

Realising the Potential: Integrating Libraries into Adult Education Strategies

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1. Introduction

Libraries are arguably one of the original lifelong learning institutions. In many countries, the initial development of adult education and that of public libraries were indeed one and the same thing. They grew from an understanding that it was essential – for the good of individuals and society alike – for learning not to stop with the end of formal schooling.

Giving the possibility to people of all ages to learn, discover and build their skills was – and continues to be – at the heart of the mission of libraries, not least as highlighted by the UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto. Much of the investment and innovation in the library field – including in organisations like the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – is focused on helping libraries to do this more effectively.

However, while libraries often see themselves above all as institutions focused on supporting learning, is this the case for those setting national strategies for learning? As we will see in this paper, while there are bright spots, there is arguably much progress to be made in order to integrate these institutions most effectively.

This article starts with an overview of what we know about the global library field and its capacity to support learning, as well as the degree to which the types of contribution that libraries can make are already recognised in the Belem Framework, as the key international document for adult learning and education currently.

It then looks at the degree to which libraries are integrated into laws, policies and strategies for adult learning and education, based on an assessment of texts collected on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning website, as well as the Eurydice database of European countries and Global Reports on Adult Learning and Education. 88 countries in total mention libraries in one way or another. In this, it highlights the different ways in which libraries are included, in order to provide references and inspiration for policy-makers elsewhere.

Finally, in conclusion, it explores the value of stronger engagement of libraries in adult learning and education strategies, and the dividends this could bring.

2. Setting the Scene: the Global Library Field, and the Presence of Libraries in the Global ALE Framework

2.1 Libraries Globally

There are well over [2.5 million libraries globally](#), of which almost half a million are public and community libraries. This represents a dense global network – on a very conservative estimate, there is one such library for every 16 000 people, and many more in some countries.

A large share of the rest are school libraries, which support teachers in their work, as well as taking the lead on some topics, and providing the space and resources to open horizons. Others are academic libraries – many of which cooperate with public libraries to enhance service offers, or national libraries which, alongside unique collection, can have a coordinating role in national library systems. Finally, there are also ‘special’ libraries – in governments, parliaments, prisons, and beyond.

These libraries vary strongly in terms of size of collections and resources, including whether they are run by professional staff or volunteers, but have in common a goal of providing access to knowledge to everyone in their communities in order to improve lives.

In terms of governance, while this is not the case everywhere, many countries do run national library systems, allowing for some centralisation of resources and planning. Elsewhere, there are networks at a local or regional level. In both cases, this opens possibilities for scaling up initiatives beyond any one institution, without losing the capacity to adjust and adapt to local needs.

While it is hard to prove causality, we know that there is certainly correlation between the strength of library fields and positive indicators around learning. For example, a stronger field tends to be associated with [smaller digital divides for low-skilled adults](#), [lower literacy gaps for traditionally vulnerable groups](#), [higher participation in non-formal learning](#), and simply [lower numbers of low-skilled adults](#).

It is clear – as highlighted above – that libraries themselves place a strong emphasis on the contribution they make to learning. Indeed, a [survey in 2016](#) in Europe suggested that around 85% of libraries offer non-formal learning.

2.2 Libraries, Library Goals, and the Belem Framework

While the 2009 [Belem Framework for Action](#) that came out of CONFINTEA VI does not make any explicit reference to libraries, it does highlight a number of themes which correlate closely with libraries’ approach to lifelong learning.

First of all, placing literacy front and centre will certainly resonate with libraries, given their own role in both building and sustaining inclusive literacy efforts, throughout life. Similarly, the connection made between the work of promoting adult education and the achievement of development goals links closely to the understanding that libraries' core work has a wider social and democratic function.

The Belem Framework also emphasises the need to promote equity. For public libraries in particular which, as underlined in the [UNESCO-IFLA Public Library Manifesto](#), have a mission to serve every single member of communities, this is a long-standing commitment. Also central to the work of libraries is the idea that services should be provided around the needs of the user – a precondition for achieving equity, rather than just equality.

The need to mobilise resources fully also appears, identifying and engaging with every actor who can contribute. This requires, as the Framework suggests, a readiness not just to work across the sector, but also with other sectors – libraries will certainly fall into one of these categories. This engagement can and should lead to close cooperation in implementation, including to the point of creating multi-purpose community learning spaces.

To achieve this, the Framework calls for the integration of all relevant actors – including learners – into the policy development process from the beginning, as well as due focus by global development players on supporting adult education.

In short, despite there not being any direct reference to libraries, the themes and priorities established by the Belem Framework point to a strong engagement of these institutions in adult learning and education strategies.

3 Libraries in National Adult Learning and Education Strategies

Having looked at what libraries are doing, and the space given by the Belem Framework for including them, it is now time to look at the extent to which national strategies make this connection. This section first provides an overview of the methodology followed in preparing this analysis, and then runs through key points raised.

3.1 Methodology

This section draws on a search of all of the laws, policies and strategies highlighted on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's [collection](#) (44 countries), the [responses](#) given to three rounds of questionnaires in the context of the preparation of the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE) (197 countries and territories), and the text and documents linked to from sections about adult education in the [Eurydice](#)

[database](#) of national education strategies (38 countries, of which some include sub-national reports). Official commentary on adult learning and education systems has been used – i.e. the responses to GRALE questionnaires and summaries for Eurydice – given that they come from official sources, and offer overall insight into how systems work.

This choice of sources was motivated by link between the UIL collections and the CONFINTEA process, as well as the comprehensiveness and standardised format of the Eurydice database. It is to be noted that a number of resources on the UIL database are a little outdated, although those on Eurydice appear, for the most part, to have been refreshed more recently.

Across these resources, a keyword search approach was adopted, based on the word ‘library’ or ‘libraries’, or a translation of this into the language in which the law, policy or strategy was published. Relevant paragraphs were then analysed in order to build up a bank of examples of how libraries are integrated into strategies.

3.2 Analysis of References

In total, 88 countries from all continents talked about libraries, with a total of 139 texts doing so, as well as 12 references in the editions of GRALE to date.

A number of these references simply talked about libraries as institutions involved in supporting lifelong learning, without providing further information. For example in the [Democratic Republic of Congo’s](#) response to the 2009 GRALE Survey, it simply notes that a lack of spending on libraries is holding back progress on lifelong learning, while [Palestine](#) notes that ongoing insecurity has also led to underinvestment. In their contribution that same year, the [Netherlands](#) simply include libraries as a type of institution providing non-formal learning, as do [Poland](#), [Romania](#) and [Slovenia](#). [Bhutan](#), alongside others, highlights in a GRALE survey response in 2015 that libraries crucially enable self-directed learning.

There is a risk, in such references, that tasks are allocated without reflection on how they may be fulfilled, and what additional resources or training may be needed:

“for Superintendents of metropolitan/provincial offices of education, the strong focus on primary and secondary education prevented them from establishing separate regional Lifelong Education Information Centers or Lifelong Learning Centers. They tended to instead impose existing libraries with the function of Lifelong Education Information Centers or Lifelong Learning Centers, which proved ineffective in terms of program execution” (Korea, [GRALE survey response 2009](#))

However, it can also be the case that a reference in a high-level document opens up possibilities in more detailed strategies. As an example of how libraries can feature in

framework texts for adult learning and education, the [1980 Constitution of Honduras](#) states:

Art. 170. The State will promote the development of out-of-school education by means of libraries, cultural centres and every form of diffusion.

Similarly, Japan's [Basic Act on Education](#) sets out:

Article 12 (1) The national and local governments shall encourage education carried out among society, in response to the demands of individuals and the community as a whole. (2) The national and local governments shall endeavor to promote social education by establishing libraries, museums, community halls and other social education facilities, opening the usage of school facilities, providing opportunities to learn, relevant information, and other appropriate means.

[Laos](#) and [Lithuania](#) also include similar references in their own education laws. Interestingly, in [Austria](#), the legislation that first put adult learning on a formal basis, in 1973, was combined with provisions about the funding of public libraries.

However, for the reasons set out above, it is worth going further, and establishing the key themes in those documents that do go into greater depth. The below sections address these points:

3.2.1 Libraries as cornerstones of literacy strategies

Unsurprisingly, there is a strong emphasis on the role of libraries in supporting literacy in many strategies, reflecting an activity that is central to the mission of libraries themselves. As highlighted above, literacy was of course recognised in the Belem Framework as being at the foundation of adult learning and education activities, a precondition of other learning opportunities. Stepping away from adult learning strategies for a moment, broader initiatives on literacy often do cite the work of libraries, as indicated by a [review](#) of the good practices highlighted on the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning's LitBase.

In total, 26 countries highlighted libraries' contribution in this space. Examples of highlighting the role of libraries in promoting literacy appear in the 2009 GRALE survey response from [Eritrea](#), which highlighted the creation of 70 community reading centres (libraries) as ways of promoting a learning environment. The [United States'](#) response also notes libraries as key implementers of adult literacy programmes, as does [New Zealand](#).

There's a particular focus of libraries as means of consolidating progress made during more formal lessons. [Togo's Education Plan](#) 2010-20 stresses how libraries can help the newly literate, while [Gambia's 2004 Education Policy](#) stresses that rural libraries

can help people advance into post-literacy. Rwanda's 2009 GRALE [response](#) underlines the following:

Pour éviter que les lauréats retombent dans l'analphabétisme (car, comme le dit le proverbe rwandais « Ubwenge buheze mu nda burabora » : une connaissance non rentabilisée finit par pourrir (littéral), le programme a créé de petites bibliothèques au niveau des centres d'alphabétisation avec collection intitulée « Portion nouveaux lecteurs » de 12 séries

[Translation] To avoid that the graduates fall back into illiteracy (because, as the Rwandan proverb goes: unused knowledge ends up rotting), the programme created small libraries at the level of literacy centres with a collection called "New reader's serving" made up of 12 series.

3.2.2 Libraries overcome barriers to access to learning resources

A second traditional core function of libraries recognised in strategies is their role in providing access to materials. This is not something to underestimate as a function, given that still, in many cases, a lack of resources on the side of readers, or of easily accessed relevant content in the first place, continue to make learning more difficult.

Libraries overcome this by pooling resources (i.e. through tax or other means by which they are supported) and giving access to books and other materials in a way that doesn't discriminate on the grounds of wealth. In doing so, they have

35 countries therefore highlighted this contribution that libraries can make.

In their responses to the 2009 GRALE survey, [Gambia](#) highlighted that local libraries gave access to local language content, and saw this as being at the heart of the 'model villages' that the government looked to set up. Meanwhile in [Cabo Verde](#), a book collection was established for the purpose of supporting national adult learning and education goals. In [Bangladesh](#), combined community learning and library centres were developed:

The primary objective of this project was to facilitate NFE graduates as well as other community people consolidate and practice various literacy skills. The EC centres contain a wide variety of easy reading materials, newspapers and some indoor games facilities for entertainment.

The [Lao Decree on Lifelong Learning](#) of 2020 also highlights this function:

Invite relevant ministries, ministry-equivalent agencies and authorities to promote self-directed learning by developing and revising regulations to enable Lao people to access education, continuously extend their knowledge and competencies at all

grades, all levels of education, and to access various sources of information and knowledge such as electronic media, online internet, and libraries.

Of course, it is not just a case of setting up libraries as stand-alone entities, but also within other institutions in order to strengthen their offer and ability to deliver through provision of access to materials. This is highlighted, for example, by Namibia's 2009 [GRALE survey response](#):

The Namibian Government is trying to ensure that all new educational and training institutions be designed in such way as to incorporate a multi-purpose learning centre (such as Community libraries, community skills development centres, agricultural extension centres, non-governmental organisation centres, community hall and church centres)- enabling it to offer a variety of services to the public. It is with this view that Community Development and Learning Centres (CDLC), have been set up.

The theme of developing digital libraries is an important one. These can of course complement the work of physical libraries, which can act as portals and curators, as well as benefitting from possibilities to give access to a wider range of content. The [proceedings](#) of an government seminar hosted at the National Library of Viet Nam recognise this, while Uzbekistan highlights this in its [2009 GRALE Survey response](#), as does Malta's 2015 [Lifelong Learning Strategy](#):

Public libraries and the National Archives should act as a hub to connect and network the local learning setting with the global resources of information and knowledge through ICT, creating an informed democratic knowledge society. Archives in particular are invaluable Lifelong Learning assets that contain the collective memory of the nation, enabling citizens to use the past to help make sense of the present and the future.

The creation of such libraries can also rely strongly on the contribution of national libraries and library services, as is highlighted in [Latvia's 2003 Guidance](#), and [Malta's 2015 lifelong learning strategy](#).

Libraries can, in particular, act as channels for the dissemination of materials created for the purpose of supporting adult literacy and education. In Cambodia, libraries and reading centres have supported this, based on the [GRALE survey response](#) for 2009:

Post-literacy Program: This program is focused on the development of libraries and reading centers in village, sub-district, and temples. Materials as booklets posters that are relevant to life skills which included knowledge on agriculture, health, HIV/AIDS, self-decision, and career are also published.

In South Africa, the role of libraries in providing access to materials is recognised in the specific area of providing support for entrepreneurship:

Library Business Corners (LBC) started five years ago, as a small pilot project that aimed to provide a cost effective service for local businesses. With support from the City of Cape Town and provincial government, LBCs now serve entrepreneurs and small businesses through a network of 74 libraries that extends throughout the Western Cape and the project is still growing. A special collection of books, newspapers, videos, journals, periodicals, brochures, pamphlets and press clippings are housed in a designated area or “corner” of the library in order to make business information easy to find and use. ([2009 GRALE Response](#))

Of course, it is not just learners themselves who may need access to materials. Professionals in the sector do also, as to those trying to carry out research in order to improve provision in the future. New Zealand’s Centre for Workforce Development opened a library to improve its effectiveness ([2009 GRALE survey response](#)). Lithuania ran a specific project focused on this, as set out in its [2012 GRALE survey response](#):

In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Science carried out the project ‘Development of adult teaching opportunities: portfolio of andragogic literature’, as a result of which 18 publications in the ‘Adult education series’ was prepared. The project was initiated in view of the context of increasing needs of adult learning, because andragogic literature widely published in the world was poorly accessible to andragogy practitioners in Lithuania, university students and lecturers, and adult learners. The book series consists of publications on the theory of andragogy, textbooks, and methodological practical books. This publication with a total print run of more than 30,000 copies in the past years has been one of the largest projects of educational literature in Lithuania. The books were provided to adult education centres, schools and libraries

Finally, libraries of course also have the potential to act as ‘message boards’, raising awareness of skills development opportunities, a point recognised in Latvia’s [Guidelines for the Development of Education Policy](#) in 2014.

3.2.3 Libraries have unique potential to reach out into communities

A point already highlighted in some of the examples given above is the role of libraries in providing opportunities for people at a local level, adapted to their needs. This builds on the traditional role of libraries as supports for learning, and the fact that they already exist and are known within communities. Slovenia’s 2007 [Lifelong Learning Strategy](#) sets out the logic for this:

Bringing learning closer to home will require the deployment of lifelong learning centers where people gather. These can be - the school is not the most suitable place for this - for example, local administrative centers, shopping centers, libraries, museums, parks, public squares, health centers, recreation centers, public places to

eat, etc. (Supplement, 24, p. 40). The Strategy also highlights the importance of informal learning in places such as libraries. Libraries also seen as a key resource to be drawn on in order to make for a more successful strategy.

For example, libraries host the *missions locales* set up in France to help people access opportunities to develop skills, and in [Hungary's](#) 2005 lifelong learning strategy, libraries were recognised for their contribution to 'micro-learning' at a grassroots level. Brazil's lighthouses of knowledge were recognised in particular in the [GRALE II report](#):

Community learning spaces also contribute to sustaining a culture of learning, by raising the attention of the broader society. One example of this is the Faróis do Saber project ['Lighthouses of Knowledge'], which was initiated in the town of Curitiba in Brazil. These free educational centres include libraries, other cultural resources and free internet access through the first public internet network in Brazil. The Lighthouses of Knowledge, which are used as venues for educational purposes and for the coordination of job training and social welfare, work jointly with public schools in each neighbourhood. In 2010 the number of Lighthouses of Knowledge reached 46 (Tavares da Costa Rocha, 2010)

In Germany, in its plans for a decade of literacy, libraries were counted among those institutions able to help ensure that programming reached everyone:

Local and regional networks (e.g. alliances, round tables) include all areas of society that are relevant to literacy and basic education in order to use their access for public relations work and to address those affected directly are being expanded. In addition to social institutions, these areas also include family associations, sports and youth organizations, city libraries, trade unions or regional business associations as well as churches and mosques.

Korea in particular refers in different documents to the importance of a local focus in efforts to build learning, with libraries (both existing and new) cited as part of this, as set out below:

The Korean government is carrying out policy projects, such as the Lifelong Learning Cities Project (LLCP) and Lifelong Learning Centres for Happiness (LLCHs). These projects aim to increase accessibility to opportunities in ALE by constructing educational institutions near residential areas for ease of access, and operate customized learning programmes that reflect specific community needs. Since 2012, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea has been implementing the development of LLCHs, which are lifelong education institutions for local residents. LLCHs prioritize supporting residents in rural communities who lack lifelong learning opportunities. LLCHs are created by restructuring existing facilities within the communities such as libraries, community centres, senior citizen centres, and facilities

at apartment complexes as well as the lifelong learning centres. ([GRALE Response 2015](#))

Slovenia's [report for the Eurydice site](#), updated in 2021, similarly sees such a role at the local level:

Centres for independent learning (Središča za samostojno učenje) facilitate a complementary form of non-formal learning, by providing free-of-charge space, learning materials and equipment for participants to gain and upgrade their knowledge in different fields. They target adults that cannot access traditional forms of education or find them unsuitable for their needs. Two commonly studied subject matters are computer skills and foreign languages. Learning is undertaken independently, with the guidance and support of professional staff and with the help of various textbooks, handbooks, dictionaries, multimedia and other learning materials adapted for independent learning. Centres for independent learning were developed by the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education following the British "open learning" example, and they started operating in 1995. They are dispersed across the country and located within folk high schools, libraries, privately owned adult education organizations and non-profit institutes. In 2015, 35 such centres are being funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport

Elsewhere, rural and mobile libraries are recognised as key players in reaching out to people who may otherwise be under-served by learning opportunities.

One particular group seen as benefitting in particular from library provision are older persons, with Poland's 2009 [GRALE survey response](#) describing libraries as a type of university of the third age. Slovenia's [Eurydice profile](#) also notes that libraries often host such activities, as does [Bulgaria's](#).

3.2.4 Libraries can be useful partners for other ALE providers

Closely linked to the above section focusing on the specific role of libraries in reaching out into communities, their place in partnerships for learning is also highlighted in strategies and policy documents from around the world. Such collaborations allow for libraries' strengths to be combined with those of other actors in the adult learning and education space.

In Germany, in the context of the [Decade of Literacy](#), local and regional networks were established to include all areas of society that are relevant to literacy and basic education in order to use their access for public relations work and to address those affected directly are being expanded. In addition to social institutions, these areas also included family associations, sports and youth organizations, city libraries, trade unions or regional business associations as well as churches and mosques.

In Scotland in particular, there is [formal guidance](#) that libraries should be involved in this way:

CPPs [Community Planning Partnerships] should ensure CLD [Community Learning and Development] has a core role in delivering identified outcomes for communities. This will depend on maximising the contribution of the following partners: services in local authorities and government bodies with an identified CLD remit, and in voluntary sector organisations publicly funded for this purpose. These services should be closely aligned with education, culture, sport, leisure and library services and should use the resulting synergies to deliver agreed outcomes

Similarly in efforts to deliver on specific national plans, cooperation involving libraries is cited as a central pillar, including in [Portugal's](#) work on reading, and in the [Czech national education plan](#) for 2022, which underlines in particular the importance of schools working closely with libraries, while [Malta's 2015 lifelong learning strategy](#) stresses the need for partnership between libraries, heritage organisations, and other learning providers.

In Saint Lucia, the 2000 [Education sector development plan](#) defines the following goals for libraries:

to develop a network of libraries as tele-information centres, to enhance the range and quality of written and electronic materials and resources, to contribute to partnerships and joint working with other information, education and community development providers, to establish sufficient management and professional staff with access to planned training and qualification opportunities, and to expand outreach services.

3.2.5 Libraries can be distance learning centres, or portals towards other provision

The examples given so far have focused on how libraries can be direct providers – or co-providers – of adult learning and education. However, it is recognised in a number of strategies that they can also boost the effectiveness of provision by others by acting as portals to learning opportunities. This idea is of course not new – already in 2003, [Lithuania's Education Strategy](#) envisioned every community having a library or school acting as a distance learning centre.

In this context, the role of technology within libraries is clearly significant. IFLA has already done work looking at the place of these institutions within [national broadband strategies](#) and [digital skills strategies](#), but this is also highlighted in adult learning and education documentation, for example Norway's [response](#) to the 2009 GRALE Survey:

Both the report Library Reform 2014 and the white paper report No 17(2006- 2007)to the Storting point to the Library as a digital learning arena. The library is an easy access point for digital competence and is often used in relation with different forms

of educational and training activities. The library is well suited as a learning centre for digital literacy because the necessary equipment and the broadband connection can be found here. It is also believed that librarians are experienced and can give guidance in digital literacy

In the United Kingdom too, libraries were seen as antennae for LearnDirect and UKOnline in its [2009 GRALE survey response](#), with a similar conclusion possible for Namibia as highlighted above, and in its 2012 [GRALE survey response](#). Of course, achieving this requires investment in libraries' own technological capacity, a point made by Tonga in its [2004-2019 Education Policy Framework](#).

3.2.6 Librarians are seen as adult learning professionals

Many of the examples given above focus on the role of 'libraries', rather than on that of 'librarians'. These terms cannot be used interchangeably of course – there are many libraries that lack a professional librarian, while in turn, dedicated, trained staff can have a decisive influence on the ability of the institution to fulfil its potential.

Some national strategies and policy documents do recognise the importance, therefore, of investing in library staff. Saint Lucia's 2000 Strategy includes a focus on professionalising librarians as people who can support the delivery of learning to the population, while Japan, in its 2009 [GRALE survey response](#), sets out the following, giving librarians a formal status:

In Japan, social education directors, librarians and curators are legally designated as professional personnel engaging in social education. The qualifications for these professional positions are specified by the Social Education Act, the Library Act and Museum Act.

Flipping the argument, the costs of not giving sufficient attention to the capacity of library staff to deliver on learning goals is made clear in Korea's response to the [2009 GRALE survey](#), indicating that where this isn't the case, there is a real risk of policy failure.

3.2.7 Libraries can contribute to adult learning and education system design

In some cases, libraries are part of the overall system for governing adult learning and education provision. In Austria, for example, the national public library organisation is a member of the Conference of Adult Education Organisations, as highlighted in its 2012 [GRALE survey response](#).

Elsewhere, such as in Germany, they are proactively engaged in relevant consultations, such as that held to prepare its [response](#) to the 2009 GRALE survey, while in [Canada's](#) and [Uruguay's](#) responses to the same, libraries were involved in

bottom-up efforts to develop new plans and programmes. In Hungary too, in its [2005 lifelong learning strategy](#), it was deemed important to make libraries part of the process of defining the strategy. in [Malawi](#), the National Library is recognised as a key partner in overall system governance, with the same going for the [Tanzanian Library Services Board](#).

The same goes at the local level, where libraries are included in a number of strategies or overviews as partners that need to be involved in planning provision. In addition to the example of Germany given in section 3.2.4, in Uruguay, the [2009 GRALE response](#) underlines that libraries should be involved in discussion about where to base local LLL efforts and how they are run.

3.2.8 School libraries can also be key community resources

A final point that arises from the analysis focuses on the potential to include school libraries in adult learning and education efforts, recognising that they already have resources and staff who may be able to help. This is not just in the context of promoting family literacy, but also for wider efforts, as suggested in Sweden's profile on the [Eurydice site](#), which suggests that school libraries can be multi-purpose learning centres. Argentina, in its [2009 GRALE survey response](#), also highlights that school libraries can represent free adult learning resources.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

From the perspective of libraries, there are arguably few surprises in the types of examples provided above. They often reflect themes and ideas that are already present in library strategies at the local, regional or national levels. What is helpful is that they point to the ways in which wider adult learning and education strategies can refer to libraries, providing examples for others to follow.

Nonetheless, given the foundational role of libraries in adult learning activities in so many countries, it is arguably a surprise that there are so few references, with our institutions often only cited once or twice, and in general terms. This brings risks – either simply missing out on opportunities to mobilise all of the infrastructure available to deliver on adult learning and education, or allocating responsibilities without the resources necessary to deliver on them meaningfully.

Of course, the fact that libraries appear in much of the commentary about adult learning and education (namely responses to GRALE surveys) indicates that libraries are often involved anyway, given that they can fit so naturally into action in this space. However, this is not to say that a more systematic inclusion of libraries could not bring dividends.

This does not need to be a difficult process – as set out in the introduction, library services within regions and countries are often organised in networks, or have lead institutions or organisations which can help repeat messages and coordinate action. It is possible – as the examples given above underline – to involve libraries from the planning stage of adult learning and education strategies, all the way through to on-the-ground provision.

There is an opportunity to advance this work. CONFINTEA VII, meeting in Marrakesh on 15-17 June 2022, will take stock of what is and is not working in adult learning and education, and to set a course for more effective policies and strategies in future. In particular, it is a chance to integrate key principles from the United Nations 2030 Agenda and beyond, not least the need for partnerships, integrated provision, and an approach based on rights and leaving no-one behind.

In this context, we hope that it will also be a time to send a strong signal in favour of making the most of the potential that libraries have to support effective and inclusive adult learning and education.