Over 99% of libraries now offer free access to WiFi

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Following a £2.6 million Government investment over 99% of libraries in England offer free access to WiFi. Arts Council England managed the successful delivery of the programme within the time and budget available.

Achieving this goal was one of the recommendations in William Sieghart's Independent Library Report for England (November 2014) and one of the priorities set for the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said: "I'm delighted that Government investment has made free WiFi available in over 99% of libraries. This move will help ensure that libraries continue to meet the needs of their local communities as a valued asset at the heart of towns and cities across England."

In delivering the project the Arts Council provided local authorities with the funds to either install new or upgrade existing equipment, allowing them the flexibility to integrate the new facility with their existing systems. They have been encouraged to make it as easy as possible for people to get logged on.

Brian Ashley, Director Libraries, Arts Council England commented: "Switching on the network alone means that libraries enable busy people to get connected and do what they need to do. But that's only the start. Libraries across the country are showing that, alongside individual use of the new facilities, this creates new opportunities for people to learn, create and share with others."

To illustrate what this means, the Arts Council commissioned five projects in a range of communities across the country. Libraries in rural Suffolk supported schools to deliver the Key Stage 2 computing curriculum. Manchester Central Library used 'hidden WiFi' to encourage people to discover library digital resources and create their own. In Cambridgeshire groups of older people meet informally to develop their confidence in using tablets and smartphones.

Ben Lee, Shared Intelligence, said: "For 150 years, England's public libraries have been places where anyone can learn, regardless of age, background, or means. Free WiFi is a powerful tool for enabling learning – but not just by turning it on for the public to use. Rather, our best public libraries are using WiFi proactively and with real social impact – by harnessing the imagination and digital skills of their staff and users."

More detail about these case studies are contained in a report written by Shared Intelligence published by the Arts Council today. You can read it HERE

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