

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

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

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Libraries deliver ...

The Libraries Taskforce report¹ was finally published on 1 December. It has already had considerable media coverage², so this assessment is going to focus primarily on its approach to social justice (and how far the issues raised, for example during the consultation workshops, have been taken on board).

In addition, The Network responded³ at some length to the *Independent Review of Public Libraries: a consultation*⁴, and again in May 2016⁵ to the draft version

¹ *Libraries deliver: ambition for public libraries in England 2016-2021*. DCMS, 2016. Available to download as a pdf (2690 kb) from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573911/Libraries_Deliver_-_Ambition_for_Public_Libraries_in_England_2016_to_2021.pdf.

² For example, Danuta Kean “Authors stamp new library strategy ‘too little, too late’”, *The Guardian*, 2 Dec 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/dec/02/authors-stamp-new-library-strategy-too-little-too-late>; Lisa Campbell “Libraries’ Ambition report offers £4m fund but ‘ignores the real issues’”, *The Bookseller*, 1 Dec 2016, <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/libraries-ambition-report-offers-4m-fund-ignores-real-issues-441071>.

³ *Independent Review of Public Libraries: a consultation. Response from “The Network – tackling social exclusion ...”*. The Network, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (204.62 kb) from: <http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Independent-Review-of-Public-Libraries-2.pdf>.

of the report that appeared earlier this year⁶; John Vincent also attended one of the consultation workshops – and this assessment will look at how many of these issues have also been taken on board.

Thinking about and analysis of the report are still in their early stages – no doubt there will be considerable additional comment that will need to be picked up at a later stage, but this assessment is intended to be a starter!

The social context

To start with some broader but vital points, in our response to the draft version of the report, we said:

“A key issue for us in looking at *Libraries Deliver* is how far it considers the context in which people are living in 2016 – and what we can forecast for the years 2017-2021 [...]

We would want to see *Libraries Deliver* addressing some of the following issues, none of which is likely to have disappeared by 2021:

- The increasing polarisation of rich and poor, and increasing inequality in the UK
- The increasing health gap between rich and poor
- The increase in poverty, for example as manifested by the growth of food-banks
- The removal of public services and the effects this has on people dependant on them
- The reduction in the public sphere, with, for example, fewer places where people can freely meet
- The growth in racism and Islamophobia, as well as hostility to migration
- The growing evidence of corruption at the heart of society, for example in the police (Hillsborough, undercover policing), in politics (expenses scandals).

Where are these issues – which the best public libraries are engaging with – reflected in this paper?” [p2]

We also argued that the suggested impacts of libraries “[...] seem a bit too ‘safe’, and it would be good if they became ‘grittier’, for example including how

⁴ *Independent library report for England* [Sieghart Review]. DCMS, 2014. Available to download as a pdf (553 kb) from:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388989/Independent_Library_Report-18_December.pdf.

⁵ *Libraries deliver: ambition for public libraries in England 2016-2021 – response from “The Network – tackling social exclusion ...”*. The Network, 2016. Available to download as a pdf (334 kb) from: <http://www.seapn.org.uk/uploads/files/Response-to-Libraries-Deliver.pdf>.

⁶ *Libraries deliver: ambition for public libraries in England 2016-2021*. DCMS, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-2021/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-2021>.

libraries can have an impact on people's lives in relation to the contextual issues mentioned above." [p6]

Our response gave a few examples too: "[...] young people being bullied, trans people wanting to find out more about transitioning, BME people wanting to find themselves reflected in society somewhere, sex workers wanting to read up on contraception and sources of support." [p6]

None of this has got into the final report.

This is disappointing, and significant for several reasons:

- It leaves an impression that libraries are not part of/engaging with the real political and social world.
- It also appears as though libraries are disengaged from the struggles that many in their communities face every day.
- It gives the impression that libraries are intended for only some kinds of people. For example, the figure, "Libraries are for everyone, throughout their lives" [p13], is a good illustration of part of what libraries do, but is targeted at 'Active' participants ("Children and young people", "Active learners", "Active citizens", "Active ageing"); and, similarly, the figure on the next page, "Examples of targeted services which libraries provide for specific life situations" [p14], again gives some important examples, but is also quite unchallenging.
- Libraries end up sounding 'cosy', 'nice', possibly 'not-for-the-likes-of-us'.

Detailed response

Section 3: Context

The Context section in the report reflects, in many ways, a different 'context' from that we have noted above. It is completely understandable that, in setting the scene, this report does emphasise the positive aspects of library provision – why, otherwise, are libraries deserving of support? – but, at the same time, by doing so, it smooths over a lot of rough edges that should have been highlighted in this important report.

For example, it is important to emphasise that "Public libraries are a unique and valued public service" [p12], but this point is not helped with evidence that people thought libraries "[...] should be protected, whether or not they themselves were a regular user." [p12]

The reach of public libraries is impressive, and there is considerable evidence of their impact on people's lives, yet the paragraphs on p12 make it sound as though there is no problem with them: there is ample evidence of people who are not welcomed in libraries and do not use their services, and, of course, in the current dire financial situation, libraries are being starved of resources – which, in turn, is having a major impact on usage.

The sections on the legal position and on funding do not go nearly far enough in suggesting ways out of the current position; to say merely that "Councils will need to take these [funding and demographic changes] – and many other

issues – into account when restructuring budgets to meet strategic priorities.” [p16] is not really very helpful.

Section 4: Vision

The final report has pulled together the vision statements (which were spread under the different ‘Purposes’ – now ‘Outcomes’ – in the previous version), and are more coherent and punchy set in one table.

These seem a useful set of overall ‘ambitions’ – for communities, public services and partners, and libraries themselves – but how will they be achieved?

Section 5: Outcomes

Section 5 looks at how the ambitions may be achieved via focusing on seven Outcomes:

- cultural and creative enrichment
- increased reading and literacy
- improved digital access and literacy
- helping everyone achieve their full potential
- healthier and happier lives
- greater prosperity
- stronger, more resilient communities [p21]

(These are also looked at in more depth in Appendix 1 – please see below.)

Interestingly, the wording and order of the Outcomes have changed since the previous draft, which gives them some more power. Here are brief comments on each:

- Cultural and creative enrichment: this Outcome has moved to the top of the list. It very much relates to the Arts Council agenda, especially with the emphasis on libraries-as-venues:

“We’ll encourage libraries to establish themselves as a focal point for community cultural life, hosting and running a range of activities in partnership with amateur and professional groups. As a result, we’d expect to see increasing attendance and active participation in creative arts by people of all ages and backgrounds.” [p23]

- Increased reading and literacy: whilst citing research to show that reading does have a positive impact on health and wellbeing, this section is not strongly argued. Having argued for the positive impact of reading/literacy, it then says that there is a lack of basic skills, but does not suggest ways that this might be overcome; and the case study used is, again, the Summer Reading Challenge, the impact of which on literacy levels is unknown.

- Improved digital access and literacy: this includes a good section on the role of libraries to support digital inclusion (but could have done with a case study other than the Tinder Foundation⁷).
- Helping everyone achieve their full potential: this is one section where a link to the wider world would really have been of benefit. At a time when social mobility is a 'hot topic', some detail here about libraries' positive role in this could have made a significant impact.
- Healthier and happier lives: the case for libraries' role in health is not well made here (for example, had some of the examples from the Norfolk case study – which is mentioned on p28 – been drawn out, this would have signalled much more clearly what libraries can offer.⁸
- Greater prosperity: this is an important role, and one which many libraries are already involved in. The British Library Business and IP Centres are a valuable opening up of the BL's resources – but surely meet the needs of only certain kinds of small businesses? There is a concern here that we are seeing this as a complete solution when it is only a partial one.
- Stronger, more resilient communities: this section really does need further development. Given that there have been two very recent reports⁹ on the growing lack of social cohesion – and the dangers this poses – much more should have been made of libraries' role in building cohesive societies; and the strong evidence of the key involvement of the library in Ferguson could also have illustrated this¹⁰. As one of the messages from this review is that we need to 'sell' ourselves to partners and to local authorities, surely this could have been a great way of doing so?

Section 6: How we'll achieve this

This section argues that, to make the vision and Outcomes a reality, “further development of library services” [p32] is required.

The report suggests that “strong local leadership” [p32] can be supported nationally by the Taskforce, and that, together, there is a set of actions that need to be taken. These include the following:

- Encouraging common design principles
- Planning public library services to meet local needs
- Considering different models for local service delivery
- Funding library services in varied and sustainable ways

⁷ Now renamed the Good Things Foundation, see:

<https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/about-good-things-foundation>.

⁸ Personally, I'm irritated by the regular references to libraries' role in reducing the burden on the NHS – surely this is not where libraries should be being located?

⁹ The Casey Review, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>; and research by Ted Cantele, see, for example: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/01/call-for-action-to-tackle-growing-ethnic-segregation-across-uk>.

¹⁰ See: <http://cilipconference.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Scott-Bonner.pdf>.

- Defining what an excellent library service looks like
- Helping libraries use better evidence to support decision-making
- Stronger co-ordination and partnership working
- Developing the library workforce, now and for the future

These seem very sensible courses of action – but, of course, are entirely dependent on adequate resourcing and political support.

Section 7: Making the case for libraries

This section pulls together all the points made in the previous draft report about improving the image of public libraries and people’s awareness of what they offer.

It includes:

- Championing libraries to decision-makers: this has four connected priorities:
 - “developing influence with local councillors and decision-makers to secure local support and funding, promoting ‘library first’ approaches whenever new service developments are planned
 - using data and evidence to make decision-makers aware of what public library services have to offer and how libraries can help achieve their wider strategic goals
 - ensuring that future policy and regulation at a national level supports public libraries
 - promoting achievements where local leaders have supported and worked through their public library service” [p52]
- Creating wider public awareness of what libraries have to offer
- Promoting positive messages about libraries in the media

Section 8: How we’ll take this forward

This brief section outlines the next steps for the Taskforce – primarily regularly reviewing progress on the actions listed in the report and in the separate Action Plan¹¹ [also, please see below].

Annexes

This is followed by 5 Annexes:

- Annex 1: The 7 Outcomes the public library network supports [to be considered in more depth below]
- Annex 2: Action plan [also see below]

¹¹ See:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573908/Ambition_Action_plan_December_2016.pdf.

- Annex 3: Summary of the consultation and responses: this sets out the main changes to the draft report, which have been taken on board
- Annex 4: Role and remit of Taskforce member organisations
- Annex 5: Image credits and references: this includes weblinks for some 167 footnotes.

Annex 1: The 7 Outcomes the public library network supports

This is where the detail about the seven Outcomes and what they involve is. As noted above, the Outcomes have been re-named and re-ordered, and there is more depth to them. Here is a quick assessment of each.

Outcome 1: Cultural and creative enrichment

This Outcome is much stronger than in the draft report, and has developed the sense of libraries as cultural hubs. There still is no link between this and Outcome 3 – makerspaces can be cultural and creative as well as STEM-based. (This work will also be further developed as SCL creates the Creativity Universal Offer.)

Outcome 2: Increased reading and literacy

Here the “Success in 2021 will look like” section is shorter but mostly better defined than in the draft. The new ‘ambitions’ are:

- “improvement in England’s international literacy rankings
- all library services offering a range of reading/literacy programmes and activities with an increase in the number of children, young people, adults and families participating (both as readers and volunteers) and, as a result, increased reading for pleasure
- stronger partnerships between public libraries and local schools” [p61]

It would still have been useful for the report to spell out what the “stronger partnerships between public libraries and local schools” would actually involve.

The outline of the role that libraries play in developing reading and literacy is clearer, and the report has moved away from what seemed to be quantitative approaches; there is also a wider range of reading programmes listed (although it would have been good to have included some local library service initiatives – which do not form part of a national programme – as well, such as Warwickshire’s creative reading festivals¹².

Outcome 3: Increased digital access and literacy

¹² See: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/%C2%A350000-warwickshires-creative-reading-festivals>.

The “Success in 2021” section is, again, stronger, although it would have been valuable to have linked digital skills and access to overcoming some of the social context issues outlined above.

The description is much stronger, with good emphases on outreach and digital inclusion.

Outcome 4: Helping everyone achieve their full potential

This has replaced “Learning” which was what was in the draft. It is much simpler and clearer, and more community-related, and less focused on measurable outcomes.

Outcome 5: Healthier and happier lives

The “Success in 2021” section is much improved:

- “libraries are perceived as important partners for achieving improved health outcomes in communities by Public Health England, NHS providers, local health bodies, clinical commissioning groups, Sustainability and Transformation Plan Committees, and other health and wellbeing commissioners and providers
- people perceive themselves to have improved wellbeing/to be happier as a result of participating in library activities
- people who are housebound, or who have dementia or autism, and their carers feel more connected and supported to manage in the community, and maintain their independence and wellbeing as a result of their contact with libraries
- library users are enabled to self-care and self-manage their health, participate in shared decision-making with healthcare professionals, and are more health literate” [p67]

There is a wide range of types of library work included in the description, as well as some national programmes.

Outcome 6: Greater prosperity

The report now includes both ‘bigger’ schemes, such as the British Library Business and IP Centres, and the smaller-scale – but vital – work that libraries undertake around literacy and digital literacy, job clubs, help with preparing CVs, and so on.

Outcome 7: Stronger, more resilient communities

The description of this Outcome has some real strengths, eg:

“Library services should work with local people to define, develop, plan and deliver the right mix of services to meet local needs and priorities; no two places will have the same mix. For example, rural and urban areas will need different ways of delivering services. Doing this will reinforce the library’s role as a focal point for local community activity.” [p72]

and some patchy paragraphs, eg:

“Public libraries contribute directly to community cohesion by creating a sense of place for their users. Local studies work brings communities together by exploring and celebrating local people’s differing and shared culture and heritage. Libraries also provide a valuable introduction into a community for newcomers, through assistance with specific needs (such as language training and citizenship support for recent immigrants where required) and, more generally, by using their knowledge to marshal a wealth of information on the local area, services and community.” [p72]

Examples of exactly what this work involves would have been of real benefit here. The examples given are strong, but there is no real sense of an active approach by libraries to foster community cohesion.

As the report goes on to say, “Libraries can also play a major role in work to combat disadvantage.” [p72] However, it would have been helpful if some of the ways in which this happens were spelled out here.

Finally:

“Libraries also provide an inclusive, free and safe space for all, both physical and virtual, making local people equally welcome irrespective of their age or background. They are one of the few remaining places where people from different backgrounds or generations can come together to learn from and appreciate each other (for example, through reminiscence sessions helping with local history understanding, or by younger age groups helping older people with digital learning). Innovations like ‘human libraries’ [...] challenge prejudices and stereotypes by stimulating social interactions that people might be unlikely to experience otherwise. We want to see libraries developing these inter-community and inter-generational activities to increase understanding and draw communities closer together.” [p73]

This is certainly true of the best library services, but, sadly, not of all. Perhaps there needs to be a clearer ‘ambition’ that this description is what every library should be aiming to achieve.

Action Plan

As noted above (in relation to Annex 2), the Action Plan¹³ has also been published.

This includes 25 actions to be taken by the Taskforce; 5 challenges to Central Government; and 12 challenges to Local Government/Library Services.

The Taskforce actions are taken from the report, and are grouped under:

¹³ See:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573908/Ambition_Action_plan_December_2016.pdf.

- Priority actions, such as ensuring that a ‘Libraries First’ approach is adopted, and that a core dataset is produced
- Raising public awareness of what libraries have to offer
- Identifying and showcasing good practice and supporting innovation
- Supporting workforce development
- How we will take this forward: monitoring and reporting on progress.

The challenges are all also taken from the report and are intended to assist in the ‘Libraries First’ approach, encouraging new approaches and partnership working.

Provided the monitoring does take place and is thorough and transparent, this should give a good way of following and checking on progress (possibly not as good as a proper library planning process, but important).

Other actions

Workshops

The Taskforce is organising a series of workshops¹⁴ in January 2017:

“The events will start with a series of presentations about Ambition, followed by workshops on topics covered in the action plan. These will be an opportunity for you to learn more about the actions and enable you to give your views. Workshop topics will include:

- mutuals and other alternative delivery models
- alternative funding streams
- communications (covering barriers to involvement and how to overcome, and shared and reusable assets)
- data
- workforce development”¹⁵

Community-managed libraries

In addition, Kathy Settle has just published a new Taskforce blogpost¹⁶, “Community managed libraries – the next phase ...”, which outlines the next stages in the work to support community-managed libraries – this will involve the Taskforce in:

- Undertaking research into community managed libraries, and
- Working with partners to create a new peer support network to make it easier for communities to share good practice and to learn from each other.

¹⁴ Further details via Eventbrite, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/libraries-taskforce-10036751881>.

¹⁵ Taken from: Charlotte Lane “Libraries Deliver: Ambition – sector forums”, *Libraries Taskforce blog*, 1 Dec 2016, <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/12/01/libraries-deliver-ambition-sector-forums/>.

¹⁶ See: <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/12/05/community-managed-libraries-the-next-phase/>.

In terms of the research, DCMS have commissioned SERIO¹⁷ (part of Plymouth University) to carry out a survey of:

“[...] all known community managed libraries in England. The survey focuses on areas such as:

- the different types of service(s) the library delivers and their effectiveness
- any barriers to service delivery
- staff/volunteer satisfaction and training
- current and future resourcing plans
- the financial sustainability of the library [...]

An analysis of the responses, along with more detailed case studies from a representative sample of community managed libraries, will form the basis of the final report to be published in March 2017.”¹⁸

There is further information about the peer network which intends to offer support and guidance, including:

- “extensive range of online tools and resources
- series of expert webinars
- local networking events
- advice and learning from others in the network on fundraising and business development
- platform for shared learning
- signposting to other external resources
- Q&A forum for practical advice and support
- sector news and debates – how can you make a difference?”¹⁹

Libraries Opportunities for Everyone Innovation Fund

ACE have also announced this new funding stream²⁰ which “will support projects that develop innovative library service activity to benefit disadvantaged people and places in England.”

Principles for the Leadership and Development of Public Library Services in England

Finally, CILIP has issued a challenge to “HM Government, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Local Government Association, the Arts Council England and

¹⁷ See: <http://www.serio.ac.uk/>.

¹⁸ Taken from: <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/12/05/community-managed-libraries-the-next-phase/>.

¹⁹ Taken from: <https://librariestaskforce.blog.gov.uk/2016/12/05/community-managed-libraries-the-next-phase/>.

²⁰ See: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/funding/libraries-opportunities-everyone-innovation-fund>.

fellow members of the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce” to support ten principles. These are:

1. “England’s public libraries are part of a successful network which delivers key outcomes including learning, health and wellbeing, digital inclusion, civic participation and stronger local economies.
2. Securing these outcomes for the long-term depends on effective leadership through a fully-funded and evidence-based National Public Library Plan for England that is owned jointly by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Local Government Association.
3. Implementing this plan requires appropriate governance of the library network, including partnerships for local delivery, regional and national support and with appropriate engagement with the equivalent strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
4. It also requires a national strategy for the development of the professional library workforce alongside the appropriate use of volunteers.
5. Effective national support for the library network requires an appropriately-resourced and mandated national development function, the responsibilities of which should include quality standards, targeted investment and development support and a transparent approach to monitoring and impact evaluation.
6. HM Treasury must make available to Local Authorities emergency relief funding and transitional support to ensure they are adequately resourced and funded to meet their statutory obligation for the provision of a quality public library service and to set in place appropriate plans for long-term governance and sustainability.
7. Library service points should not be transitioned out of statutory provision unless all alternative options for their maintenance have been explored, a full cost/benefits analysis has been conducted in consultation with the community and a realistic plan for long-term support is put in place.
8. Where a Local Authority fails to meet agreed standards on statutory public library service delivery (so-called ‘hollowing-out’ of services) DCMS and DCLG should use effective strategies for early intervention & improvement, including options for sanction and the removal of library services (and funding) into a national or regional Library Service.
9. Public libraries must work in partnership with other local community organisations to sustain and amplify the reach and impact of their services.
10. Public engagement with libraries should be promoted and encouraged through a joined-up programme of media and public relations led jointly by members of the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce (and in future by

the organisation with responsibility for the national development function for public libraries).”²¹

Conclusions

The report has met with a mixed reaction, with some saying it’s a good way forward²², with others saying it is ‘too little, too late’ and/or being critical²³.

In terms of social justice, there are real strengths (and it’s a huge improvement on the earlier versions), but still does not really touch the reality (as outlined above in the ‘Context’ section). The result is a vision of libraries that is very positive and proactive – but also somehow unrealistic, and unrelated to the austerity cuts and to the severe disadvantage and discrimination that large sections of the UK face.

Certainly, the £4m from ACE is very welcome – but does not really go anywhere near replacing the core funding lost by public libraries over the last eight years or so.

Overall, probably of most importance is the lack of any real monitoring process which would hold local authorities to account. Much as people grumbled about Annual Library Plans, they did ensure that a planning process was in place; plans were assessed and they and the assessments were made publicly available.

So – there are huge improvements in this version of the report compared to earlier drafts; some areas of library work come through really strongly (including aspects of their social justice work); but the real context – in the social, community and political senses – seems to have gone missing.

²¹ Taken from: <http://www.cilip.org.uk/blog/giving-public-libraries-strong-leadership-commitment>.

²² See, for example: Sue Wilkinson “Libraries Taskforce publishes Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021”, *The Reading Agency*, <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/libraries-deliver.html>; Society for Chief Librarians “SCL Response to Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016-2021”, <http://goscl.com/scl-response-to-libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-2021-2/>; “New strategy encourages councils to use libraries as ‘community hubs’”, *Public Sector Executive*, 2 Dec 2016, <http://www.publicsectorexecutive.com/Public-Sector-News/new-strategy-encourages-councils-to-use-libraries-as-community-hubs>.

²³ See, for example: Nick Poole “Ambition for Public Libraries presents ‘stark choice’ for future of libraries”, *CILIP blog*, 1 Dec 2016, <http://www.cilip.org.uk/blog/ambition-public-libraries-presents-stark-choice-future-libraries>; Ian Anstice “Public Libraries now have Ambition. Well, perhaps ...”, *Public Libraries News*, 4 Dec 2016, <http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/2016/12/public-libraries-now-have-ambition-well-perhaps.html>; Lisa Campbell “Libraries’ Ambition report offers £4m fund but ‘ignores the real issues’”, *The Bookseller*, 1 Dec 2016, <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/libraries-ambition-report-offers-4m-fund-ignores-real-issues-441071>; Dan O’Donoghue “Government’s £4million library handout dismissed as ‘too little, too late’”, *ChronicleLive*, 9 Dec 2016, <http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/governments-4million-library-handout-dismissed-12295441>.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACE = Arts Council England

BME = Black and minority ethnic

CILIP = Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

DCLG = Department for Communities and Local Government

DCMS – Department for Culture, Media and Sport

IP = intellectual property

SCL = Society of Chief Librarians

STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

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