



# Engaging Libraries Phase 2: Findings in Brief

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This report is a summary of an independent evaluation of Engaging Libraries Phase 2 carried out by Marge Ainsley. The findings relate to evidence captured and made available between November 2019 and November 2021. As with any evaluation there are limitations, and further information about the method can be supplied on request.

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## 1. Overview

Engaging Libraries Phase 2 (herein known as Engaging Libraries) supported public libraries to work with higher education partners to deliver public engagement activities. This report provides an overview of the independent evaluation findings of the programme, funded by Carnegie UK, Wellcome and the Wolfson Foundation. It draws on data collected by 14 participating projects (16 different library services) between November 2019 and November 2021<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. About the programme

Engaging Libraries provided public libraries across the UK with the opportunity to develop and deliver public engagement projects on research in health, society, and culture in collaboration with others. The following definition of public engagement was used:

*Public engagement involves creating an opportunity for people to consider, participate and debate ideas. It is a two-way process, which may involve activities like participation, conversation, interaction and listening. It can take many forms but is often made up of projects, activities, or events, ranging from a family fun make-and-take activity, right through to an artist performing a new piece of work exploring an issue or concern to a public audience.*

Projects were asked to engage people in creative and imaginative ways, which were two-way involving activities like participation, conversation, interaction and listening. It was recognised that applications and successful projects would offer activities which varied in how 'two-way' they were. However, the Carnegie UK team clearly advised that activities involving an 'expert' and passive listeners such as talks or lectures in a presentation style and explanation format were not viewed as public engagement for the Engaging Libraries programme. Funders' expectations were for a range of activities across this public engagement spectrum to be delivered, with an encouragement for projects to move towards the most interactive two-way engagement appropriate for their theme, context, or audience.

Successful projects therefore represented a variety of public engagement methods and outputs. These ranged from information sharing through question-and-answer sessions, to art projects involving shared experiences, performances based on workshops and co-produced experiments.

Engaging Libraries required libraries to work in partnership with researchers or a university department, where ideas and activities were developed and delivered collaboratively. The type of collaborations could vary, from those which allowed people to access and respond to research, to those which were more co-produced, enabling people to play a role in formulating research. In order to make the application process as open as possible, Carnegie UK accepted applications where research partnerships were not yet established, as well as where they were already in place, and recognised that selected projects would vary in terms of their stages of development. The programme had an ethos of experiment, risk, and innovation, and the Carnegie UK team encouraged a flexible approach, where ideas and activities could continue to be developed into the initial stages of the programme.

<sup>1</sup> All data collected, analysed, and reported took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. Two projects (Redbridge/Kirklees/Newcastle and Falmouth) continued to deliver activity digitally and did not pause their activity.)

As well as funding, Engaging Libraries also offered a development programme for the library staff. This was a key strand and reflected the aim of Engaging Libraries to develop the ability of library services to generate and sustain support for relevant, dynamic, and proactive library services. This skills development programme delivered information and training and prompted activities in order to build learning. It began with in person sessions, then transitioned to online workshops and use of the social media platform Yammer. Although an online element to the development programme was always envisaged, this expanded as a result of the pandemic and the resulting inability to meet in person. The development programme encouraged interaction, shared learning, and the building of professional relationships between participating public libraries. Through skills development and support, participants were also encouraged to maximise the potential of their project, for example by sharing their successes and learning with others locally and across the sector.

### 3. Covid-19 context

It is important to understand the context in which the programme was delivered when considering the findings. The original timeframe for Engaging Libraries was November 2019 - May 2021. The participating libraries had planned and were in the process of developing or delivering face-to-face public engagement activities when the pandemic hit the UK. These activities were to be delivered within their library buildings. The UK-wide lockdown, which started on 23 March 2020, impacted the timeframe, nature of project delivery and capacity of participants to engage with Engaging Libraries. Due to the need to protect both staff and library users, the pandemic led to the closure of public library buildings and the redeployment and furloughing of some staff. There was a switch to digital forms of delivering various services. These changes directly impacted Engaging Libraries in terms of what participating libraries had set out to do (face-to-face interaction, often with physical materials forming part of an activity), where they sought to do it (in a library space) and staff availability and capacity to redesign and deliver projects and participate in the programme more widely.

To support participants on the programme, the funders extended the programme by six months to provide time and space to rethink projects, extending the end date of the programme to November 2021. The project team also found ways to support participating libraries to replan; adjust the development programme to meet new training needs (and build a new way to deliver sessions); and assess whether the evaluation framework and approach was fit for purpose. This planning and re-planning took place within a shifting, uncertain landscape of UK government-wide guidelines, changing restrictions and newfound variants. It is worth noting that library buildings remained shut until July 2020 but even when restrictions started to be lifted and some libraries reopened, services were limited e.g. provision of click and collect and some digital services only. The introduction of various tiered systems and lockdowns in November 2020 and January 2021 further disrupted library services, staff, and engagement with Engaging Libraries.

It was challenging for the project team to project manage and implement a new programme schedule due to these changing timelines but also variations in guidelines and legal rules between the nations (and in some cases, within regions - such as in the Northwest of England - where specific localised lockdown rules were brought into force).

All library teams worked to a completion date of November 2021; however, they did not follow the same design and delivery trajectory as would have originally been the case due to having different restart dates. In addition, the loss of face-to-face activity meant that – as with many other cultural and creative organisations – activity had to be reimagined and, in many cases, completely changed. In addition to Covid-19, some of the services within the cohort were also having to deal with the wider challenges that perpetuate within the libraries sector environment more broadly – such as cuts and threats of/actual library closure, restructures, and staff losses through redundancy or redeployment.

The evaluator recognises that the ability to design and deliver Engaging Libraries activity was substantially compromised. Participating libraries rose to the challenge of finding solutions to deliver their Engaging Libraries projects, and it is testament to the hard work of the library staff, partners, and project team that none of the participating libraries withdrew from the programme.

## 4. What did the evaluation set out to measure?

An evaluation framework and overarching strategy was put in place to monitor and evaluate Engaging Libraries Phase 2. Based on a logic model and created collaboratively with the project team, it provided a roadmap for achieving the programme aims which were:

- 1.** To energise and empower people<sup>2</sup> through engagement with research about health, society and culture in one of the following ways:
  - Enable people to access, use and respond to research;
  - Enable people to value and think critically about research;
  - Enable people to play a role in formulating research.
- 2.** To enable public libraries to build upon and explore their civic role as safe spaces for participation and engagement with research.
- 3.** To facilitate partnerships between public libraries and universities or Independent Research Organisations (IROs).

An abridged version of the logic model can be found in further information on page 19 which outlines the series of intended outputs and outcomes<sup>3</sup> (mapped against Generic Learning Outcomes or GLOs) that the programme intended to collectively deliver for people, library staff and partners. The evaluation assessed whether these outputs and outcomes were met, to review whether the programme ultimately achieved its overarching aims. The evaluation also included a process evaluation where the aims, ambitions, selection process, project design and management during a pandemic was considered<sup>4</sup>. The evaluation draws upon best practice guidelines for evaluating public engagement projects, including NCCPE's Common Standards<sup>5</sup>. This included evaluating the design<sup>6</sup>, delivery and impacts of engagement.

- <sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this evaluation, the HEFCE definition of 'public' as 'individuals and groups who do not currently have a formal relationship with an HEI [higher education institution] through teaching, research or knowledge transfer' is used (i.e. this may include existing library users or those who are new to the library and drawn in by the public engagement event – both adults and children).
- <sup>3</sup> Outcomes are defined as the benefit, difference or change the project team want to make for beneficiaries (public, library staff, partners) as a result of Engaging Libraries.
- <sup>4</sup> Whilst each project was not expected to achieve every single outcome, the project team believed that collectively working towards these would lead to the successful achievement of the overall project aims.
- <sup>5</sup> [http://www.apenetwork.it/application/files/4315/9972/1332/2018\\_Reed\\_et\\_al.\\_A\\_common\\_standard\\_for\\_the\\_evaluation\\_of\\_public\\_engagement\\_with\\_research.pdf](http://www.apenetwork.it/application/files/4315/9972/1332/2018_Reed_et_al._A_common_standard_for_the_evaluation_of_public_engagement_with_research.pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Evaluation of initial design and redesign was intended to be undertaken by the library services in the design phase, with the independent evaluator focusing on the delivery and impacts of engagement.

## 5. Headline facts and figures



**321**  
public events/activities delivered



**12,393**  
number of people engaged



**3,470**  
estimated number of non-library users engaged



**302**  
library staff engagements in the development programme



**57**  
partners across academia and community/culture engaged

## 6. Key findings

The below narrative provides an overview of the top-level findings, highlighting what worked well and less well - structured by the public, library staff and partners.

### 6.1 Public

**High levels of satisfaction and enjoyment were reported**, with 97% rating their experience of participating in an Engaging Libraries project as either 'excellent' or 'good'; and the public commonly describing their experience as powerful, informative, insightful, illuminating, and invaluable. This is attributed to the quality of the speakers, technical delivery, ease of access (online) and inspiring, engaging, or relevant content.

**88% of people are more likely to try other events or activities at (or organised by) a library** as a result of their experience. These results demonstrate the satisfaction and enjoyment of the programme by the general public and is testament to the work of the library staff and partners in creating reportedly engaging and quality events and activities during a pandemic.

One of the most striking outcomes of the programme is the influence it has had on learning, with **88%** of those surveyed either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they had **learned something new** as a direct result of participation. A wide range of individual examples were cited, for example: how to use an air quality monitor and interpret the data, how to better manage their own menopause symptoms, how to spot misinformation, plan for a death, or be better informed about how to deal with their own or someone else's grief, and how to use Zoom/digital tools to access events.

Similarly, the programme has had a **positive influence on inspiring people**: it has **made them curious** (84%) and **think differently about a topic** (89%). Members of the public indicated they **would talk to others about their experience** (65%) and described a range of future plans (such as attending further events, doing more reading into the subject matter, joining networks, hosting their own events, making changes to their lifestyle) which suggests that participants have a propensity to take some form of direct action in their personal or professional lives.

Indeed, 77% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that **what they learned would have a direct impact on their life in some way**. There are several unintended outcomes related to this, for example a parent attending Glasgow's Sharing Stories sessions decided to change her career path to work in Early Years settings as a direct result of the sessions they attended.

The shift to digital for some of the participating services - perhaps unsurprisingly - **increased reach**, with the programme attracting participants from across the UK and beyond including Poland, Germany, Canada, South Africa, Hungary, Australia, Denmark, Ireland, USA, Dubai, and South Africa. This allowed teams to successfully open up their library brand and content to more people than initially anticipated, including those whose volunteering or work professional development commitments linked with the topic.



On the flip side, where activities were held in face-to-face settings when restrictions lifted, **face-to-face numbers of attendees were not as high as they would originally have been due to restrictions** on numbers in the space due to social distancing, or audiences not being confident in re-engaging with activities at point of delivery.

**Holding public engagement activities online offered several benefits to face-to face alternatives** - including greater confidence in active participation, convenience, and intimacy. Engaging Libraries events – whether online or in person – were **delivered during a time where people needed connection the most**. This was especially pertinent for those who were shielding and unable to leave their homes (who gained enjoyment and a sense of connection from online activities) and those in isolated or rural communities. As currently debated more widely in the cultural sector<sup>7</sup>, this indicates that there is a demand (and potentially an accessible, equitable need) for online digital events to continue running alongside face-to-face options.

It should be noted that **digital exclusion was a concern across the programme**. This was addressed wherever possible by offering onboarding advice and by reducing barriers to accessing kit and data by seeking additional funding sources such as Connecting Scotland<sup>8</sup> to support this.

The variety of creative ways that information was conveyed, the reportedly welcoming environments created by library teams and partners, and the opportunity to co-create approaches to public engagement gave audiences agency and **opened up access to information or research** often for the first time. These approaches also **made research or complex information more relevant** to peoples' lives (with 67% strongly agreeing or agreeing that had been the case). In turn, this encouraged the public to be more open-minded and understand the value of research more readily.

Through Engaging Libraries, members of the public have **had the chance to discuss topics in a perceived safe environment** (with three quarters either strongly agreeing or agreeing that they **felt more comfortable exploring them in a 'library held space' than elsewhere**) and as a result are **more likely to try similar events** and activities both inside and outside a library environment in the future (88%).

The programme has also contributed to **changing perceptions about what libraries offer** (including a broader product range) with just under two-thirds strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement 'I've changed my views on what libraries offer as a result of my experience.' Although it is difficult to robustly evidence, the shift to digital access may have played a role in this change of mindset.

As a result of the pandemic, the public programme was redesigned by the majority of projects and in certain circumstances this led to completely different (and potentially more sustainable) products being developed. This may unexpectedly lead to longer lasting legacies than originally intended for audiences, with products made available beyond the life of the programme. For example, websites that will continue to be used beyond the lifetime of the programme, rather than a temporary exhibition on-site.

7 For example, in the data shared in The Audience Agency's Cultural Participation Monitor, and in Indigo/Baker Richards 'Missing Audiences' findings (see <https://www.indigo-ltd.com/research-programmes/missing-audiences>).

8 This fund is a Scottish Government initiative which was set up in response to coronavirus. Glasgow Libraries successfully applied for a grant which meant that families could continue to take part in activity when it moved from face-to-face sessions. See <https://connecting.scot/for-organisations/welcome-pack>.

Where criticism was made by members of the public, this mainly related to technical issues such as a **need to make improvements to onboarding across a range of online platforms** and allowing more time to socialise in those spaces.

Engaging Libraries attracted predominantly older, female, highly educated, White participants with 14% self-describing as being D/deaf or having a disability. Basic analysis (of England and Wales data only) suggests the programme attracted those from medium - high socio-economic groups. 24% were not currently members of their local library service, which shows **that Engaging Libraries also helped to bring non-users into a library experience.**

### 6.2 Library staff

One of the main benefits of the Engaging Libraries programme for library staff has been the **positive impact on professional development**, with 96% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they have **improved their skills and knowledge**, and 54% attributing this improvement to the development programme. This shows the positive impact of having a CPD programme running alongside delivery, but also highlights the benefits of taking an iterative, responsive approach which tailored support for staff as the programme unfolded.

**Confidence to design and deliver public engagement activity has increased and many staff have shifted their mindset**, with 88% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they can describe what effective public engagement looks like more confidently as a direct result of the programme. Staff suggested that they have become bolder and more creative with public engagement activities and there is some evidence to suggest that **future public engagement activities within the individual library settings may become more diverse in content/delivery methods** as a result.

In addition, some library staff have dealt with unexpectedly challenging issues due to their topic area and gained professional development experience in doing so. For example, both Calderdale Libraries and Libraries NI were working on potentially provocative topics of air quality and hair/identity respectively.

There are two particularly striking unintended outcomes for library staff who developed new skills. For example, at Calderdale Libraries a member of staff successfully moved careers/job roles into an air quality post, part influenced by Engaging Libraries. And at Sutton Libraries, the main creative project officer who worked on Engaging Libraries has been inspired to develop their own academic practice in relation to community engagement and has subsequently applied for a PhD.

The evaluation also finds that **self-assessment of skills increased in all expected areas** from those reported in the baseline survey (November 2019) with staff independently suggesting a range of different skills gained including evaluation, audience development, working with partners, problem solving, strategic planning, teamwork/managing staff, digital skills, working on complex projects, and creativity.

Aside from developing a specialist knowledge in the topics delivered, an unexpected benefit of the pandemic in terms of learning has been the need to digitally upskill and make radical

changes to delivery models in a short space of time. For example, **staff are more digitally literate** as a result and have fast-tracked learning new digital skills which they will be able to use across other project and service areas. It is suggested that without the pandemic, this may not have happened.

**Staff rated their experience highly**, with this predominantly attributed to meeting and learning from other library teams, having time to think creatively about public engagement, the support received from Carnegie UK, and being part of a large project with other services (which was deemed especially beneficial during closure). **Staff are proud of their achievements during such a difficult time.**

A key strength of the programme highlighted by many staff has been the benefit of **being part of a support network during the pandemic**: it enabled them to make new connections across services and provided much-needed moral support during the pandemic. Whilst the shift of the development programme online prevented much of the 'water cooler' networking opportunities of face-to-face training, it opened up access to more library staff to participate than initially planned. Conversely however, some library services reported that they did not manage to involve as many colleagues in project delivery as anticipated. This led to a lack of wider ownership of Engaging Libraries; attributed to the lack of face-to-face delivery on site and the pandemic impact on library staff (such as being redeployed).

The programme **provided a source of inspiration** to library staff (including applying for and gaining further funding streams often buoyed by their newfound digital capabilities) which will indicatively impact on future public engagement programming. 88% of staff surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed that they had been inspired to explore future ideas for public engagement projects as a direct result of the programme, and 92% strongly agreed or agreed that they can **more readily see the potential of using different library spaces** (online and offline) to deliver public engagement activity.

Delivering or observing blended or digital activities has been a huge influence on staff and is likely to have an impact on other aspects of service delivery, not just on public engagement work. There are several examples where library staff have suggested they would not have been able to try certain methodologies or approaches without the funding from Engaging Libraries: **being involved has given them permission to be creative, take risks and fail forward.** Whilst capacity and budget are a potential barrier for continuation, several libraries have been specifically inspired to continue their public engagement activity (including seeking further funding). Examples include Calderdale's 'Something in the Air?' project being replicated in the town of Hebden Bridge; and Redbridge, Newcastle, and Kirklees' work with Libraries Connected to create a framework to support other library services to undertake similar Death Positive work.

**88% of library staff described their academic partnership as a success.** Effective relationships with partners were attributed by library staff to strong foundation work, mutual recognition and respect of specialist knowledge, regular communication, similar motivations, getting to know their partners personally rather than formally, and finding a common interest in the topic. Partnership working is valued by library staff, even if their relationship did not turn out as initially planned. 88% strongly agreed or agreed that they have specifically **increased their confidence in working with universities/IROs** as a direct result of the programme.

Whether partnerships were described as successful or not, staff learnt what ingredients are needed for a successful partnership and have gained confidence in knowing how to work with these kinds of partners in the future. Staff also commonly reported that they had shifted perception about the valuable contribution that libraries could make to a partnership with an academic institution.

Moving activity online was commonly suggested as having increased staff confidence in engaging the public, as controversial topics became easier to facilitate and discuss (for example exploiting video conferencing tools meant active participation could be better managed, and greater privacy was enabled for those taking part who could elect to turn their camera off in sensitive moments). But it also presented the opportunity for library staff to work more closely with partners as video conferencing became a more convenient way to hold meetings, especially for those with university or research partners further afield.

Library services who worked with cultural or community partners in addition to academic ones also described particular benefits – from logistics and legacy, such as expanding their contact book of local community organisations, through to enhancing the product offer, for example by bringing a creative energy to their public engagement process. **Many of these community/cultural partnerships were developed for the first time** and some were unintended partnerships which grew organically as the project evolved.

Whilst it is difficult to robustly demonstrate that the status of public libraries in the local authorities has been enhanced as a result of Engaging Libraries, **some services reported positive impacts on profile and perception within their overarching organisations and beyond** and 88% of staff said they **feel better equipped to articulate the value of their library service** as a direct result of the programme. The findings also indicate that being part of a project run by well-respected funders and regarded academic institutions has helped raise the profile of library services.

In addition, there have been **several important pieces of news coverage** across local, regional, and national newspapers during the project, including in The Guardian<sup>9</sup>; and Redbridge/Newcastle/Kirklees won the Libraries Connected Health and Wellbeing award<sup>10</sup> for their Death Positive Library project. In addition, some services have built a solid evidence base as a result of their public engagement work which they are now using to lobby for future funding; however there has been a reliance on academic partner reports or papers rather than in-house evaluation.

It is also difficult to assess whether the partnerships developed by libraries with community/academic partners will be sustainable in the long run. However, examples exist where **partners are already continuing to work together as a direct result of the programme** and **88% of library staff stated they were either 'very likely' or 'likely' to continue working with their academic partner**. This is positive; however caution must be drawn with these results as library staff highlighted caveats such as staff capacity, funding, and strategic priorities.

There were **limited suggested improvements around the Engaging Libraries programme**, which reflects the project team's hard work in providing open lines of communication, ongoing

9 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/25/uk-libraries-become-death-positive-with-books-and-art-on-dying>

10 <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-connected-awards-winners-announced>

support and a relevant, Covid-responsive, development programme for library staff. Where suggestions were made these typically related to the choice of cohort-wide communication method, for example some services had problems using Yammer (the social media platform chosen originally); the disappointment of being unable to have a 'natural' networking environment that would ordinarily have happened in the planned face to face development programme sessions; or the need to streamline support materials and toolkits.

### 6.3 Partners

A total of **57 external partnerships<sup>11</sup> were developed through Engaging Libraries and 40 of these were completely new.** Library staff and partners suggested common critical success factors for partnerships which can be used within the 'Engaging the public with research' [toolkit<sup>12</sup>](#). **Six specific library services experienced difficulties with their academic partner,** and this was attributed to impacts on the university and/or researchers due to Covid-19, staff leaving or no longer being in their role, and finding little common ground. These factors led to delays in project design and delivery, however the library services were resilient: they adapted and found new academic partners or different ways to continue delivering despite their setbacks. The project team helped all libraries experiencing challenges with their partners, and the support and flexibility shown with this was very much appreciated by library staff.

Some projects have enabled researchers to engage the public in collaborative ways, however, there are also examples where a more advisory role has predominantly been held by the academic partner. Delivering two-way engagement at the more interactive end of the scale was a challenge for some of the cohort. Notwithstanding this, **71% of academic partner survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they had been able to collaborate, create or decide something with library users as a direct result of the project.** This is particularly positive given the restrictions in place and challenges that arose with social connections as a result of the pandemic.

Alongside examples where the design of the public engagement activity was co-created between partners, library staff and the public, there are also examples where **new community partner connections were brought in to help sense-check content and help deliver an audience-focused product.**

It is evident that like their library staff counterparts, **partners enjoyed being involved in Engaging Libraries,** with the majority of suggested improvements attributed to the pandemic rather than anything within the project team's control. One particularly reoccurring comment was the impact of Covid-19 delays on 'squeezing' the delivery time of the programme. This resulted in it being delivered at a busy time for academic staff, reduced the available time for promotion, and increased the pressure on delivery. Partners also commonly suggested that they would have benefitted from greater networking opportunities with the full programme cohort or direct contact with the funder.

11 Partners include those who are academic/IROs, cultural and community. Note that multiple researchers from one academic institution are counted as one partner.

12 A libraries toolkit for public engagement is being developed by the development consultant and many of these practical recommendations would be useful to include or draw upon within the content. The 'Engaging the public with research' toolkit is available on the Libraries Connected website at <https://public-engagement.librariesconnected.org.uk/>

Having the opportunity to collaborate with libraries and essentially run a 'live' public engagement project (with permission to fail and learn) helped to grow confidence and build skills. Indeed, partners **learned unexpected skills such as digital literacy and experimentation** in a similar way to library staff. For example, the ability to try out new digital public engagement methods that would not previously have been considered was regularly referenced, and there is evidence to show that confidence in digital delivery has increased.

Furthermore, 85% of academic partner survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they can describe what effective public engagement 'looks like' more confidently as a result of the programme. And indicatively, the evaluation finds that these **new skills will potentially benefit other public engagement work** outside of the programme for both academics and cultural/community partner projects.

**Engaging Libraries has encouraged researchers to be more audience focused**, with 85% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they had been inspired to be more responsive to the needs/interests of the community in the future. Findings also suggest that working with public libraries on this project has **helped partners to reach new audiences** (93%), and although definitions of 'new' may vary (e.g. audience type vs number), **85% either strongly agreed or agreed that they have increased their understanding of how libraries can help reach new audiences as a direct result of this work.**

This programme has positively demonstrated to academic partners the valuable role that libraries can play in audience engagement and how it can contribute towards their Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment process<sup>13</sup>. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that **some research and published work will be influenced by participation in Engaging Libraries.** There are other learning legacies, for example from school partners who intend to use the educational content developed through Engaging Libraries in ongoing curriculum delivery.

Another key outcome is the new knowledge and confidence about libraries gained by partners, who **suggest that they have increased their confidence in working with libraries**, especially in specific areas such as library logistics, and marketing to new audiences. There has been an **increase in knowledge of the logistics required to work effectively with libraries**, and an understanding of the difficult context and environment in which they are currently operating within.

As a result, the evaluation finds **there is a high propensity for partners to work with libraries in the future** (with 75% of survey respondents stating they would be 'very likely' to work with their library service partner again and 25% 'likely'. 100% of survey respondents also described their partnership as a successful one). Although funding dependent, this is a positive outcome and indicates that partners are being introduced to, and inspired by, libraries who are now seen as a viable partner. There are several plans in place for partners (whether academic, cultural or community based) to continue working with the library services and in certain cases this has already started.

<sup>13</sup> The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK's system for assessing the excellence of research in UK higher education providers (HEPs). The REF outcomes are used to inform the allocation of around £2 billion per year of public funding for universities' research (source: UKRI). Researchers are encouraged to submit case studies featuring public engagement as a route to evidencing impact within their REF submission.

There is also some evidence to show that **researchers/universities have benefited from being introduced to new community partners** who they would not ordinarily have independently approached or had access to. This has opened up a range of new contacts, recruitment possibilities for future work, and increased social media followings. There is evidence to suggest that some cultural/community partners have a propensity to work independently with their project academic in the future (i.e. without their library partner).

**Universities have been given the opportunity to demonstrate their relevancy and civic role through Engaging Libraries**, however further exploration with the public would be needed to robustly demonstrate any major impact. That aside, 93% of academic partners either strongly agreed or agreed that the project has helped them strengthen their relationship with the community in some way. Academic partners also commonly suggested that **the programme is likely to have started changing public perception** about how academic research can be used, and why it is important and relevant to those outside of institutions.

## 6.4 Process evaluation

### Aims and ambitions

- The programme aims were ambitious but were the right ones to select as they were exciting, flexible, valuable, and easy to understand for grantees. Library services were not expected to achieve all aims within one project, so having three very large, broad aims (rather than narrow prescriptive ones) gave agency to library teams and the flexibility to deliver and achieve an end result – especially needed during the pandemic.
- The aims allowed library services to undertake innovative, potentially provocative (i.e. challenging or completely different to normal) work within their settings.
- During the process of designing the programme, the team thoughtfully considered the different types of partnerships between library and universities that might be possible, and how best to encourage these partnerships to be established and take place. In recognition of the fact that Carnegie UK's wider work was to encourage and build up the libraries sector and noticing a historic trend whereby universities tend to hold more power in a library/university partnership, the programme consciously worked to support library services as the lead partners rather than the academic partners. This was reflected in the fact that applications were open only to library applicants, and funding was provided to library services for them to manage. Although there were pros and cons to this approach, it also meant that library services could apply without an academic partner in place and could be matched with a partner post selection.

### Selection and application

- An expression of interest phase is likely to have led to greater work for the project team but may have lowered expectations/disappointment for unsuccessful applicants and enabled any concerns or issues to be identified at an earlier stage.

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## 14 Engaging Libraries Phase 2 - Findings in Brief

- Spending time carefully creating the application form paid dividends as it provided the right and relevant information on which the project team could make decisions about which services to select.
- Given that the programme aims were broad and ambitious, the criteria were consequently quite complex. Projects were difficult to compare given the variety of topics, approaches, and methods. There was also variation in readiness, ideas, understanding and capability within the applications, with some noticeable regional differences. In addition, the Advisory Group was asked to consider a group of secondary criteria including the geographical spread of projects across the UK and a mix of libraries participating in terms of their size and setting. The programme team reflected that applying this substantial set of criteria to the applications was not straightforward, but that consideration of all of these different factors created a portfolio that was reflective of the full breadth of programme aims, rather than being grouped around one emphasis.
- To ensure that this process felt fair and robust, it was important that the criteria had been given considerable thought and presented clearly in the application pack. It was also crucial having the expert Advisory Group in place, along with adequate time, briefing materials, and leadership to help them make the selection decisions. Whilst this was a considerable investment of time and energy, which could have been reduced by having simpler criteria, the project team felt that the criteria enabled applications to be submitted from services who do not regularly (or at all) undertake this type of work, and indeed for some of those to be funded by the programme.
- Some projects had a strong vision about what they wanted their project to achieve, but not how they could deliver it.


### Leading projects through a pandemic

- The evidence demonstrates that the funders did their best to be flexible and fair to participating projects through extending their delivery in response to the pandemic.
- The flexible, kind, and caring approach taken by Carnegie UK has potentially strengthened their relationship with participating organisations and built positive brand perception.
- As a result of delivering Engaging Libraries under extenuating circumstances, the Carnegie UK project team and external consultants have developed new skills and knowledge – including strategic planning (and re-planning) during difficult times.
- The project team and external evaluator reduced the expectation on library services to undertake their own evaluation using frameworks that teams had been trained to produce. Embedding creative evaluation did not therefore happen across the board as had originally been the intention, although there is evidence within the data to show that certain services developed new evaluation skills which will leave a lasting legacy.



- Aims and outcomes were kept the same; projects were reassured about quality rather than quantity of public engagements given Covid-19 restrictions.
- Some projects finished earlier than others and the variation of timelines made it difficult to plan evaluation around a mid and end point as these differed between projects.
- Whilst quality was reportedly high from the perspective of participants, two-way engagement was not always able to be delivered. It is difficult to suggest any other support or changes that may have helped with this, because staff were delivering in such challenging circumstances.
- It is important to contextualise the environment in which services were operating in and celebrate that they were still able to successfully deliver something with high public satisfaction ratings during a pandemic, and under other ongoing pressures such as funding cuts, restructures, and reduced capacity. It has shown the resilience of libraries and their staff.

## Communication

- Projects described the approach by Carnegie UK as excellent, friendly, flexible, and approachable, with one library staff member positively describing the funder as an 'enabler'. It was frequently commented that Carnegie UK's approach, ethos and general communication set a very different tone to other funders, which in turn led to a different type of relationship with grantees.
  - Further support from Carnegie UK would be welcomed by library services to help raise the profile of the innovative work that has been delivered.
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## 7. Recommendations

The Engaging Libraries project was successfully delivered under incredibly difficult conditions for library staff, partners, the project team, and consultants. The findings demonstrate the ultimate impact that the programme has had on various intended beneficiaries, but perhaps unexpectedly, it has exemplified the resilience of library services and their staff.

The below resulting recommendations should therefore be read within the context in which projects delivered, and the spirit of resilience they showed throughout the programme. All recommendations are drawn directly from the findings.



Good quality, highly satisfactory public engagement activities can happen in digital spaces, with the right digital literacy, onboarding support and facilitation skills of library staff. Libraries should be encouraged to carefully consider the online customer journey from booking to post-event attendance, to ensure that opportunities around communication and future marketing potential are exploited.



With the right training and support, library staff can achieve substantial changes in delivery methods as demonstrated by the shift to digital. The wealth of digital literacy learnt from this experience should be shared with the libraries sector as part of the 'Engaging the public with research' [toolkit](#) and can build on the digital support guide published in summer 2020<sup>14</sup>. In addition, there is best practice to share with the sector in terms of change management as witnessed in the acceleration to digital delivery. The willingness to innovate, adapt and take risks has ultimately shown just what is possible, and the positive difference it can make for audiences and access.



Library-run public engagement activities do not always have to happen in a library space to have positive results. This programme provides a variety of best practice examples which demonstrate how taking a product outside a library setting, such as into a community can have multiple benefits including audience development, changing the perception of what libraries offer, and building brand. Furthermore, the examples that exist from Engaging Libraries of co-created public engagement work should be shared more widely in the overall cultural sector; this would be especially useful for those going through the design stage of the public engagement planning process as outlined by the NCCPE.



It will be important for library services to find ways to continue delivering activities online or in a blended way. This would equitably meet the needs of those shielding and with the least ability to attend in-person; and will continue to open up new audiences. It will also manage the expectations of users who have experienced a new way to engage with libraries and may be proactively looking for more content.

14 [https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie\\_uk\\_trust/2020/12/08112724/Delivering-Public-Engagement-Digitally.pdf](https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2020/12/08112724/Delivering-Public-Engagement-Digitally.pdf)



It is beneficial (and essential) to run a staff development programme alongside the delivery of a public engagement project such as this to increase confidence and model best practice, as it ultimately impacts the success of delivery. This should be built into any future public engagement projects on this scale with multiple partners, whether libraries or otherwise.



Libraries continue to be reliant on one-off funding grants to continue delivering public engagement to this standard and variety. Ongoing support for libraries (and partners) to source such funds may be required if it is not centrally invested by their governing organisations. Expectations of the general public also need to be managed, especially where the same level of activity is no longer able to be offered.



Embedding evaluation as a core activity and encouraging library teams to utilise the evaluation resources supplied during Engaging Libraries may support services to more readily measure what matters and demonstrate their value in future projects. Utilising the latest sector support resources, such as the Centre for Cultural Values Evaluation Principles<sup>15</sup> along with the NCCPE's online guides to evaluating public engagement<sup>16</sup> should be encouraged. A guide to the available latest evaluation support tools is provided as part of the 'Engaging the public with research' [toolkit](#).



At the time of writing, the legacies of partnerships may not be reflective of the ultimate eventuality. The project team could consider contacting participating library services in six months' time to more accurately assess whether partnerships have indeed continued, and in what ways. This would be particularly useful and interesting to monitor with the Death Positive Library movement, and the impact to which this proliferates the sector as a direct result of the work undertaken by Redbridge/Newcastle/Kirklees and their academic partners should their AHRC bid be successful.



The funders should draw on the evaluation findings including the critical success factors (key ingredients) for successful partnerships for the 'Engaging the public with research' [toolkit](#).



Engaging Libraries was a large investment in the delivery, capacity, and capability (upskilling) of staff in the sector. The resulting learning from the programme should therefore not only sit within an internal-facing environment, but should be selectively shared through sector think-pieces, conferences, and papers both in the UK and internationally to demonstrate the potential of libraries and the impact they can have on public, library staff and partners.

15 <https://www.culturalvalue.org.uk/our-work/evaluation/evaluation-principles/>

16 <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/do-engagement/evaluating-public-engagement>



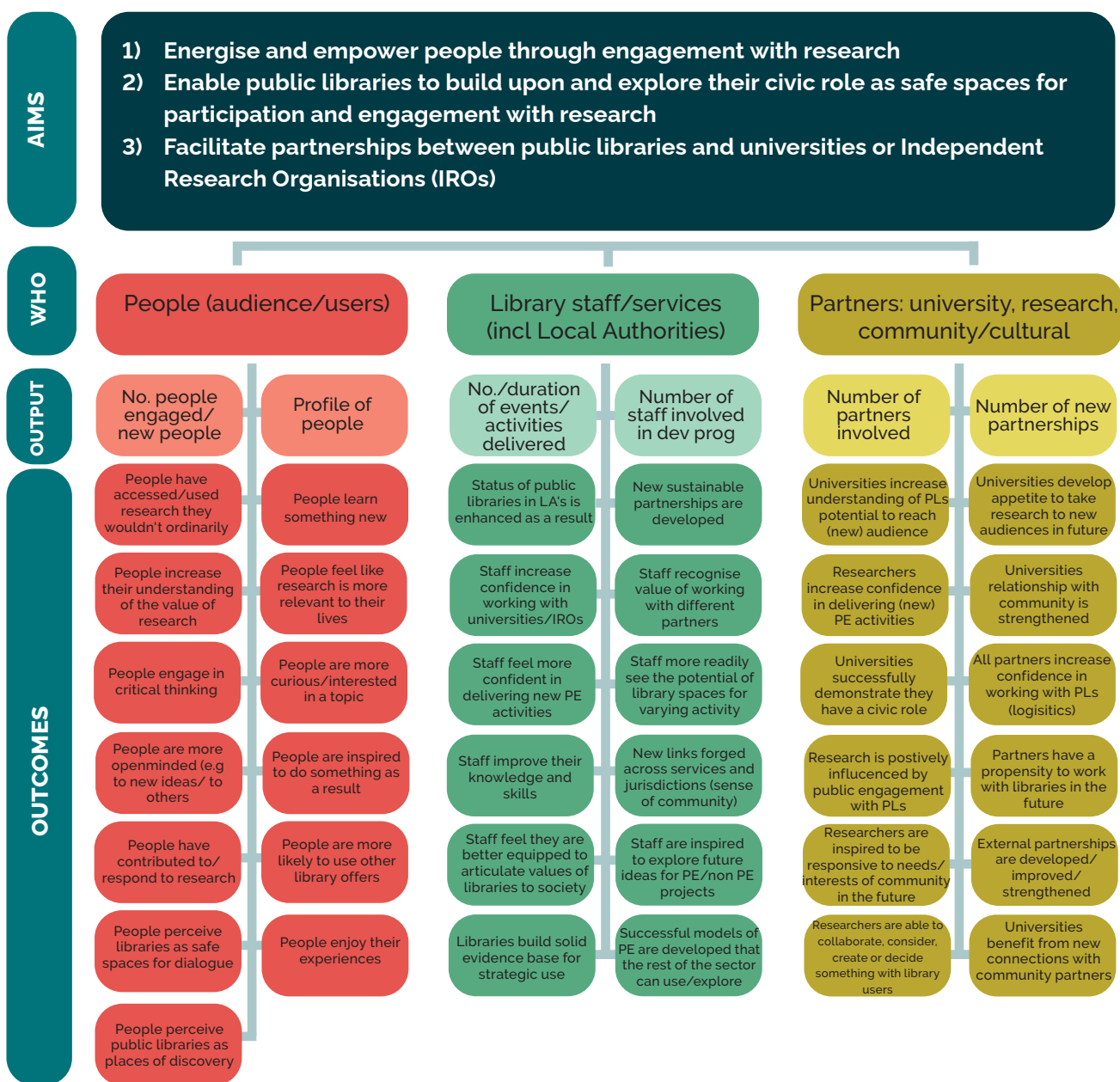
There are opportunities to take the evaluation findings and use them for advocacy and lobbying purposes. Equally, where particular approaches have failed and been learnt from, these can be shared to improve delivery within the wider sector.

## 7.1 Project aims summary

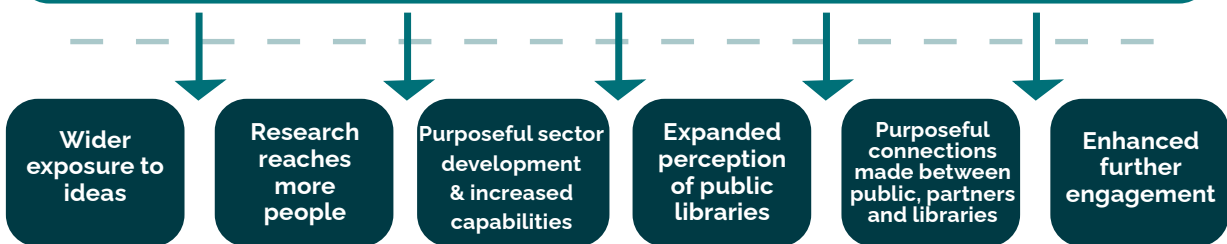
Project aim	Status
Energise and empower people through engagement with research about health, society and culture in one of the following ways: a. Enable people to access, use and respond to research b. Enable people to value and think critically about research c. Enable people to play a role in formulating research	Achieved
Enable public libraries to build upon and explore their civic role as safe spaces for participation and engagement with research.	Achieved
Facilitate partnerships between public libraries and universities or Independent Research Organisations (IROs).	Achieved

## 8. Further information

### Abridged version of the logic model for Engaging Libraries



Long-term impact examples incl. on wider libraries sector and funders (outside scope of this evaluation)



## 9. Engaging Libraries Phase 2 projects

Library service/s	Partner	Topic	Project overview
Manchester	Multilingual Manchester (University of Manchester) Manchester City of Literature Manchester Museum	Multilingualism/ language diversity	This project celebrated language diversity in Manchester - one of the most linguistically diverse cities in Europe. The aims were to bring people together to learn about the wealth of languages and cultures that make up the city, to share their own experiences and to promote understanding and empathy across communities. The project was designed to reach new communities, people who hadn't used the library before, and post Covid lockdowns, to re-engage with local communities bringing people back into the library.
Libraries NI	Armstrong Storytelling Trust University of Ulster Beyond Skin	Hair as culture and identity	Turning Heads aimed to explore the theme of hair as an important part of our identity and culture. Hair can say a lot about who we are, whether we have it or not, choose to colour or not, cover it or not. Hair can identify our taste in music or fashion and can carry our DNA. Turning Heads aimed to spark conversation and challenge stereotypes while exploring the cultural and societal significance that hair has.

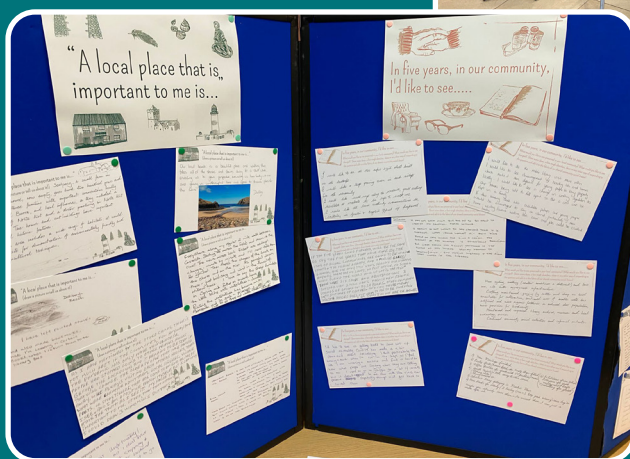
<b>Redbridge/ Kirklees/ Newcastle</b>	University of Northumbria CHOL Theatre The Good Grief Project Kirkwood Hospice Marie Curie The Loss Project	Death and dying	Tickets to the Afterlife was a jointly delivered project in three library services which explored the role of public libraries as death positive spaces where conversations, debates, and explorations about death. By using books, creative activities and social events organised by libraries the project team aimed to create deeper public engagement into questions about death and dying in an accessible and non-threatening way. See more at <a href="https://afterlifetickets.co.uk">https://afterlifetickets.co.uk</a>
<b>West Lothian</b>	Heriot-Watt University Education Services	Co-creation with communities led to an exploration of brain health, body representation, social interaction, robotics, artificial intelligence and more	The aim of Lothian Lugs was to listen to communities to explore how to share cutting edge research with them, and how they can help shape future research. See more at <a href="https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/Lothian-Lugs">https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/Lothian-Lugs</a>
<b>Calderdale Libraries</b>	Calderdale Council Air Quality Management Strategy Group University of Manchester Bolton Brow Primary Academy Sowerby Bridge	Air quality	Something in the Air? engaged members of the public in the West Yorkshire town of Sowerby Bridge with research and issues around air quality and health, empowering them to make a response. See more at <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rOpkbCgdr8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rOpkbCgdr8</a>

<p><b>Fife</b></p>	<p>University of Bristol Tricky Hat ONFife Programming Team NHS Fife Let's Talk Menopause Menopause Café Bread in Fife 5 x freelance individual practitioners</p>	<p>Menopause</p>	<p>Pause not Full Stop aimed to break down the taboos surrounding the menopause and start conversations, making achieving the menopause a natural part of the lifecycle through sharing experiences. The team hoped this would give those transitioning through the menopause the confidence to seek out help if required. See more at <a href="https://www.onfife.com/libraries-archives/pause-not-full-stop/">https://www.onfife.com/libraries-archives/pause-not-full-stop/</a></p>
<p><b>London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham</b></p>	<p>Imperial College London (SCARU) Richard Neville Storyteller London Institute of Medical Sciences Mother and Child Welfare Organisation Addison Community Champions</p>	<p>Self-care</p>	<p>The library service wanted to work with a diverse audience to create exploratory and creative conversations about life-science research and self-care between library audiences and scientists. They also wanted to use the conversations to create new ideas, new partnerships and a 'street corner' engagement with science.</p>
<p><b>Treorchy Library</b></p>	<p>The University of Liverpool Parc and Dare Theatre Treorchy Primary School</p>	<p>Fake news</p>	<p>The project aimed to raise awareness of the topic of Fake News and to promote and develop critical thinking among participants, who included Year 6 school children and other members of the local community. See more at <a href="http://www.fakenewsimmunitywebsite.co.uk/">http://www.fakenewsimmunitywebsite.co.uk/</a></p>



<b>Falmouth, Cornwall</b>	FoAM (now known as Then Try This) ECEHH	Climate, environment, and health	Falmouth Libraries worked in collaboration with Then Try This (previously known as FoAM) to learn how to deliver AccessLab workshops, a workshop designed to demystify the world of academic research and show people how to access peer reviewed articles and information. The aims were to reach new library users and to provide new, challenging and quality learning experiences for regular library users and volunteers.
<b>Western Isles</b>	Division of Rural Health, University of Highlands and Islands Science Ceilidh Alice Macleod, project artist Fiona Rennie, photographer and podcaster	Culture and connectivity in rural and socially isolated areas	This project aimed to connect with communities in a meaningful way and give them a voice to express their feelings and hopes for the future through social dreaming. The focus of engagement was the importance of local place, culture, creativity, and community in a rural and remote area. See more at <a href="https://lecheiletogether.wordpress.com/">https://lecheiletogether.wordpress.com/</a>
<b>City of London - Barbican Library</b>	Made by Play Goldsmiths University	Social isolation	This project aimed to engage the community with research on the concept of 'bumping spaces' as an antidote to social isolation by encouraging informal, playful interactions that might spark connection. They also wanted to encourage people to think of the library as a bumping space.

<p><b>Glasgow</b></p>	<p>University of Edinburgh University of Dundee Connecting Scotland Education Services – Early Years Claire Mills/Listen Think Draw</p>	<p>Children's literacy</p>	<p>Sharing Stories enabled parents/carers of children aged 3-5 years to engage with and critically assess the research around early brain and literacy development, to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subject and to produce a practical resource to share their learning with other parents/carers.</p>
<p><b>London Borough of Sutton</b></p>	<p>University of Birmingham Adam Dixon Glenthorne High School Stanley Park Junior School Lucas Maxwell</p>	<p>Misinformation</p>	<p>In an ever-increasing digital age, Newsflash!'s core aim was to explore how young people experience and react to fake news. The project team wanted to create a digital platform where this specific target audience could explore the topic of fake news/news misinformation, and which would also reinforce the civic role libraries hold as safe spaces for participation and engagement with research. View the game at <a href="https://www.newsflashgame.org/">https://www.newsflashgame.org/</a></p>
<p><b>London Borough of Camden</b></p>	<p>UCL Artist Richard DeDomenici</p>	<p>Place shapers/ Yourtopia</p>	<p>The project sought to engage people from three local areas in Camden to discuss the past, present and future of their communities. The aim was to draw this together with events and exhibitions that could be shared with a wider audience. See more at <a href="http://yourtopia.uk/">http://yourtopia.uk/</a></p>



Images from Engaging Libraries project activities: City of London, Hammersmith and Fulham, Redbridge/Newcastle/Kirklees, Calderdale and Western Isles

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