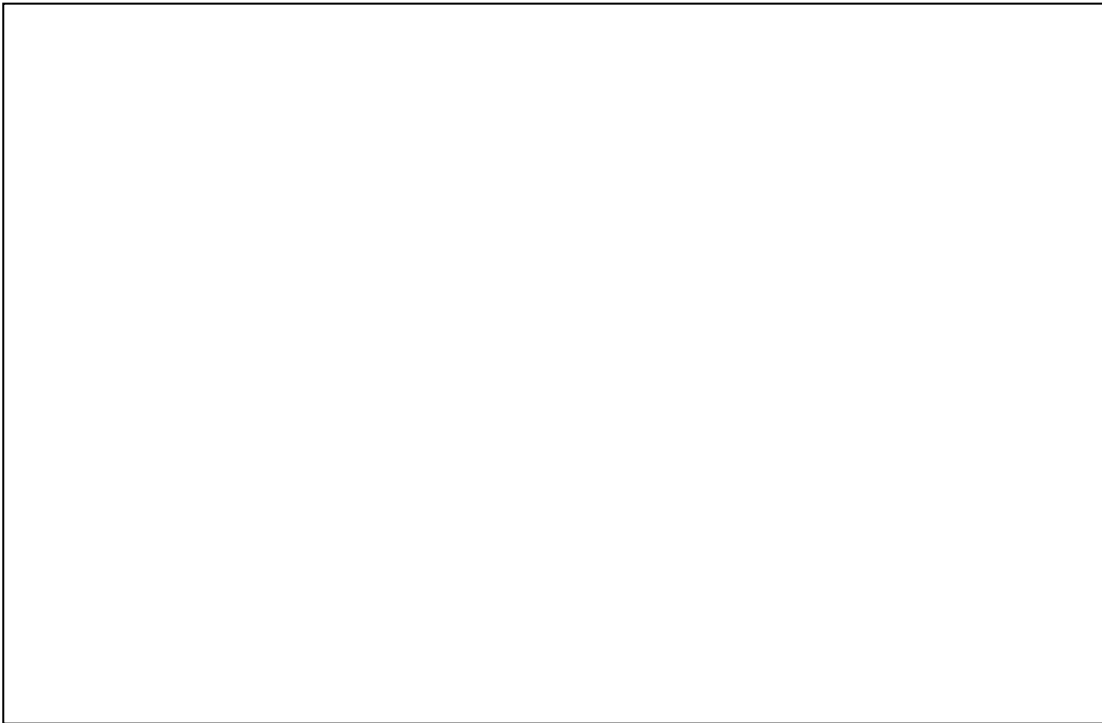
Yes

No

Please turn over



If you have any thoughts or suggestions on the library stock/library service, please write them in the space below:



Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. This information will help us to improve the library service and the range of our book stock by letting us know what you think about the books. Please return your completed questionnaire in the front of your library book, or place it in the box provided at the library desk.

You may if you wish complete further questionnaires for other books you have borrowed.

This survey is also available in Large Print format or on audio CD by request and on Wexford County Council's Website www.wexford.ie/library and via email bunclodylib@wexfordcoco.ie.

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