

# The view from the front line

Results of the  
UNISON library staff survey

Love  
Your  
Libraries

**UNISON**  
*the public service union*



## The view from the front line

**UNISON commissioned Cardiff University to carry out a questionnaire survey of UNISON activists and members in the library service. The purpose was to get the views of library workers about the current state of the library service throughout the UK and issues for staff. A full report on the survey will be included in the report of the Love your Libraries Inquiry, to be published in the Spring. Below is a summary of the key findings and Steve Davies, Senior Research Fellow from Cardiff will present the findings at the Inquiry on 11 February.**

## The sample

- 2,750 respondents – 83.7% are female; 16.3% male

## Working

- 55.5% work more than 31 hours in a normal working week. 42.4% work more than 36 hours a week (both figures exclude overtime working).
- 63.1% have been employed in their current post for more than 5 years and 86.8% have been employed in the library service for more than 5 years.

## A career choice

- 35.1% would recommend the library

service as a career (42.5% would not and 22.4% did not know)

- Only a third (33.8%) felt that there are career opportunities within the library service in their authority. Over half (51.1%) felt that there are not.

## Job security

- Three-fifths (61.4%) felt insecure in their post.

## A public service ethos

- 57.5% believed there to be a public service ethos among library staff and believed that library service management and library staff trade unions like UNISON best represented and defended it.

## A public service?

- 77.3% believed that the library service would change if it was no longer part of the public service.

## Change in the service in the last two years

- 93.1% have seen changes in the library service in their local authority in the last two years but less than half (48.5%) reported that they were consulted before change – either directly or through the union. 77% of those that experienced change reported that this included reductions in staffing levels.

- Almost half (47.7%) reported positive developments in their library over the past two years.
- Just over half (51.5%) reported that there had been investment in their library service over the last two years.
- However, over 40% (42.7%) reported that their library service had cut services or delayed the introduction of planned new services over the same period.

## Volunteers

- Over half (53.6%) work in authorities that encourage the use of volunteers. However less than half (42.7%) worked in libraries that used volunteers
- In libraries that used volunteers, the vast majority of respondents (76.8%) said that they did not work alone.
- 60% of respondents did not know of any plans to replace staff with volunteers and the same proportion were unaware of whether their authority had a protocol governing the use of volunteers (one third – 34% – reported that their authority did have such a protocol).

## Staffing levels

- Almost two-thirds of respondents (62%) stated that staffing levels were inadequate in their library. Just over 40% agreed that adequate arrangements were in place to cover sickness and holidays while over half (54%) disagreed.
- Asked whether there are times when staff members work alone in the library

almost half answer 'yes' (46.5%) and half answered 'no' (50.1%).

## Part time and full time work

- 97.5% reported that there are part-time workers in their library but only 90% that there were full-time workers in their library. In other words one in ten respondents work in a library without any full time staff.
- 73.5% would like to be offered flexible working for an improved work/life balance.

## Valued work?

- Just 38% of respondents felt valued by their management.
- Over 60% felt that their local authority did not value the library service.
- However, 88% of respondents felt valued by the general public.

## Training

- 61.2% felt that the training provided was adequate but 35% reported cuts to the training budget over the last two years.

## Stress and morale

- Two-thirds (65.7%) reported feeling stressed at work.
- Two-thirds described morale among the workforce in their library service as either very low or low with just 6.6% describing it as high or very high.



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