

Economic Evaluation of the British Library

April 2013

We know that the British Library is much-loved and valued – for its collections, staff expertise, exhibitions and as a bustling public building – but this is often hard to capture and quantify. This evaluation has helped us to measure and articulate this in economic terms by quantifying the value that our users place on our services.

Roly Keating

Chief Executive, British Library

The effective use of resources has never been more crucial for public sector organisations. Nor has the need to generate value for the economy.

With this in mind, the British Library undertook an evaluation of its services to determine how it generates economic value for its users and the wider public. This updated a similar study from 2003.

The evaluation shows how the Library is valued by researchers, business, academics, schools and visitors. It also demonstrates that the Library has a value to those who do not directly use its services.

The findings of the evaluation will be used to inform internal strategic planning processes. It provides important evidence that the British Library makes efficient use of the public money it receives and generates a high return on investment.

The British Library has 'existence' or 'institutional' value to people and the evaluation helps it to express this in the language of economics as well as individual stories and experiences.

Dr Dave O'Brien

Lecturer, Cultural Industries, City University

This study provides a comprehensive overview of the British Library's economic value to the UK through the application of rigorous cost benefit analysis, an approach which is rarely applied to such institutions. In doing so, it produces a clear illustration of the return which society's investment in the Library provides to the UK.

Andrew Tessler

Economist, Oxford Economics

Key findings

- The economic value the Library delivers for society is £5 for every £1 invested.
- The Library generates a net economic value of £419m for its users and UK society as a whole.
- The benefit cost ratio increased to 4.9 from 4.4 in 2003. Accounting for value placed on the Library internationally, the benefit cost ratio is 5.1.
- The value of the Library's Reading Rooms as estimated by their users is £70m per annum, including over £20m for the Business & IP Centre which was launched in 2006.
- The value that the public places on the continued existence of the Library is £412.8m per annum.

Case Studies

Alex Hall

PhD student, Centre for the History of Science, Technology & Medicine, University of Manchester

Alex has recently completed his PhD, and was a regular user of the Library's collections throughout his degree. He is interested in the way that the Met Office has communicated with the public, and how its role and public perception has changed since the Second World War. His work creates links between historical events, the current role of the Met Office and its relationship with the press.

Alex has used official documents from other archives but these sources tend to be limited to the facts of the event. He turned to the Library's unique collections of local newspapers to track the public response. He also used the Library's international collections to find government documents from around the world and give a wider context to his work.

Sarah Orecchia

UnBEElievable

Sarah launched her company with the support of the British Library's Business & IP Centre. UnBEElievable produces all in one health supplements with natural ingredients and all products are manufactured in the UK.

Sarah used the business collections for research and attended workshops, events and one-to-one advice sessions with the Library's resident experts. She also made useful contacts with other entrepreneurs who are helping the business with marketing and social media.

UnBEElievable products won a Healthy Living Award in 2011 and are stocked in Tesco and Harrods. Sarah is currently being supported to grow her business on the Library's *Innovating for Growth* programme.

Chris Levack

Behavioural Support Teacher
Regent High School

Chris works in the Behaviour Support Unit at Regent High School with students from Year 7–11 who are at risk of exclusion. He has taken part in Young Researchers projects for the past three years and is a member of the British Library Teachers' Network. Chris also brings 'at risk' students to the Library to use the Learning Centre for lessons with his students.

Chris sees a big impact on how the Library setting has improved concentration levels, behaviour and enjoyment of learning and how the projects increase achievement, confidence and attainment levels. Many of the young people live very close to the Library but had never visited previously.

Each Young Researchers project produces new outputs such as a film or fanzine, showing how the Library's cultural and historic collection inspires new creative work.

A note on methodology

This evaluation was conducted using benefit cost analysis (BCA) within a Total Economic Valuation (TEV) framework. This calculated the total benefits of the British Library divided by its total costs to society (grant in aid, donations and externalities). The TEV framework took account of market-traded commodities and non-traded values (including 'use values' and 'non-use' values) in assessing the benefits of the Library.

Assessments were made of the Reading Rooms, online services, Document Supply, the UK Research Reserve, onsite learning activities and the exhibitions programme. This was undertaken through analysis of financial information and user/visitor figures. It also included analysis of 2,065 onsite and online Reading Room surveys, 1,400 online surveys from website users and 220 online surveys from Document Supply customers.

A representative sample of 1,200 people was also surveyed to establish the value that the Library holds to those who have never used its services.

The overall methodology is the same as the British Library's 2003 study. However there are variations within the analysis of individual services and not all services were included in 2003. For this reason, not all figures are directly comparable.

The evaluation was undertaken in line with accepted Treasury methodology as outlined in the Green Book guidance. It used figures from the 2011/12 financial year and focused primarily on UK-based value. The data collected also allowed a global assessment of value to be developed using an alternative approach.

The study was undertaken by Oxford Economics on behalf of the British Library.

Further information

The Economic Evaluation is available on the British Library website at www.bl.uk/economic-value

For further information on the results of the survey or the methodology, please contact:

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