**Call for written submissions – Visit by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from 5 to 16 November 2018**

**Introduction**

[CILIP](https://www.cilip.org.uk) is the leading professional body for Information professionals; librarians, information managers, data professionals and knowledge managers. Libraries help to reduce inequality by providing safe, civic spaces open to all located in urban and rural areas and part of this offer is access to computers and the internet.

Given the important place of public libraries in our communities we have responded to three questions: Section B Austerity (12), Section C Universal credit (17) and Section D New technologies in the Welfare System (24)

**Summary**

* Austerity measures have had an impact on public libraries. Budget cutting has resulted in declining levels of professionally qualified staff, numbers of books and other resources, reduced opening hours and a reduction in the availability of free broadband internet access
* Usage figures of the public library service shows that these changes are likely to impact most upon vulnerable groups in our society
* Pressure on public libraries is likely to increase as full migration of UC is expected in 2019
* New technologies which could be used to good effect in hard pressed times are being used to further restrict supported access to broadband internet
* There are still significant differences by age and socio economic groups in the numbers of people online at all and in the level of digital skills required to complete the UC application process

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**B. AUSTERITY**

**Since 2010, successive governments have engaged in fiscal consolidation, the process of reducing the amount of fiscal deficit of the United Kingdom. This process is popularly referred to as 'austerity' or 'budget cutting'.**

**(12) How have local governments been affected by austerity measures in the last decades? If possible, please specify the impact on public services such as police and fire departments, public libraries, and the administration of the welfare system by local authorities.**

There has been a continual downward trend in local government funding since 2010. The greatest cuts in percentage terms have been to arts development and there are some stark regional differences, but within this sector “public libraries have suffered the most in real terms”. [*Next ten-year strategy: evidence review,* BritainThinks*,* July 2018].

**Impact of funding pressures on public libraries**

• [Funding to Local Government](https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainabilty-of-local-authorites-2018.pdf) has fallen by 49%, a real-terms drop of 28% in their spending power of local Councils in less than six years.

• There was a [10.3% reduction](https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainabilty-of-local-authorites-2018.pdf) in the number of public library service points from 2010-11 to 2016-17

• Between 2010 and 2017 the number of qualified librarians has reduced by a quarter (8,000 jobs lost).

• The European benchmark for library service provision is one service point for 13,000 people. In the UK, this has fallen to around 1:20,000 and some Local Authorities are implementing spending cuts which would reduce this to as little as one library per 40- 50,000 people. [Analysis by CILIP of Eblida EU library statistics].

 • The total net expenditure by Local Authorities in England on public library services fell by £69.1m between 2012-13 and 2014-15 [Comparing DCMS, (September 2012), Taking Part 2012/13 quarter 1 report: statistical release with DCMS, (January 2016), Taking Part 2015/16 quarter 2 report] to £762 million (net), just over 27 pence a week per person (under 1% of England’s local government net expenditure).

At a certain level of income some families provide books, computers etc. so that trips to the library are not necessary. For those on lower incomes “libraries are an accessible product and an enabler of access to books, computers, digital media and social space”.

In households with children aged 11-15 and with relatively low personal incomes £5,000 to £19,999 there is a positive association with library use. [*Child taking part survey: multivariate analysis of the determinants of child participation in arts, sport, heritage, museums and libraries: summary report.*: Shibli, S., kokolakakis, T. and Davies, L., November, 2015].

It is estimated that every fortnight 536,997 individual young people use library services in England, Scotland and Wales. Findings have been mapped against the index of multiple deprivation and reveal that libraries are really important to young people and their families when access to resources for learning, including computers, can be challenging. [[*Young people’s library survey: national report for the academic period September 2014 to July 2017*](http://www.ascel.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/public/Young%20People%27s%20Library%20Survey%20-%20National%20Report%202014-2017.pdf) *,* CIPFA -data from 344 libraries across 18 library services].

This would indicate the importance of and possible greater reliance on public libraries for the more vulnerable groups in our society.

**Summary profile of public library users:**

* Around [half of people](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2017/04/England-Shining-a-Light.pdf) (46%) in England used a library last year.
* [15-24 year olds](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2017/04/England-Shining-a-Light.pdf) are the most likely demographic group to use a library and are the most frequent users.

•  Public libraries engage with the most diverse audiences in the arts, culture and heritage sector across ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status and income. [DCMS Taking Part 2016 diversity statistics](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/593993/Focus_on_diversity_final.pdf) show that uniquely in the arts, culture and heritage sector only libraries:

o  Engage proportionately more of the Black and Minority Ethnic adult population than White adults.

o  Show no difference in engagement between those with a long standing illness or disability and those with no disability.

o  Engaged more people on lower than higher incomes, unlike any other part of the sector.

Groups which have remained similar in their library use across the period 2010 – 2017 are: Adults aged 16-24 & 75+, adults who identified as disabled, adults who were not white.

**C. UNIVERSAL CREDIT**

**Universal Credit, which was first announced in 2010, is a key element of welfare reform in the United Kingdom.  Its stated aims are to simplify and streamline the benefits system for claimants and administrators, to improve work incentives, to tackle poverty and to reduce fraud and error. The Special Rapporteur is interested in learning more about Universal Credit, including its impact on poverty in the United Kingdom and on the human rights of those living in poverty. Below are some of the questions the Special Rapporteur has in that regard:**

 **(17) Claimants apply for Universal Credit online. What has been the impact of Universal Credit being a ‘digital-only benefit’ on the ability of potential claimants to apply for this benefit? How does this relate to broadband internet access in the UK and the so-called ‘digital divide’? What is the role of public libraries and Jobcentres in enabling access to broadband internet for those applying for Universal Credit and have these public services been adequate for the purpose?**

The impact of Universal Credit being a “digital only benefit” relates to issues around access to broadband internet and the level of digital skills in potential claimants.

Lower levels of internet use are linked to financial disadvantage and disability (at all ages) and the proportion of older people who do not use the internet is likely to be even higher among those entitled to benefits.

A recent study of 100 local councils in England looked at the process of claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction and the options given or suggested for those not online. Libraries are often signposted by local councils as places to go to access a computer [*Everything is online nowadays What happens if you want to claim Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction and you don’t use the internet?* Age UK, May 2018].

Universal credit is only 11% complete and there are an estimated 8 million potential applications to be brought online [HC briefing paper]. Full migration is expected in 2019 and the impact/ pressure on libraries, already being felt from Universal jobsmatch and current UC applications, will increase.

NB: *Universal jobsmatch*. It is estimated that each year the EU helps 250,000 people find jobs through their public library. Public libraries helped 4.1 million Europeans with queries related to employment and further helped 1.5 million Europeans to apply for jobs. Public access to ICT and training enables people to apply for jobs, as the application process for many jobs has moved online.

The offer of free internet access is not universal in UK public libraries. Free (and unlimited) internet access is available via Wi-Fi in most public libraries in England but this only allows people who have their own devices to benefit from this service. According to the latest Lloyds digital consumer index, the population 65+ and C2DEs, the groups with the lowest digital capability, continue to have lower levels of device ownership. The application for Universal Credit process, in its current form, is also not suited to a smart phone or tablet.

The UC application process for people who have a good level of digital skills has been estimated to take over an hour. Many public libraries are now limiting their free internet access to just 30 minutes a day. This is down from a norm of 2 hours of free internet access a day when the People’s network was first introduced in 2000.

An extension of this time can be given at the library’s discretion but only within the resources available. Supported access, which is often required by claimants of UC, is limited to staff time. The numbers of professional staff in public libraries and other staff able to offer this support has been falling steadily since 2010.

***Digital skills***

There has been a call for digital literacy to be seen as the fourth pillar in education (alongside STEM subjects) but this is not yet happening in our schools. The level of Basic Digital Skills in the UK amongst the adult population has remained at 79%. But the latest comprehensive annual report on media use and attitudes from Ofcom shows there are still “significant differences” by age and socio-economic group in the numbers of people online at all and the extent to which those online have the critical skills to understand and negotiate the online world.

**D. NEW TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WELFARE SYSTEM**

**The Special Rapporteur is interested in learning more about the impact of new technologies including the use of ‘big data’, artificial intelligence, algorithms and automated decision-making processes on the human rights of those living in poverty in the United Kingdom, especially in terms of the functioning of the welfare system. Below are some of the questions the Special Rapporteur has in that regard:**

 **(24) What are the potential human rights issues faced by individuals living in poverty as a result of the use of new technologies in the UK welfare system?**

Communities that have access to timely and relevant information and to the internet are better positioned to eradicate poverty and inequality and support people’s health, culture, research, and innovation. [*Access and opportunity for all*, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions].

New technologies can be a means for Councils to benefit from a “digital dividend” and provide a way of squaring increased demand with continuing austerity. In the UK we have the biggest network of trusted, physical and digitally connected spaces of any public service.

But austerity has impacted upon the public library service’s potential to be an active agent in delivering better outcomes for people.

Digital inclusion delivery models and pilots carried out by 16 library services across England, funded by Tinder Foundation [now Good Things Foundation], allowed library services to support 1,600 people. Potential channel shift cost savings for government services of £800k per annum across the 16 library service areas was identified - £7.5m per year if rolled out nationally across all 151 authorities. [Tinder Foundation, (July, 2016). *Library digital inclusion fund: action research project: final report*].

Given the usage figures for public libraries outlined above, cuts to public library services including opening hours and the number of skilled staff available to offer support, affect the most vulnerable groups in our society including children.

“Prosperity for all”, the national strategy for Wales to target poverty, particularly child poverty, regards public libraries as a delivery agent to help with this agenda. There is no comparable national strategy for England.

Austerity is not just associated with a reduction in income for libraries but with the developments that local authorities look to as a way of providing their statutory services. Open+ technology which offers opportunities to increase opening hours has in certain instances been used to replace staffed opening hours.

Restrictions on the use of these unstaffed libraries differ between the local authorities who have introduced them, but in some cases under 16’s (and sometimes under 18’s) have to be accompanied by an adult in order to access the library’s resources. These restrictions are more likely to impact upon those less resourced households and the children from these households in particular.

**In conclusion**

We hope that our submission will be useful to Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Please contact us should you require any further information or clarity on any of the points made here.

We would like our written submission to be published on the website of the Special Rapporteur.

Thank you.

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CILIP

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