

E-lending vs. physical lending during COVID



Data prepared for meeting of the English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group – 08/11/2021

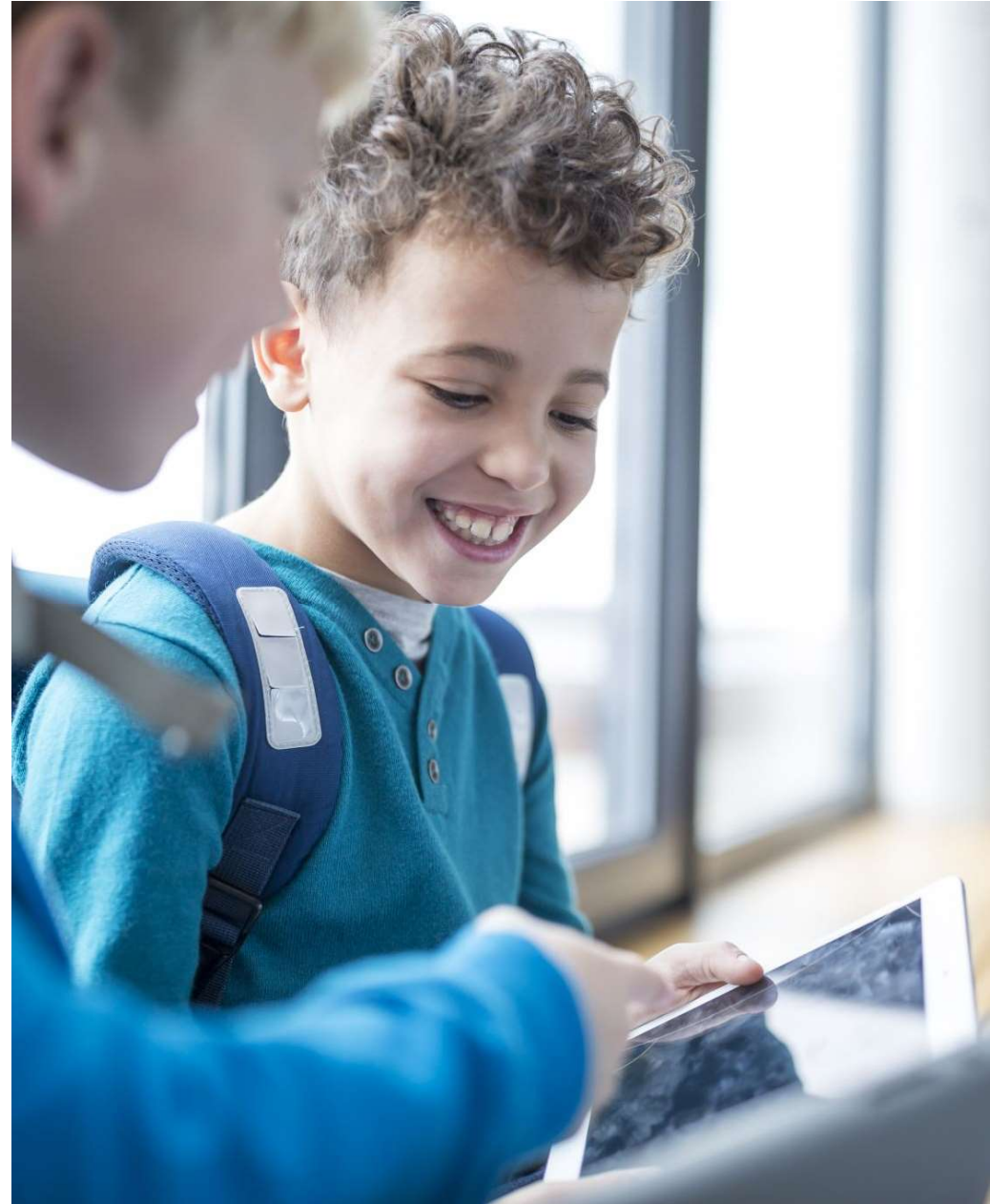
Elaine Robinson, David McMenemy and Ian Ruthven
Strathclyde iSchool Research Group
University of Strathclyde



UK Research and Innovation

Today's figures

- Overview of some patterns of lending behaviours before and during COVID
- Physical lending and e-lending
- Insights into how much e-lending filled the gap



Background to project

- AHRC funded project exploring public libraries and digital services during COVID
- What are the effects of the digital turn for public library services and users?

Project explores this from multiple perspectives:

- Organisational and sectoral issues
- Ethical issues
- User information behaviour issues



Data gathering – methods being used

- Freedom of information requests of UK public library authorities
- Readability testing of third-party privacy policies
 - How understandable the documents are for readers?
- Focus groups with public library users across UK
- Nationwide UK survey via survey company
 - Coming soon
- Staff survey

FOI Questions

1. Active memberships stats
2. Past five years usage stats for digital services
3. Past five years usage stats for physical loans
4. Past five years costings for digital services
5. Support services available for use of digital services
6. Advice offered re privacy of use of digital services
7. Impact of COVID on library service opening hours

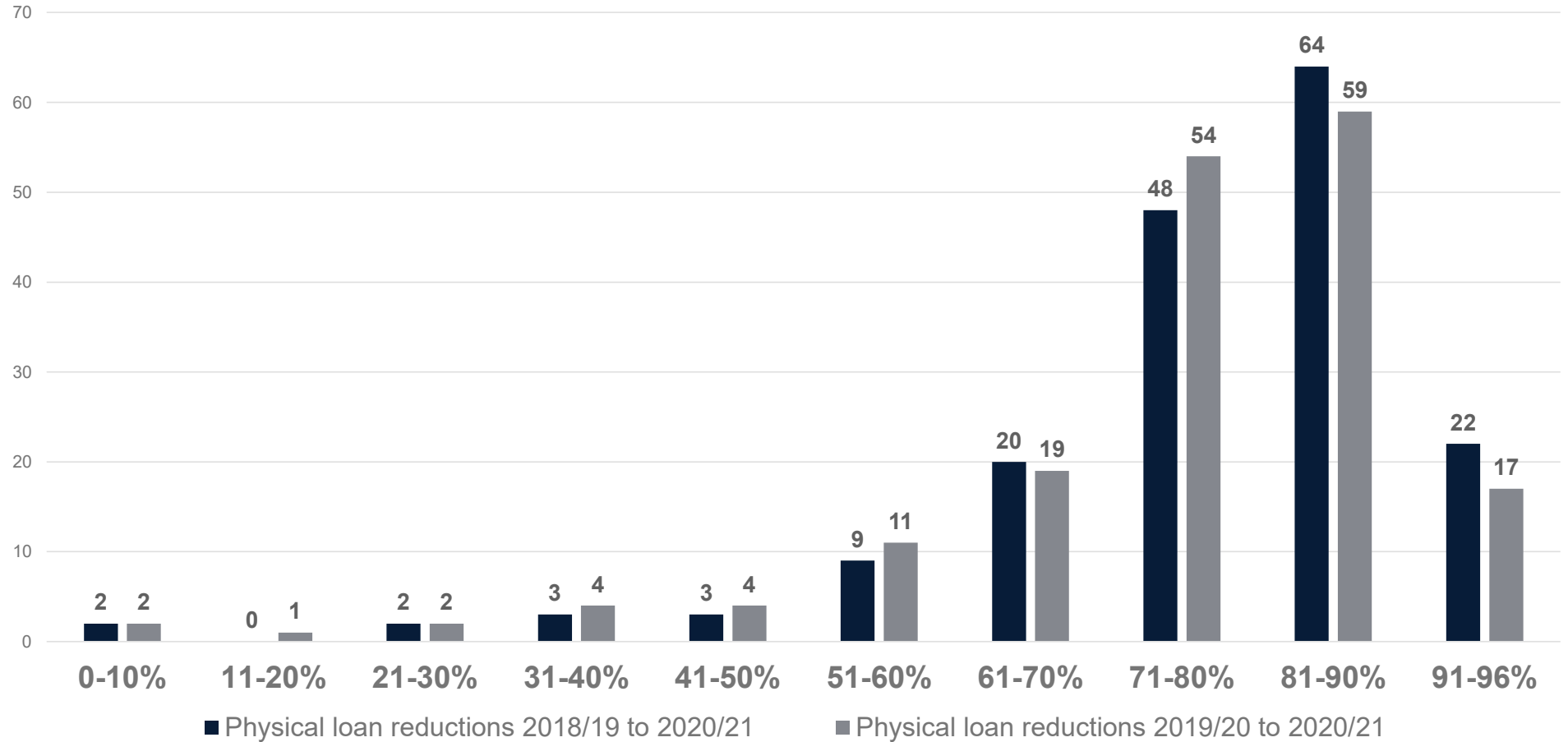
Fol responses

Number of FOIs sent	208
Responses received	201
Non-responses	7
Number in Pilot	10
Number in Pilot II	5

Data to be displayed

- Comparison of last full pre-COVID “normal” year (2018/19) compared against the full COVID year of 2020/21
- Charts display only services where we have full set of data for a question
- Some focus group comments

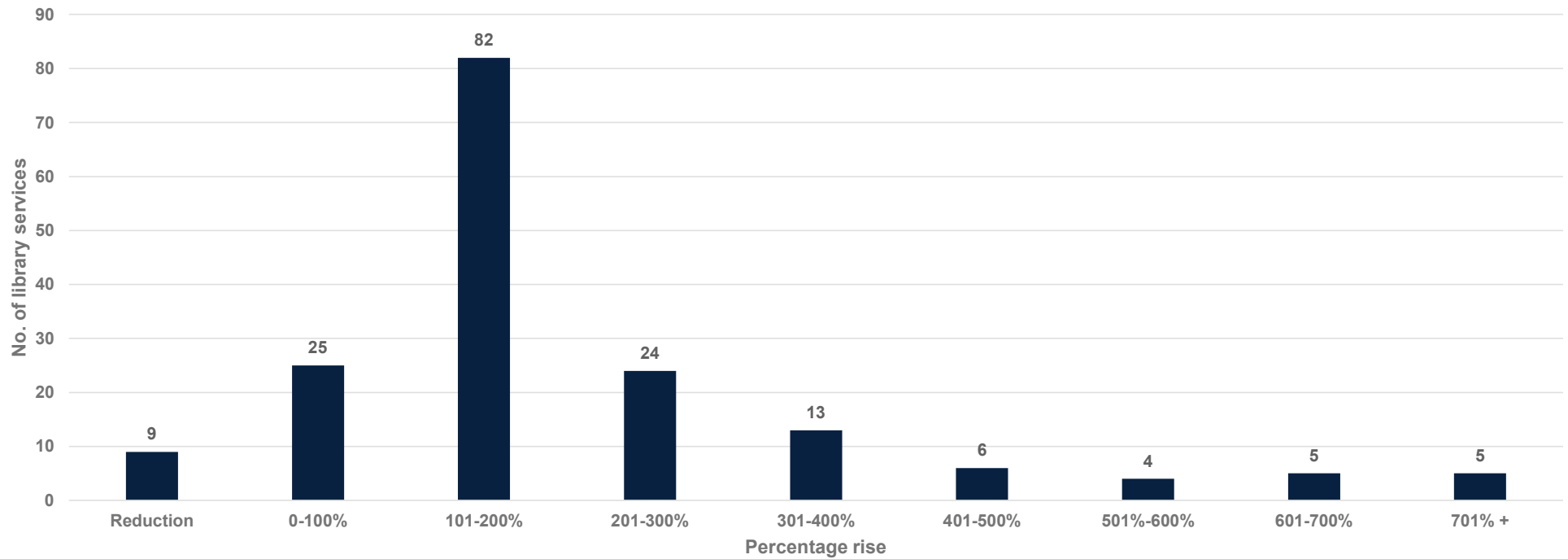
% drop in physical loans from 2018/19 and 2019/20 to 2020/21 (n=173)



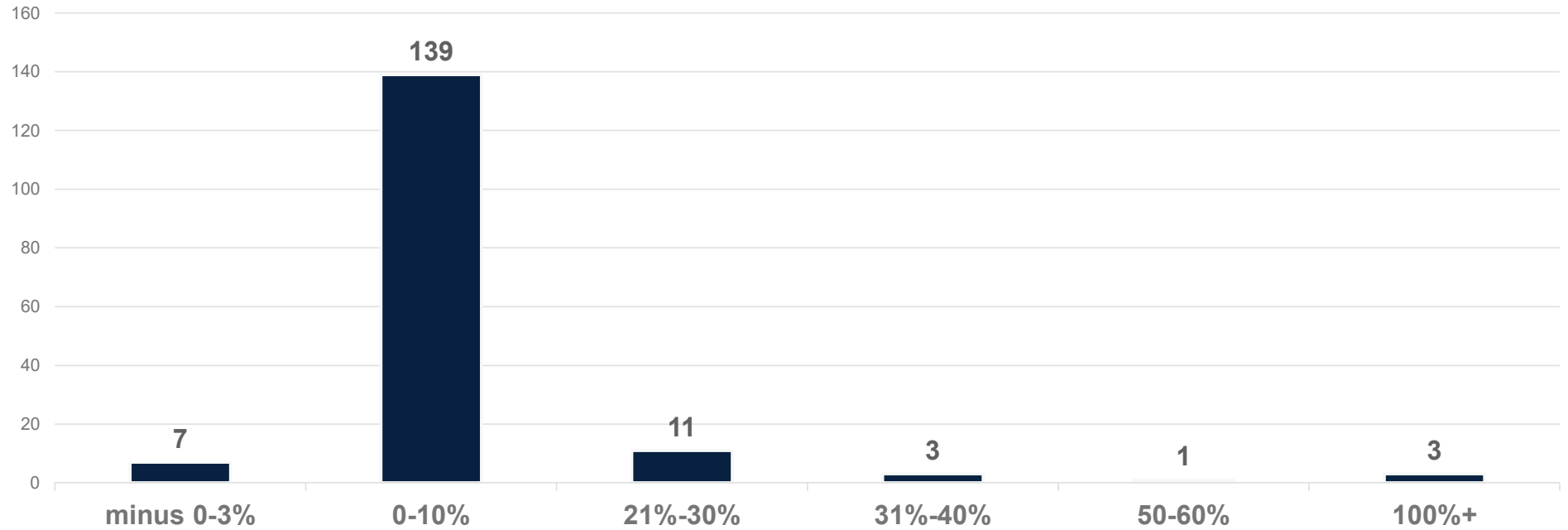
Some examples

Library service	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Bedfordshire	785,521	824,532	108,459
Bolton	562,446	555,211	130,248
Cambridgeshire	1,938,444	1,849,832	294,831
Gloucestershire	1,767,182	1,781,222	335,991
Leeds	2,054,300	2,109,750	280,181
Sheffield	946,736	89,6085	98,594

Percentage rise in e-lending from 2018/19 to 2020/21 (n=180)



% of 2018/19 to 2020/21 physical lending shortfall filled by e-lending (n=164)



Some examples

Library service	2018/19 physical	2020/21 physical	2020/21 e-lending
Bedfordshire	785,521	108,459	46,209
Bolton	562,446	130,248	47,101
Gloucestershire	1,767,182	335,991	111,879
Leeds	2,054,300	280,181	103,467
Sheffield	946,736	98,594	75,016

Focus group comments - 30th June

I was just gonna say was that one of the bizarre things is I think my change in working patterns might affect my library usage. I've got a library round the corner, but they are open 10-2 on working days and not open on a Saturday. But I am no longer commuting on the train to Manchester, so the Manchester Central Library is down the road from where I work. I used to go to the Central library in my lunch break and just browse. It was just something nice to do on my lunch break. But now I am working from home, and not really planning to go back to work in the office in a full-time sort of way, I'm now looking at the services provided by my physically local library as opposed to local to work and thinking, 'gosh, I'm really gonna miss the service and selection of stuff'. That is kind of an odd post COVID change.

Focus group comments - 6th July

I would like to say that I think that is the risk for libraries that the digital method will take over because it is gonna be a lot cheaper on that basis and I think it will be a major tragedy if that happens. As you mentioned earlier, it is a community space and they have a great use, have done so much good work over the decades really. Even during COVID they were giving out test and trace kits in Brighton to everybody who came in.

In summary

- Issue figure reductions during COVID lockdowns were significant for library services across the UK
- Healthy growth in use of e-lending is evident, **BUT**
- This growth was not comparable to the losses in physical lending, and the clear pattern across UK is that it did not come close to mitigating it
- Positive advocacy story on e-lending needs to consider the impacts of the gap in access that emerged during COVID

Details...

Twitter: @DownloadNormal

Website: <https://newnormal.cis.strath.ac.uk/>

Email: e.robinson@strath.ac.uk ;
d.mcmenemy@strath.ac.uk ; ian.ruthven@strath.ac.uk