

The Network Newsletter: tackling social exclusion in libraries, museums, archives and galleries

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The Network's Website is at www.seapn.org.uk and includes information on courses, good practice, specific socially excluded groups, as well as the newsletter archive.

Contents List

Did you see ...?

- *Museums Journal* – page 1
- *Museum Practice* – page 2
- *Books for Keeps* – page 2

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

- UK Digital Strategy – page 2

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

- *Come together: lessons from Bedford on reaching out to Britain's most isolated minorities* – page 3

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums and Archives

- *Review of reader development activities in libraries and training needs* – page 6

Abbreviations and acronyms – page 8

Did you see ...?

Museums Journal

The Feb 2017 issue includes:

- Geraldine Kendall Adams “Museums need to do more to welcome disabled visitors”, which looks at the accessibility of museum websites (drawing on the recent report by VocalEyes¹); the Heritage Buddies Scheme, a partnership between the RNIB and five SE museum services²; and Euan’s Guide, the disabled access review website³ [pp12-13]
- Charlotte Keenan “Uncovering LGBT history” (“Me and my research” column), which briefly reports on the “Pride and Prejudice” project at NML⁴ [p63].

Museum Practice

The latest postings⁵ (15 Mar 2017) look at autism, particularly creating safe spaces.

Books for Keeps

The March issue⁶ includes an update on EmpathyLab⁷, outlining their pioneering work with schools, Sarah Mears and Miranda McKearney “EmpathyLab – building empathy through stories” [pp12-13].

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Government, Government Agencies and Local Government

UK Digital Strategy

The previous issue⁸ included an assessment of the newly-published Strategy.

There is a critical look at the report by Ian Clark on *Infoism*, “Public libraries and the UK Digital Strategy”⁹, focusing in part on the relationship with the private sector:

¹ *State of museum access 2016: a survey of UK museum website access information for blind and partially sighted visitors*. VocalEyes, 2017. Available to download as a pdf (813.83 kb) from: <http://vocaleyeyes.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/State-of-Museum-Access-2016-VocalEyes.pdf>.

² See, for example: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/20122016-rnib-scheme-to-make-museums-more-accessible-for-those-with-sight-loss>.

³ See: www.euansguide.com.

⁴ See, for example: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/lgbt/pride-and-prejudice/>.

⁵ *Museum Practice*, available to MA members at: http://www.museumsassociation.org/museum-practice/autism-friendly-museums?dm_i=2VBX,EVVJ,27LU0M,1IWTJ,1.

⁶ *Books for Keeps*, 223, March 2017. Available to download from: <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/222>.

⁷ See: <http://www.empathylab.uk/>.

⁸ *The Network Newsletter*, 191, Jan 2017, pp4-8, <http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Newsletter-NS-191.pdf>.

“As someone who is concerned about digital inclusion, I can only conclude that the current strategy amounts to not getting people online for the benefits it brings to the individuals, but getting more people online to create benefits for corporations and the government. The more people that are online, the more data is created and, ultimately, the more profit is created. Getting people online is good for business. It enables a marketing strategy that is not possible if people remain offline.”

Thought-provoking and well worth reading, especially at a time when issues of privacy are in the headlines.¹⁰

There is also a brief new Libraries Taskforce blogpost¹¹, introducing the Strategy and its relationship to libraries.

Tackling social and digital exclusion – Other Agencies

Come together: lessons from Bedford on reaching out to Britain’s most isolated minorities

This important new report¹² from IPPR looks at barriers to social cohesion and ways these can be overcome.

“The government recently commissioned Dame Louise Casey to undertake a review into the integration of Britain’s most isolated communities. That review raised alarm at the poor state of integration in Britain. While it made some important observations, it offered few concrete suggestions for what can be done. This report looks at how Bedford’s residents have made integration work for their community. We argue that Bedford’s experience shows how concrete, empowering interventions can boost integration.” [p3]

It takes Bedford as a model:

“Because the ethnic makeup of Bedford represents the demographics of England as a whole remarkably closely, many of the issues addressed in this report go to the heart of our national debate.” [p6]

The report begins by outlining the history of migration to Bedford from the 1950s onwards, and argues that:

⁹ Ian Clark “Public libraries and the UK Digital Strategy”, *Infoism*, 6 Mar 2017, <http://infoism.co.uk/2017/03/digital-strategy/>.

¹⁰ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 8 Mar 2017.

¹¹ Harry Lund “Libraries Deliver.... Improved digital access and literacy” *Libraries Taskforce Blog*, 17 Mar 2017, <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/17/libraries-deliver-improved-digital-access-and-literacy/>.

¹² Chris Murray. *Come together: lessons from Bedford on reaching out to Britain’s most isolated minorities*. IPPR, 2017. Available to download as a pdf (254.62 kb) from: http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/come-together-lessons-from-Bedford_Feb2017.pdf?noredirect=1.

“Migration will remain a key driver for increasing diversity in towns, cities and villages across Britain. Towns like Bedford are likely to see further ‘chain migration’: new migrants opting to settle in the town due to the fact that they already have relatives or connections. Native Bedford residents who have a migration background are also more likely to marry non-British spouses [...]

Bedford’s local economy is also likely to continue to need migrants in the future. Attracted by the promise of work in the construction industry and processing work, increasing numbers of central and eastern Europeans have come to Bedford in search of work. Even as the UK negotiates its exit from the EU, migrant labour from overseas will still be needed to plug some skills gaps in the regional economy. For example, the local enterprise partnership that covers the Bedford area has argued that the current delivery model does not provide sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified people to keep pace with demand from key sectors as the economy grows [¹³]. Migration will continue to play a role in the regional labour market.

Bedford is also likely to see an increase in foreign students. Currently some 4,500 of the 15,665 students at Bedfordshire University, which has a campus in Bedford, are international students and the university has launched an active recruitment programme to attract more [...] Foreign students now make up a growing proportion of new arrivals to the town.” [p10]

The report also acknowledges that Bedford has had a long and continuing history of receiving asylum-seekers and refugees.

One of the issues that the research explored is whether Bedford is becoming more segregated: there was evidence that some neighbourhoods were beginning to be perceived as more segregated. The research involved some Asian Muslim women who identified cultural, language and confidence issues as being barriers to integrating more. It was also identified that some migrant worker men were (or were seen as being) transitory:

“Many such migrants live in temporary accommodation or bedsits (often near the railway station), organised by a speaker of their own language; work long, often antisocial hours, also alongside people who speak their own language; and take cheap flights home to see their friends and families when their contracts end or whenever they have holidays.” [p15]

The report then went on to look at how and why Bedford had built good levels of social cohesion; factors include:

- Steady and diverse population change
- Committed leadership: a “high level of commitment from leaders and institutions to making diversity work.” [p19]

¹³ South-East Midlands Local Economic Partnership. *The Midlands engine for growth: prospectus*. SEMLEP, 2015.

- A strong and viable community sector
- Adaptable local services (and this is illustrated with brief case studies).

The report concludes:

“Bedford has done well to build a shared town. This has been thanks to a combination of external factors – the slow and steady migration flows over decades – and factors within Bedfordians’ control, such as making small adaptations to build cohesion. However, some groups in Bedford – such as eastern European men and Asian Muslim women – have integrated less well than others, and will remain outside the shared town that is being built around them unless measures are taken to address this.” [p25]

It summarises the key challenges as:

- “Lack of affordable English-language tuition, meaning many non-English-speaking residents remain excluded from full integration.
- Persistence of traditional views of women’s roles due to the cultural heritage of Asian Muslims, and increasingly due to sons coming to these conclusions as a result of Qur’anic study.
- Childcare and home duties preventing Asian Muslim women from integrating, by reducing their free time and flexibility to build their skills and confidence. In addition, within the Asian community there is frequently no culture of childcare, and a reluctance to leave children in the care of strangers from outside the community.
- Little knowledge of public service provision in the UK among transient workers from EU countries, despite the fact that they pay taxes to support these systems and, under current EU law, are entitled to use these services.
- Very low levels of confidence among many Asian women, meaning that steps of integration that would be straightforward for other types of migrant or minority group can become almost insuperable obstacles.
- Vulnerability of migrants – particularly recent arrivals – to rogue landlords, due to their unfamiliarity with their rights as tenants [...]” [p25]

The report then makes a series of recommendations:

- Target English language learning at the most isolated migrants, and set up an interest-free loan scheme to allow them to pay for classes
- Educate boys on the role of women
- Develop the provision of culturally-sensitive childcare
- Set up an integration hub in areas where migrant workers congregate
- Establish a selective landlord licensing scheme.

The library service in Bedford plays a strong role in the community, and it’s a pity that has not been recognised – especially as libraries, museums and heritage organisations could well form part of the ‘integration hub’.

That comment aside, this is an important report which identifies key issues and areas where our sector can make a difference.¹⁴

Broader issues – Libraries, Museums and Archives

Review of reader development activities in libraries and training needs

SCL published this key report¹⁵ in Feb 2017.

The research involved:

- “A round table discussion with key stakeholder organisations
- A reading activities survey distributed to library services across England
- A call for reader development case studies
- An informal conversation with Leicestershire Library Service about the reader development training needs of its community run libraries” [p7]

The report includes 22 case studies which give a good introduction to the range of activities currently undertaken.

The research evidence suggests that the priority areas for developing reader training in libraries are:

- “Outreach and non-readers
- Volunteers and community-run libraries
- Making the case for reading promotion/evaluation training
- ‘Soft’ skills such as having conversations about reading with the public

There is some evidence that existing reading development training may not be suitable for volunteers and community-run libraries because it does not employ suitable language/approaches or delivery mechanisms. A co-created approach may need to be undertaken to develop training for community-run libraries to ensure it is relevant and taken up.

More work may need to be done understand exactly what type of training would be suitable to support library services in refining their outreach work and work with non-readers. It may be that a community of practice with library staff and national bodies already engaging with these groups would be a good way to explore which essential skills are required and how this type of training could be delivered. Certain other priority areas may be more suited to case-study and information sharing rather than formal training, these include:

¹⁴ Source: *IPPR Weekly*, 3 Mar 2017.

¹⁵ *Review of reader development activities in libraries and training needs*. Society of Chief Librarians, 2017. Available to download as a pdf (831.35 kb) from: <http://goscl.com/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-Reader-Development-Activities-and-Training-Needs-February-2017-1.pdf>.

- New delivery models
- Marketing and promotion approaches, including social media” [p5]

Despite the obvious constraints on time and resources, libraries were still managing to undertake a level of reader development work outside library buildings/via outreach, and in a variety of settings, including:

- “Home Library Service
- Children’s centres and youth clubs
- Prisons
- Schools, colleges and adult learning centres, freshers fairs, ESOL centres
- Voluntary organisations and community groups such as University of the 3rd Age, the Women’s Institute, churches
- Health and wellbeing organisations such as postnatal groups, MIND, hospitals
- Care homes, residential homes and sheltered housing
- Literature festivals and other festivals
- Shopping centres, super markets, shops and cafes
- Pop-up libraries and book boxes in a variety of locations
- Theatres, cinemas and local arts groups
- Parks, public spaces, beaches
- Radio” [p15]

In addition:

“In terms of specific projects to engage non-readers in reading, respondents mentioned a wide range of initiatives including:

- Work with prisons
- Using initiatives such as Reading Ahead in different contexts e.g. youth clubs, community centres etc.
- World Book Night
- Reading Ahead (often in partnership with another organisation e.g. Adult Community College)
- Work with people with dementia, often in partnership e.g. with dementia cafes
- Targeting areas with low literacy levels, often in partnership with others e.g. arts organisations” [p16]

The report also identified the need for greater evaluation of these activities, and looked at different marketing/publicity methods.

This is an important report, although there are also some issues with it.

Firstly, although some of the case studies have equality and diversity themes running through them, many do not, and this is also not particularly highlighted in the body of the report – although it does identify that:

“The audiences least likely to be targeted were BME communities, adults with learning disabilities, ESOL readers and young adults aged 18-25.” [p28]

and:

“[...] several case studies explored ways of engaging audiences that are less often targeted with reader development activities, including adults with learning disabilities and young adults aged between 18-25.” [pp28-29]

Secondly, perhaps there should have been a bit more questioning of some of the assumptions made, for example that promoting provision via radio and other marketing methods can somehow replace real knowledge of and involvement in the local community; or that there is some straightforward way of carrying out longitudinal research.

Lastly, SCL has also issued an Invitation to Tender to “Develop a Reader Development e-learning Module for Public Library Staff”¹⁶. This could well form part of a suite of training approaches, but an e-learning module would not be able to deal particularly well with the interpersonal/outreach skills required.

Nevertheless, this report is well worth reading, and it will be important to pursue the recommendations to make sure that progress is made.¹⁷

Abbreviations and acronyms

BME = Black and minority ethnic

ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages

IPPR = Institute for Public Policy Research

NML = National Museums Liverpool

SCL = Society of Chief Librarians

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¹⁶ See: <http://goscl.com/invitation-to-tender-develop-a-reader-development-e-learning-module-for-public-library-staff/>.

¹⁷ Source: *Public Libraries News*, 14 Mar 2017.