

By Roy Clare, CEO and Steven Murray & Research team, Museums, Libraries and Archives Council

- **Number of respondents:** the Taking Part Survey was being used by DCMS to measure achievement of a government target over a three year period. This required large samples in the baseline (2008/09) and final (2010/11) years because the larger your sample, the more precise your estimates can be. As a result, it was decided to reduce the sample for this interim year (2009/10) to maximise resources available for the key baseline/final years. The reduced sample of ~6,100 is more than adequate and any reduction in precision of the estimates is taken into account through the greater range (i.e. the confidence interval) of the figures.
- **Differences in participation by age:** participation has declined across all adult age groups. It has not held up among the under 65's. This is clearly stated in the main report on page 32: "Since 2005/06, the proportion of adults visiting a public library has declined across all age groups".
- **Over 65s participation:** the survey asks whether people have used a public library service, not whether they have physically visited a public library. Use of a service includes getting books delivered to a home address so this would not have an effect on reported use. This definition is clearly stated in Annex B of the report (p49).
- **Question wording change:** the wording of the question was changed from "In the last 12 months, have you been to a library? This could be any type of library: for example, a public library, mobile library" in 2007/8 to "During the last 12 months, have you used a public library service at least once?" in 2009/10. Although the question wording has changed slightly, the definition of use still includes mobile library use and this is made clear in the definition (annex B, p49). The change was made to reflect that people could use a public library service without physically visiting. The new question was carefully piloted before introduction and it does now provide a more accurate measure of public library service use. Yes, it is slightly different but this has never been hidden – web-links to the questionnaires are available from the DCMS report web-page.
- **Definition of service use/exclusion of work & study:** there is always a debate about how the use of a service is defined, what is included and what is not. The key point is that a broadly consistent definition has been used across the period and that this has been openly and clearly published. See Annex B (p49).
- **Gender differences:** over the period, females have consistently been more likely to use a public library service than males. In the last year the figure for men has increased slightly and decreased slightly for women. However, neither of these changes are statistically significant – they are both well within the range (confidence interval) – so it is not true to say that female participation has declined this year while male participation has increased. Statistically speaking, there has been no verifiable change between 2008/9 and 2009/10.
- **Proportion of people visiting vs visitor numbers:** in response to a further comment. The figures published by DCMS are the proportion of people using a library service. This is not the same as the number of visits. The people actually using a service may be visiting more or less on average per year – a decline in participation may leave a rump of intensive service users and/or web-based services may reduce the need to physically visit. Our Research Briefing No. 9 on CIPFA Library Statistics shows that physical visits in England have decreased by 4.7% between 2004/5 and 2008/9 (see: <http://research.mla.gov.uk/evidence/view-publication.php?dm=nrm&pubid=1118>).