

## **A Brief Profile of the Public Library Sector**

The delivery of a public library service to the public is the remit of the local authority. There are 30 public library services across the country, each delivered by the relevant local authority to the population in its catchment, except for Galway, where Galway County provides the service on behalf of Galway City by agreement.

The number of branches in each local authority service varies and the overall total number of branches in the country is currently at 330. Library branches vary also in size, which in turn has implications for services that are provided. Hours of opening also range, with some small branches offering in the region of 10 hours per week, larger central branches providing up to 50 hours and an increasing number offering the *My Open Library* service, with unstaffed opening adding to staffed hours to offer over 95 hours of access weekly.

## **National Programmes**

Public libraries in Ireland work with many different stakeholders to deliver national programmes, including:

A national literacy and reading programme, *Right to Read*, with a core set of services and resources;

A national *Work Matters* programme of services for business and employment supports for locally based entrepreneurs, start-ups and job seekers;

The *Healthy Ireland at Your Library* initiative – developing health information in public libraries, providing book-stock, e-books, e-audiobooks and e-magazines on health and wellbeing, as well as talks, discussions, and workshops with a focus on physical health, mental health, and health literacy.

### **Reading and literacy development**

In 2021 there was a significant adaptation to using remote technology to deliver programme and most parts of the programme exceeded 2020 performance.

### **Information on business, job seeking and other work-related topics**

*Work Matters* evaluation showed strong programme of events and attendances suggesting this is a vital role for public libraries, but information on resources available such as book stock, and support, was not included.

### **Health information and supporting users in information-seeking**

The *Healthy Ireland at Your Library* programme is delivered by all 30 library services. The core offer of 117 print titles and 965 e-titles resulted in 137K issues in 2021. There were 1217 *Healthy Ireland at Your Library* events held in 2021.

## **Other Information**

### **Capital building programme**

In the period of the current public libraries strategy, programmes totalling 123 million euros have been completed on 17 static and 3 mobile libraries.

### **My Open Library**

*My Open Library* was introduced as a pilot in three branch locations 2014. The service allows members to access the library outside of staffed hours from 8am to 10pm, 365 days a year. *My Open Library* is offered as one measure in the approach to deliver better and more user-friendly opening hours. Of the 330 public libraries in Ireland, 15 had *My Open Library* status by the beginning of 2022 (although one of these has now moved to a new site without *My Open Library*), with a further 33 either proposed to offer *My Open Library* at some point in 2022 or where the infrastructure is in place.

### **Digital Learning Centres and digital services**

The public library is a key enabler of digital support services, encouraging digital skills development through the provision of Internet PCs and free Wi-Fi. Digital Learning Centres offer a safe space for less confident users in the community to try out technology, explore its functions and become comfortable in its use. For example, in 2019, more than 70 library branches across the country had established Digital Learning Centres. New and enhanced digital services are being provided which utilise technology such as interactive LCD screens, hublets, 3D printers, VR headsets, gaming PCs, robotics and other STEAM equipment enabling the provision of courses and workshops in graphic design, robotics, coding, and podcasting for children and adults.

### **Online services**

Public libraries in Ireland provide access to a large collection of free online resources available nationally, including:

- Over 500 e-learning courses at a variety of levels and a wide range of subjects

- 114 online language courses in 32 languages

- Over 300 international magazine titles from leisure and fashion to business

- 100,972 volumes in the collection of e-books and e-audio books, which include:

  - 43,873 eAudio volumes across 12,153 different eAudio titles

  - 57,099 eBook volumes across 20,784 different eBook titles

- Access to the content of 3,200 newspapers