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# Gaming in Libraries

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A survey of the UK

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Sarah McNicol & Carl Cross

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## Introduction

Gaming in libraries can be controversial, especially with the current financial constraints libraries are facing<sup>1</sup>. However, there is currently little evidence about the provision of gaming resources and activities (electronic and traditional), or about the potential benefits and difficulties of promoting gaming in libraries.

On 12th August 2010, an online survey was launched to capture data about the extent of, and support for, gaming activities in libraries across all sectors in the UK. The survey remained open until 10<sup>th</sup> September.

The idea for the survey was based on work carried out at the Library Game Lab at Syracuse in the United States<sup>2</sup>. Since 2007, the Lab has been collecting data about gaming in libraries in the United States. Some of the questions in the UK survey were based on those devised by Scott Nicholson and his colleagues, with some adaptations for a UK audience.

An email asking for libraries to complete the survey was sent to a number of email lists including LIS-LINK, LIS-PUB-LIBS, YLG-LIST, Games in Libraries UK, Games in Libraries (US), Graphic Novels in Libraries UK, Virtual Worlds and Serious Games. It was also sent to a representative from all UK public library authorities, plus a number of schools library services and Games Workshop. The request was also mentioned on a number of blogs and Twitter feeds.

## Responses

A total of 117 responses were received. Public libraries (63%) and school libraries (27%) were the most heavily represented sectors. The number of responses from each sector is given in the table below.

Sector	Number of responses	% of responses
Public	74	63%
School	32	27%
College	6	5%
University	3	3%
Joint use	1	1%
Special	1	1%

N=117

The geographical distribution of responses is given in the table below. London (17%), the South East (16%), the West Midlands, the North West and Scotland (all 14%) were the regions providing the greatest number of responses.

<sup>1</sup> For an example of the current debate, see

<http://communities.cilip.org.uk/blogs/update/archive/2010/06/16/shouldn-t-libraries-exploit-this-popular-interest-in-gaming.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> see <http://gamelab.syr.edu/>

Region	Number of responses	% of responses
Channel Islands	1	1%
East Midlands	4	3%
Eastern	6	5%
London	20	17%
North East	4	3%
North West	17	14%
Scotland	16	14%
South East	19	16%
South West	7	6%
West Midlands	16	14%
Wales	3	3%
Yorkshire	2	2%
Unknown	2	2%

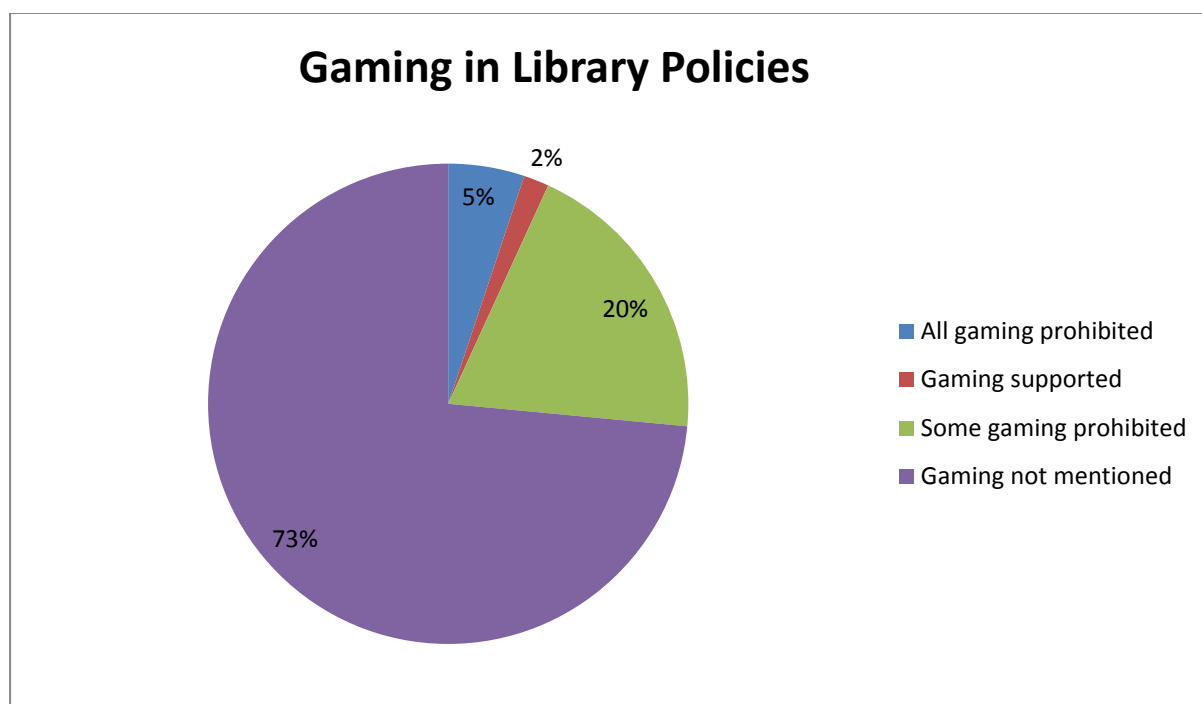
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N=117

## Findings

### Policies

The first question asked, was whether the library had a policy relating to gaming. The responses given are in the chart below.



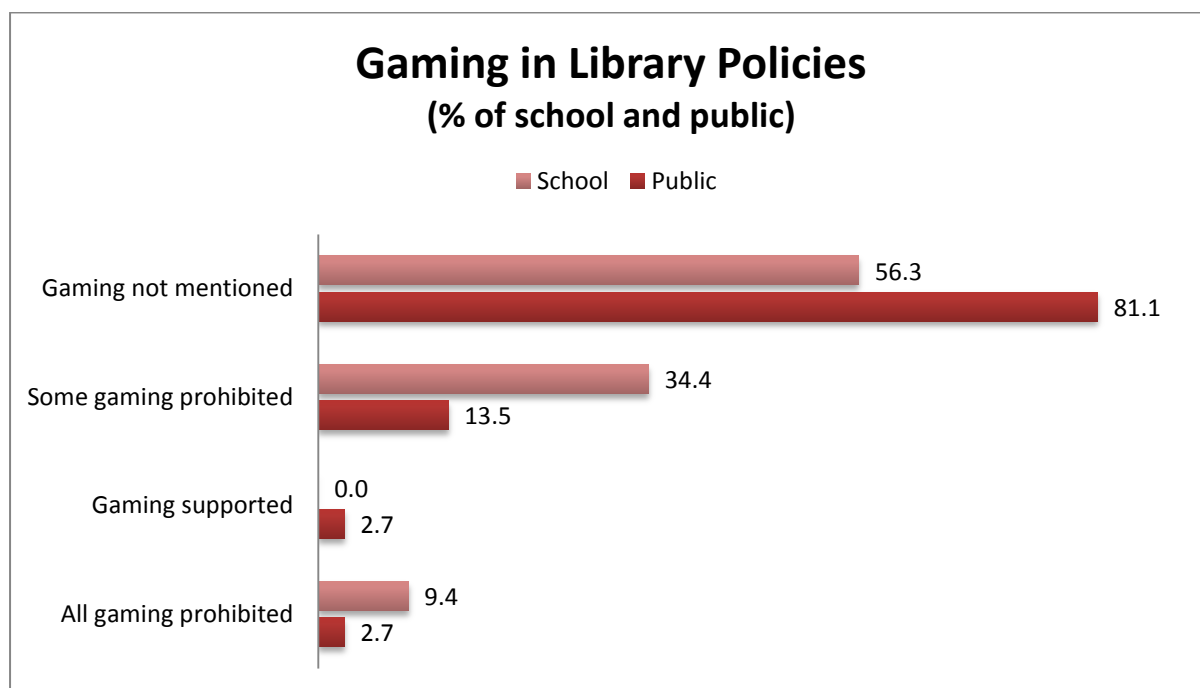
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In almost three-quarters of cases, respondents said gaming is not mentioned in library policies. In one-fifth of cases some gaming is prohibited. Just 2% of respondents said that their library’s policy supports all types of gaming. Most of the restrictions relate to PC games. The ways in which these might be restricted include:

- No PC games allowed (6)
- PC games only allowed if for educational purposes (5)
- Filters (4)
- Gaming on PCs only allowed outside lesson times (4)
- Gaming allowed if PCs not required by another user (2)
- Gaming only allowed on certain PCs (2)
- Gaming allowed provided other users are not disturbed (2)
- Gaming allowed at librarian's discretion (2)
- Gambling not allowed (1).

Only one respondent said there was a restriction on board games and this was because the library was currently too busy.

The responses to this question from public and school libraries (the two main sectors represented in the survey) were analysed separately. This indicated that gaming is less likely to be mentioned in public library policies compared to schools where a more definite stance is taken in many cases. There were no school libraries where all gaming was supported and in 9%, all gaming was prohibited. This compares to just 3% of public libraries where this was the case. Some gaming was prohibited in 34% of school libraries, compared to just 14% of public libraries.



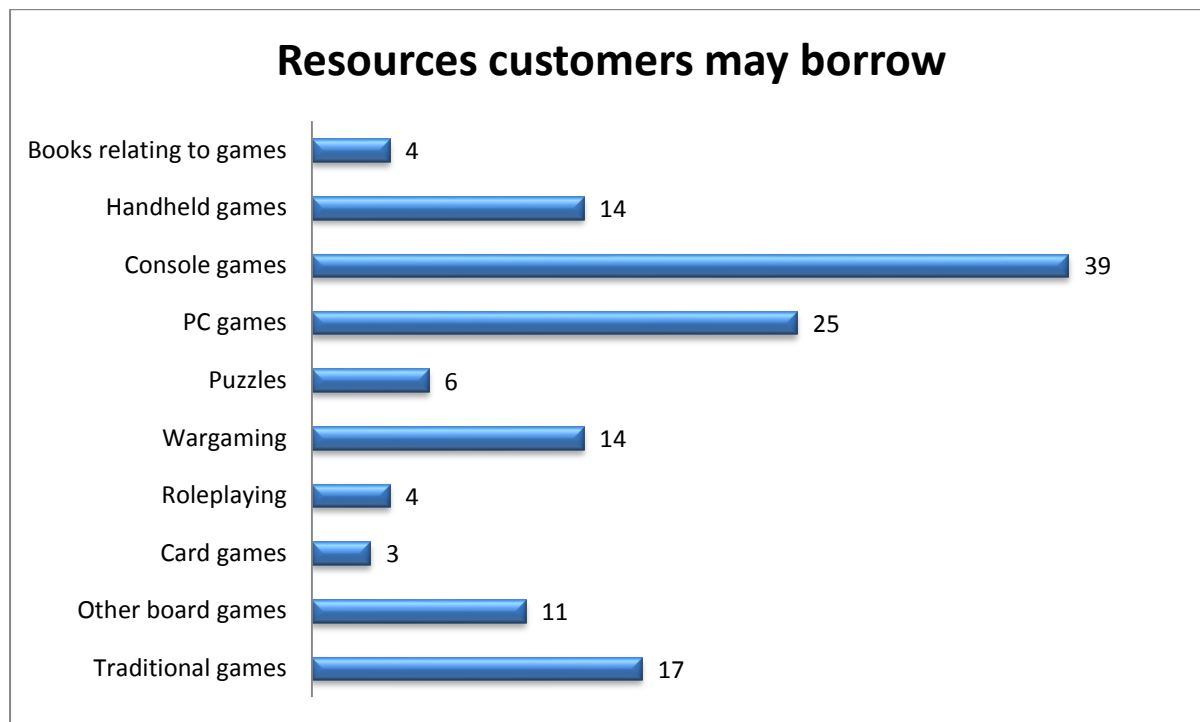
N (school libraries)=32; N(public libraries)=74

### Gaming resources

Respondents were asked which types of resources customers are allowed to borrow from the library. 69 libraries (59%) provide at least one type of gaming resource for customers to borrow. Console games are the most common resource customers can borrow; one-third of respondents said their library loaned console games. These are followed in popularity by PC games, which 21% of libraries said customers were allowed to borrow. Traditional games such as draughts and chess

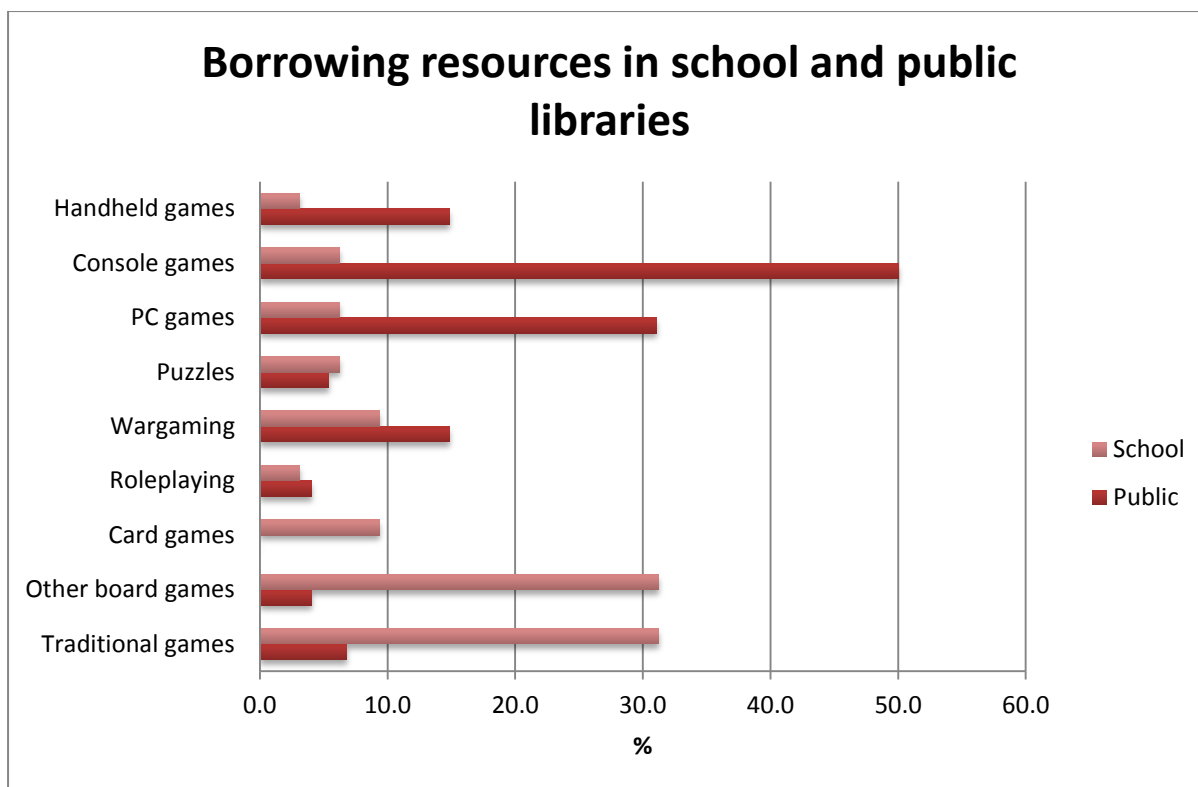
(15%), handheld games and wargaming resources (both 12%) are also popular loan items. Card games and roleplaying resources (both 3%) are the least common gaming resources available for loan.

The graph below shows the responses.



N=117

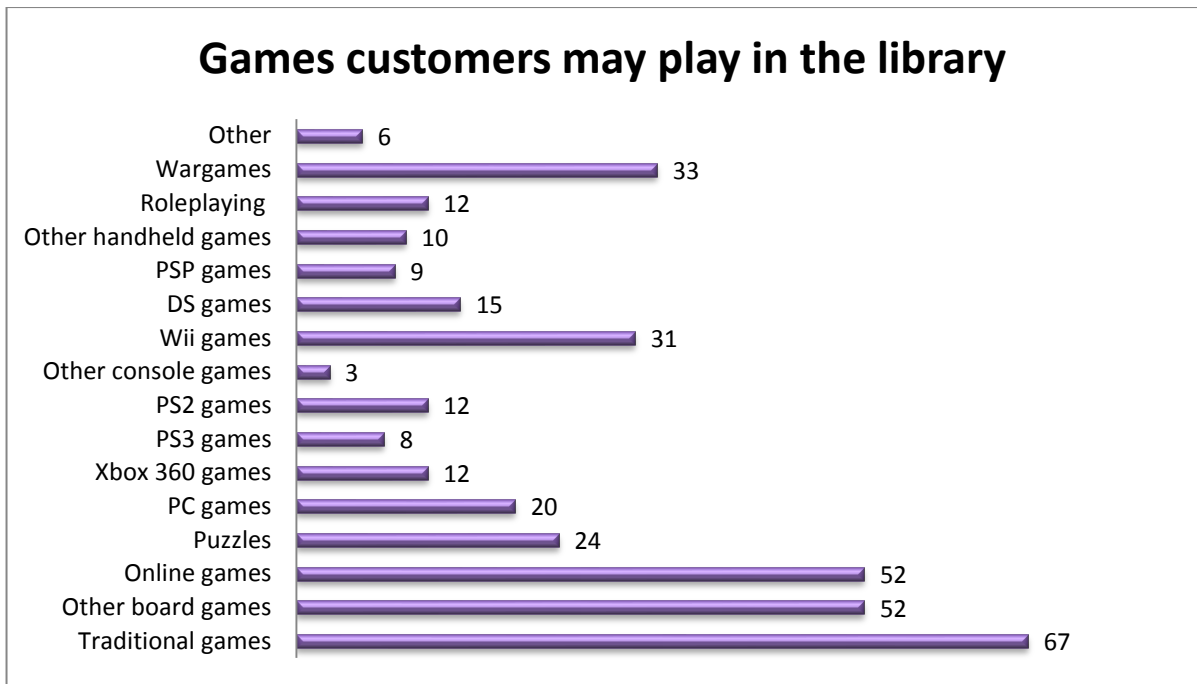
When the results are analysed separately for school and public libraries, there are some noticeable differences. While 68% of public libraries offer at least one type of gaming resource for loan, only 41% of school libraries do so. Traditional and board games are far more likely to be loaned by school libraries (in both cases, around 30% of school libraries compared to around 5% of public libraries). On the other hand, PC, console and handheld games are more likely to be available to borrow from public libraries. The graph below illustrates differences between the two sectors.



N (school libraries)=32; N(public libraries)=74

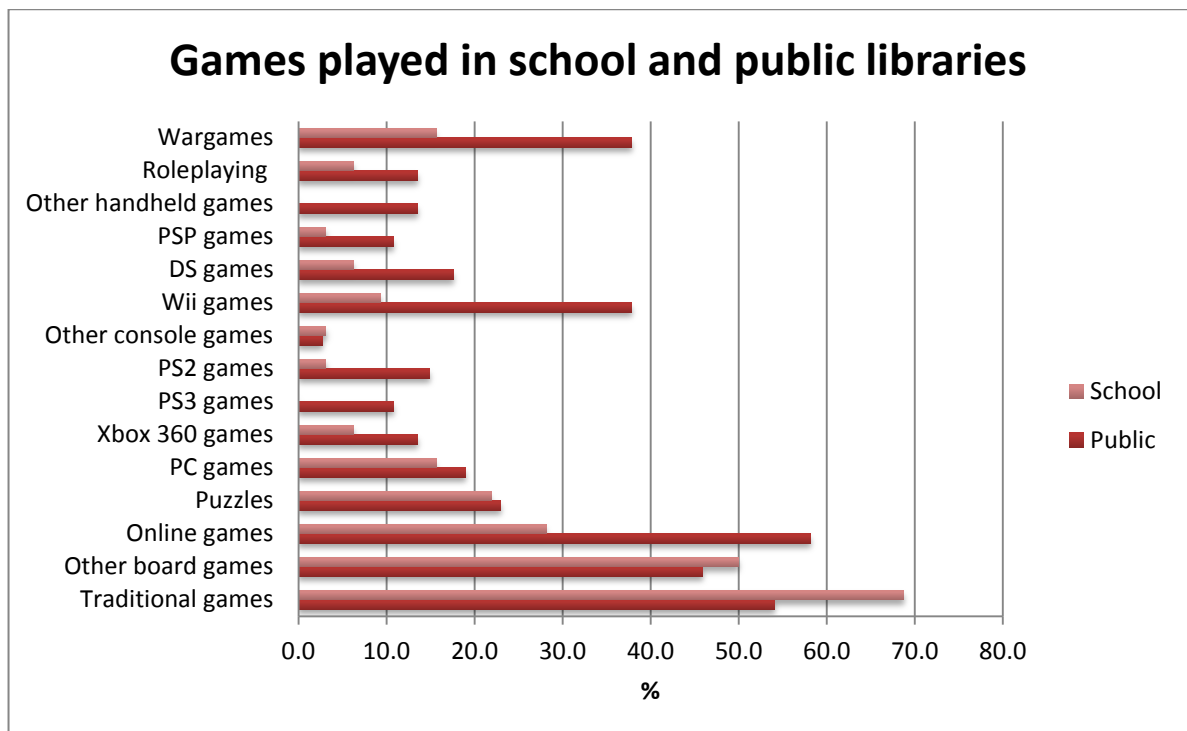
The survey also asked about the gaming resources which customers are allowed to play within the library. 87% of libraries allow customers to take part in some type of gaming activity. When it came to actually playing games in the library, traditional games such as chess and draughts are the most common, being allowed in 57% of libraries surveyed. This is closely followed by other board games and online games (both 44%). Wii (26%), Xbox 360 and PS2 (both 10%) are the most popular console games and DS (13%), the most popular handheld game. Wargames are also popular, being played in 28% of libraries surveyed. In addition, four respondents said that customers are allowed to play their own games in the library. Three libraries only allow games to be played as part of a specific club activity.

The graph below shows number of libraries in the survey which allow customers to play each type of game.



N=117

Again, there are differences between school and public libraries. With the exception of traditional and board games which are more frequently played in school libraries, gaming is more likely to be allowed in public libraries. The greatest differences between the two sectors can be seen in the percentages of libraries allowing wargames, Wii games and online games. This is likely to be due, in part, to differences in resources available, but also in attitudes towards PC use which, according to respondents' comments, is likely to be focused on educational activities and can be more restricted in school libraries.



N (school libraries)=32; N(public libraries)=74

## Gaming activities

71 respondents (61%) reported gaming activities which are run in the library. Details of the types of activities are given in the table below. Warhammer wargaming clubs are the most common activity; these are run in just over one-quarter of the libraries taking part in the survey. Wii clubs are also popular. There are also a number of clubs encouraging the playing of traditional board games and card trading games.

Activity	Number of respondents
Warhammer/Warhammer 40K club	30
Wii club	11
Games Workshop club <sup>3</sup>	10
Board games/traditional games club	7
Yu Gi Oh (card trading)	4
Online gaming club	2
Dungeons and Dragons club	2
Game design group	2
Other gaming club <sup>4</sup>	12

N=71

It is worth noting that some library-based gaming clubs are not run by library staff, but by volunteers (eg parents), third party organisations or the gamers themselves. Several respondents said their library used to run gaming clubs, but these had ceased for a number of reasons including lack of interest, lack of specialist staff and limited space.

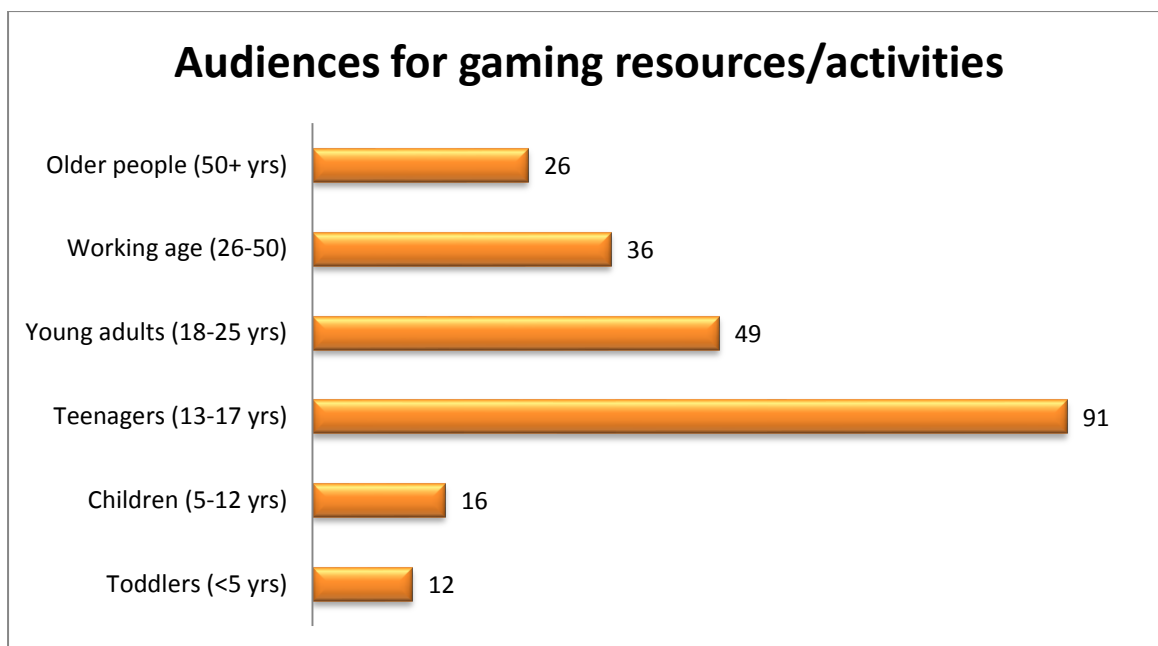
## Age groups

Although teenagers are the most common target audience for gaming resources and activities, there are examples of provision from toddlers to older people.

<sup>3</sup> It is likely that other clubs mentioned (eg Warhammer clubs) are supported by Games Workshop, but only 10 respondents were explicit about this.

<sup>4</sup> Clubs mentioned by just one respondent were: story games, console gaming club, Lord of the Rings club, gaming allowed in homework club, PlayStation competition, battle gamers' club, card trading club, Pokemon club, part of teen club, general games club, treasure hunt.





N=117

78% of survey respondents provided gaming resources or activities for teenagers and 42% targeted young adults. Interesting, working age and older adults were both more common target groups for gaming than children or toddlers.

### Benefits of gaming

Among survey respondents, attitudes towards gaming in libraries were overwhelmingly positive. Only six respondents (5%) said there were no benefits attached to gaming in libraries or did not answer the question. A wide range of social and educational benefits for customers, as well as practical benefits for libraries, were identified.

The most commonly mentioned benefit (29 respondents or 25%) was that gaming resources and activities can attract new users to the library, especially those who might not be regular users otherwise. In addition, 25 respondents (21%) explicitly referred to the value of games to attract young people to libraries and 6 (5%) saw attracting boys as a potential benefit. Spins offs of attracting new users which respondents identified are that they may make return visits to the library and also make use of the other resources and services on offer.

Another important benefit of gaming is its role in supporting social interaction between groups who might not normally come into contact with each other, for example, intergenerational activities. This was mentioned by 25 or 21% of respondents. Linked to this, 13 respondents (11%) felt that games could help to develop social skills such as negotiation, teamwork and understanding the importance of fair play. Gaming is also thought to help to develop literacy, IT and broad mathematical skills (this includes skills such as problem solving, logic and strategic thinking). On the other hand, simply the fact that games are fun was seen as a benefit by 13 (11%) respondents. This is, perhaps, linked to the fact that 8 respondents (7%) believed that gaming could help to change perceptions of the library.

The table below lists the benefits identified in full.

Benefit	Number of respondents
Attracts new users	29
Social interaction	28
Attracts young people	25
Mathematical skills	18
Literacy skills	16
Fun	13
Social skills	13
Encourages use of other resources	12
Challenges perceptions of library	8
A safe space	7
Attracts boys	6
Fine motor skills	5
IT skills	5
Creativity	4
Encourages repeat visits	3
Personal confidence	3
Makes library relevant to community	3
Increases PC use	3
Fits with council policy	1
Wider range of resources	1

N=111

The following quotes are just a few examples from the survey which illustrate the range of benefits respondents identified:

*It brings all types of young people into the centre who may not in the past use a library or be seen in it! Students are more likely to read a book/comic whilst waiting to use the Wii, sometimes even borrow an item. We find that the Wii brings people together from all year groups and all abilities. The Wii creates friendships, especially with the September intake. Also, I find it helps develop their personal and emotional skills with other students.*

*They come in! We use the consoles to attract our young people in. Also Warhammer requires lots of reading to understand and play so we view it as promoting literacy.*

*The boys who do Warhammer were not previous users of the library. Although they don't borrow much it does encourage the use of the library as a cool place to be, thus breaking down barriers.*

*Games workshop games provide (mostly) boys with a reason to read, encourage use of number skills, development of social skills (fair play etc) and fine motor skills (painting).*

*Increased footfall, young people discovering the library who may not have previously used our resources, storytelling in a new way, changed perceptions of library offer, provide a safe space for children in holidays.*

Additional benefits were identified when respondents were asked for further comments at the end of the survey. These included the following:

*Ever since I allowed PCs to be used for games at break times and purchased board games the library has been a much more relaxed atmosphere and pupils have respect for it. It means that as well as reading and school work there is always something available for them to do rather than just stand around and chat. It has also improved discipline.*

*Dungeons & Dragons activities have allowed me to get to know the pupils better and there is a greater respect shown.*

*We love gaming in libraries - it encourages people in to use our services. If they don't use our services now, then they look at libraries in a positive light so when they are ready to use them they feel comfortable to do so.*

### Challenges of encouraging gaming

Despite all the positive aspects of gaming identified, 111 respondents (95%) identified at least one potential difficulty of encouraging gaming in libraries.

The fact that people playing games can create more noise than was usual in the library and the difficulty of managing behaviour was the challenge mentioned most frequently (by 40 respondents, 34%). In particular, it was felt that this can lead to complaints from other users who wanted to concentrate on quieter activities. A lack of space was another common problem, especially when gaming is competing for space with other library activities. Naturally, financial constraints can also limit involvement in gaming.

The need to monitor gaming, especially in school libraries, for example, to ensure that no gambling takes place, is another difficulty. The question of whether gaming is an appropriate activity for a library was mentioned by around one in ten respondents. Furthermore, the fact that there was pressure on PCs which are needed for 'more important' uses was an additional barrier to encouraging gaming.

Staffing gaming activities could be problematic, simply because too few staff are available, but also due to negative attitudes towards gaming. A lack of knowledge of gaming among staff is another problem in some libraries. This can make it difficult to identify suitable resources, for different age groups for example.

Finally, reaching the target audience for gaming activities can be tricky as many are not traditional library users.

The table below lists the issues identified in full.

Difficulty	Number of respondents
Excessive noise/behaviour management	40
Complaints from other users	30
Lack of space	17
Financial constraints	16
Hard to monitor appropriate activities	13
Not appropriate in library	12
Limited PCs	11
Staff availability	10
Negative staff attitudes	8
Damage to games	7
Effective marketing	4
Staff knowledge	4
Identifying suitable resources	3
Could create bad publicity	2
PC filters block games	1

N=111

The following quotes illustrate the problems identified and views of gaming among survey respondents:

*Some games are noisy, particularly plastic components. I wouldn't support electronic games, pupils' spare time at home should be used for this. Priority has to be given to school/homework otherwise the same pupils will hog the machines.*

*The main purpose of the Library as a study/research area would be reduced in the eyes of the users.*

*Could detract from core functions of access to information & reading for pleasure & leisure.*

*Many customers believe money should be spent on traditional resources, especially with enormous budget cuts taking place.*

*Might possibly attract rowdy young people who have no interest in other library resources, and who might disturb other users.*

*Getting the balance right between traditional users who want quiet and book borrowing only, and the new generation of users who want the fun and games.*

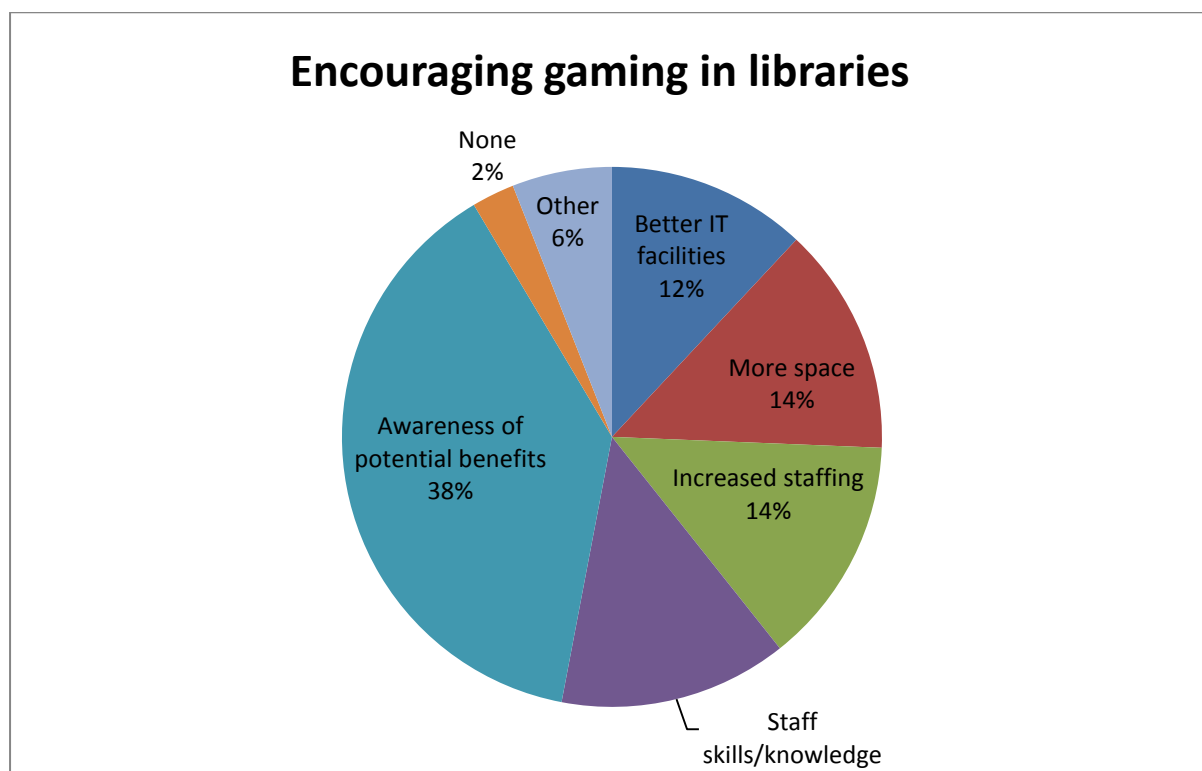
*The snob factor, staff feeling it is not a good use of library space. Members of the public complaining about not being able to use tables as they are covered with gamers.*

*If it involves teenagers there is resistance from some older users and some staff. Also we don't have staff to run regular activities like this or to encourage /recruit volunteers. Teenagers are no longer seen as a priority group.*

### Encouraging gaming in libraries

The survey asked what factor would encourage more gaming in libraries; respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the most important factor, but several commented that most of the factors were equally important. Only three respondents felt that gaming should not be encouraged in libraries, although four others said they were happy with the current level of gaming in their library, so would not want to expand.

A lack of awareness of the potential benefits of gaming among library staff and managers was felt to be the greatest barrier to greater gaming activity in libraries. This was chosen by 38% of survey respondents. Better staff knowledge and skills, more space, increased staffing and better IT facilities were all selected by approximately the same number of respondents (12-14%).



N=117

The other factors identified were:

- Being welcoming and having contacts within the community so that people feel able to use the library as a venue.
- Increased budgets
- Dedicated areas for gaming activities
- A better idea of the purpose of allowing gaming; strong, specific reasons that back up the aim of the library.

### Comparison with US survey findings<sup>5</sup>

Scott Nicholson and his colleagues at the Library Game Lab of Syracuse in the United States have carried out a number of surveys of gaming in libraries in the US. In 2007, they created a web-based survey to collect details of gaming programs across all library sectors. This was the second such survey; the first was carried out the previous year. Some of the questions in the US survey are similar to those in this UK survey, so it is possible to compare the findings. However, it must be remembered that the US survey was carried out three years before the UK survey.

In the US survey, 4% of libraries had a policy which prohibited gaming; this is close to the corresponding figure for the UK, 5%. However, while just half of the US libraries had no mention of gaming in library policies, almost three-quarters of UK libraries said this was the case.

In the US survey, 41% of libraries surveyed loaned at least one type of gaming resource. This is lower than the percentage in the UK survey, where 59% of respondents allowed customers to borrow gaming resources. The percentage of libraries circulating PC games was similar in both countries, 25% in the US compared to 21% in the UK survey. However, the percentage of libraries having console games for circulation differed; this was 33% in the UK, compared to just 19% of US libraries. More libraries in the UK also circulated handheld games, 12%, compared to 5% in the US survey.

In the US survey, console games were the most common type of game to be used in the library, followed by board and card games, but in the UK, it was traditional games, followed by board games and online games. PS2 and Wii games were popular in both countries, but there was more support for Xbox 360 consoles in the UK survey.

### Conclusions

- Just 2% of libraries surveyed prohibit all gaming. However, the extent of support for gaming varies tremendously from library to library.
- Gaming does not currently feature in policy documents for many library services, especially public libraries.
- In general, gaming policy is more clearly set out in school libraries. Here, gaming is more likely to be restricted or prohibited than is the case in public libraries.
- In the absence of policy guidance, gaming activities usually rely on enthusiastic individuals with a personal interest. This can mean continuity is a problem when these members of staff move on.
- Electronic gaming is more prevalent in public libraries, whereas traditional games are more commonly supported in school libraries.
- Most libraries have limited gaming resources available for customers to borrow; for instance, even console games, the most popular resource, are only available in one-third of the libraries surveyed.

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<sup>5</sup> See Preprint of Nicholson, S. (2009). Library gaming census report. <em>American Libraries</em> 40(1/2), 44, available at <http://librarygamelab.org/CensusReport2007ALA.pdf>

- Despite this, there is considerable support for gaming activities which take place within the library.
- Whilst console and PC games are the most common types of resources available for loan, online and traditional games are the most widespread when it comes to playing games in the library.
- Online games are the most common activities in public libraries, but traditional games are more likely to be allowed in school libraries. This may be due to differences in resourcing, but also to attitudes towards PC use, which is more focused on educational activities in most school libraries.
- Wargames clubs, often with the support of Games Workshop, are the most common gaming clubs in libraries. However, there are also a number of Wii clubs in public libraries and traditional games clubs in school libraries.
- The audience for gaming activities in libraries is not just teenagers, but spans the entire age range.
- Benefits for the library include: bringing in new users; attracting hard to reach users; gamers making use of other resources and also making return visits to the library; and helping to change non-users' perceptions of the library.
- The benefits for gamers include: opportunities for social interaction; development of social skills; and improving literacy, numeracy and IT skills.
- Potential problems include: complaints from other library customers, especially about the amount of noise, lack of space and lack of resources.
- Staffing gaming activities can be problematic due to negative attitudes, lack of knowledge; or simply too few staff. Some libraries make use of volunteers to support gaming.
- The negative attitudes of some library staff and managers is a major barrier to the future development of gaming in libraries.

## Recommendations

With increasing interest in gaming, alongside budgetary pressures on libraries, library managers need to take a clearer lead in determining attitudes towards gaming, and its place in library policies. This includes setting out financial resources available, staffing, space and IT provision. Gaming activities are currently reliant on enthusiastic staff. More support is needed for libraries without such knowledgeable staff to support gaming. All library staff and managers should be made aware of the many potential benefits of gaming.

## Appendix 1: Examples of gaming activities in libraries

In response to various questions in the survey, library staff provided details of gaming activities in their libraries. Some more detailed and unusual examples are given below.

- We run computer design workshops for young people as well as offering limited gaming opportunities in libraries. Our workshops are run by an industry professional and give young people a competitive edge if they choose to go into the gaming industry.
- During holidays we run events. One of the mainstays is storygames which are interactive role-play type activities. This is for 7-11 year olds and usually has about 16 participants per event at each of our 10 libraries.
- We have a Wii console in one library, and this has been fantastically successful. We have had PS and PS2 consoles in the past, but these don't seem to be as geared up at getting groups together, which is where I think they haven't been as successful.
- We are also currently piloting the Youth Achievement Awards in the school and the D&D activity can be used as one (or more) challenges which eventually lead to a recognised qualification.
- Our Games Workshop sessions have been a huge success and have directly influenced the take up of the Summer Reading Challenge and borrowing from 12-16 year olds.
- Did setup a Fifa 2010 360 Tournament for the world cup which went very well. The winner won a local football team shirt.
- We run Computer Design Workshops where young people create their own games, and we have had Games workshop in the past to run role play gaming. 13-19 years.
- Regular Wii tournament, recent examples: Wii-mbledom tennis competition and Wii hula-hooping.
- We run a "treasure hunt" game as part of new graduate induction to take participants to our wide range of resources.
- Game Design Group - worked with Nottingham Trent University to create a game to teach information literacy.
- Yu Gi Oh Club - 20 + children take part every Saturday and Sunday. They organise themselves with a couple of older boys acting as team leaders. Every few months we will supply cards and trophies for a tournament.
- Annual Playstation competition for 11-18 year olds. 100-130 young people per year. Competitions in FIFA, dance mats, Singstar, Need for Speed.
- We run a Warhammer club two evenings a month for 11-18 year olds at our museum due to lack of space in the library. Between 6 and 14 participants at each meeting. About 25 members. 3 members of staff attend (2 volunteers and one member of library staff who volunteers). Kids have own club committee. Club is self-supporting after initial set-up investment - £1 subs per visit which covers club models, paints, glue, squash, rule books & codexes, tournament prizes etc. - we have free use of the museum room and have an online forum for club members only. All club members must be library members.



## Appendix 2: Advice on gaming

Survey respondents offered the following recommendations and advice for other librarians.

- I don't think you can get someone to run a gaming initiative who doesn't actually enjoy gaming themselves. If you do go down the RPG route than issues of exclusivity within the group and ensuring player mobility can be tricky. Wargaming unless map based takes a lot of storage space & set up time for terrain.
- If you are setting up a Games Workshop retail section - make sure you base your initial stock on what your club members are playing with & collecting (it is likely to be mostly 40K), not Games Workshop 'best sellers' - and have a discount card for club members (20% at least to compete with online suppliers).
- Get the kids to set their own club rules so that they stick to them - but be strict about no violence and respect for others models/equipment. Advertise for members utilising your local school librarians. Set up a committee - the kids will be glad to do some of the work and when guided can make well-rounded decisions. Make sure you are over- rather than under-provided for with volunteers - in case things go wrong (and they can do unexpectedly!). If you are not familiar with the rules you will need a volunteer who is enthusiastic and really knows what they are doing - it is easy to have cheating issues otherwise even if it is unintended.
- We do not allow parents to attend except where the parent is a member of council staff and has been CRB checked (and is therefore 'volunteering' in the session), or where the parent is accompanying a child with learning or physical disabilities e.g. mild autism.
- You must have signed parental permission forms before kids turn up (ask about allergies, and email addresses - will save postage!). Need rules about not leaving before session ends except for prior agreement with parent, and rules about visitor attendance . You may also need to run a membership waiting list! If you are running a waiting list make a child's place available to another member if e.g. they do not attend 5 in a row, otherwise attendance is difficult to predict (and tournaments difficult to run) and lists never go down.
- One of the hardest parts of arranging gaming clubs either techie gaming or games workshop is that although an individual may be willing and interested in starting one up, to really get going you need someone who knows about it, is already involved in gaming and is able to lead the group. I tried to start a games workshop club and was hampered by the fact that I myself am not knowledgeable enough.
- Perhaps a specific website dedicated to gaming activities in public Libraries, with advice on setting up and running clubs, forums for swapping hints and tips on gaming, painting, modelling, terrain making etc.