

Call for Evidence

Developing a new national reading strategy in England for the 'Read On, Get On' campaign to get every child reading well by the age of 11

Response from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals

June 2015

1. In your view, how can parents and families best be supported (and support each other) to help their 0-5 year old children learn to listen, speak and communicate clearly and confidently?

The single most important motivator for reading is that it is enjoyable and brings personal satisfaction. Librarians in schools and public libraries are there to promote this enjoyment, extending the range of reading undertaken by children of all ages, free from the constraints of the curriculum. Librarians play a crucial role in supporting parents, carers and families as they nurture young children's early language development, and in helping children to read accurately, fluently and with enjoyment by the end of primary school.

Our response to this question is divided into four sections:

- Helping 0-5 year old children learn to listen, speak and communicate clearly and confidently
- Support through the provision of free books
- Support through parenting education programmes and early intervention activities (including social activities and book sharing)
- Support through automatic library membership

Helping 0-5 year old children learn to listen, speak and communicate clearly and confidently

An early form of literacy may be seen in a parent or carer sharing the delights of a book with a child from a few weeks old to five years. Simply knowing how to hold a book and gaining confidence in engaging and playing with such materials are crucial if children are to develop a love of reading and the good listening, speaking and communication skills that have been proven to develop alongside this¹. In addition, reading to very young children has protective effects on their health and wellbeing. Kelly et al (2011) estimated that if all the three year-olds in the UK currently read to on a less than weekly

¹ Wade and Moore, 2000. A Sure Start with Books. Early Years , Vol 20 (2), pp39-46

basis were read to daily, the percentage with social or emotional difficulties at age five would be reduced by a fifth.²

Support through the provision of free books

The provision of free books, through lending libraries or through initiatives such as Bookstart and Bookbug, plays an important part in supporting parents and carers.

- ***Bookstart***

Bookstart offers free books to all children at two key ages before they start school to inspire a love of reading and to help families enjoy reading together every day.³ The programme is founded on community partnerships and Corporate Social Responsibility: nationally, it is coordinated by Book Trust; locally, the schemes are coordinated by the library service in cooperation with early years settings and health professionals. Since its inception in 1992, over 10 million children have received more than 35 million books.

Longitudinal research by Wade and Moore (2000)⁴ found that a group of children who had received a Bookstart pack in infancy were ahead of a carefully matched comparison group when they started school and maintained this gap throughout their primary education, consistently achieved higher scores in English, maths and science. These findings reinforced the potential of Bookstart to make contributions to raising standards across the curriculum, not just in literacy. Subsequent to this research, impact assessments have found that:⁵

- 27% of parents know more about how to read with their child since receiving their Bookstart Baby pack, increasing to 46% of Bookstart Treasure recipients.
- 45% of parents have spent quality time with their child as a result of Bookstart Baby, increasing to 49% of Bookstart Treasure recipients.
- 50% of families who were not library members joined the library after receiving the Bookstart Baby pack, increasing to 57% of Bookstart Treasure recipients.

Specific impact on socio-economic groups⁶

² Kelly, Y., Sacker, A., Del Bono, E., Francesconi, M., and Marmot, M. (2011). What role for the home learning environment and parenting in reducing the socioeconomic gradient in child development? Findings from the millennium Cohort Study. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 96(9), 832-7

³ <http://www.bookstart.org.uk/>

⁴ Wade, B. and Moore, M. (2000). A sure start with books. *Early Years*, 20, 39-46

⁵ <http://www.bookstart.org.uk/research/impact/>

⁶ The statistics refer to the National Readership Survey classification of socio-economic status, which ranges from higher managerial positions in group A to casual labourers and unemployed people in group E.

- 38% of DE parents report that they know more about how to read with their child since receiving a Bookstart pack, compared to 27% of AB parents.
- 73% of DE parents feel the Bookstart Treasure pack has improved communication with their early years setting compared to 52% of AB parents.

Bookstart Corner supports children's centres across England to help families that need extra support to develop a love of stories, books and rhymes. Aimed at families with children aged 12-24 months, the programme allows centres to offer intensive support for parents and carers so that they may read together for pleasure with their children with confidence. Following participation parents reported the following impacts:

- 87% spent quality time with their child as a result of Bookstart Corner
- 85% felt more confident about reading with their child
- 84% felt more knowledgeable about reading with their child
- 71% were reading books more with their children

- **Bookbug**

Scottish Book Trust supports access to book gifting schemes through Bookbug Packs with packs of books gifted to all children in Scotland at key developmental milestones – 6 weeks, 18 months and 3 years.

Support through parenting education programmes and early intervention activities (including social activities and book sharing)

An extension of sharing the enjoyment of reading and storytelling with a parent or guardian is sharing stories with other children, and libraries provide a space for this. Some examples are given below.

- **Bookstart Rhymetime**

Rhymetime sessions are organised locally and take place in public libraries, as well as in children's nurseries. They incorporate a mix of songs, rhymes, rhythm and movement as well as providing the opportunity to share games, novelty books and toys.

- **Bookbug free song & rhymes sessions**

Scottish Book Trust runs Bookbug free song & rhymes sessions throughout Scotland and are generally held in libraries or other community venues. The free sessions build up children's confidence and social skills, and boost their speech and language development.

- ***The Family Futures project***

The Family Futures project is a partnership between Glasgow Life, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council, that provides parenting education programmes and early intervention activities. It is designed to support local communities through increased partnership working and a shared vision of parenting across Glasgow. It is intended to result in a more universal approach to provision of parenting education and support across the city. The project incorporates three strands, two of which are outlined below⁷:

- Bounce & Rhyme

Bounce & Rhyme sessions are designed to help improve children's literacy, numeracy, and communication skills, assist understanding of child development, promote parenting skills, prevent social isolation of parents and encourage active book sharing and library membership within families.

- Toddlers' Tales

Toddlers' Tales sessions are designed to help improve children's literacy, numeracy, and communication skills assist understanding of child development, promote parenting skills, prevent social isolation of parents, supporting increased physical activity and encourage active book sharing and library membership within families.

A review was undertaken by Ipsos Mori Scotland (2011)⁸ and found the main short-term benefits of Bounce & Rhyme/Toddlers' Tales to include:

- Parents confidence in singing and reading with their child increases
- Attendance increases use of library services
- Attendance increases awareness of other services available

- ***Play, Talk, Read campaign***

The Scottish Government's Play, Talk, Read campaign⁹ aims to encourage parents and carers to play, talk and read more with their children, and raises awareness of the benefits of positive interaction from day one. The Government collaborates with

⁷ The third strand is Triple P, an evidence-based positive parenting programme providing tips on how to promote child development and manage behaviour

⁸ For the full review of Family Futures, which includes views on programme content and delivery and recommendations for future development, see <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/3023/Review-of-Family-Futures.aspx>

⁹ <http://playtalkread.org/>

Working on Wheels, a charity which manages the Scotland-wide Play, Talk, Read bus tour. The tour aims to visit the heart of local communities to engage with families. The services on the campaign buses facilitate a non-judgmental space for parents and their children using:

- Singing and rhyming sessions for pre-school children and their parents / carers
- Free creative activity sessions on the bus promoting simple ideas and their benefits of to take home and share.

Glasgow Libraries are key partners in this Strategy implementation in the City.

Support through automatic library membership

Public libraries should provide support for families, enabling them to obtain and use appropriate, attractive books with their children. Families need access to libraries and children's centres enabling them to obtain a wide range of resources and participate in a diverse range of activities designed to increase a love of reading and the use of language skills.

There is a proven link between public library use and young people's reading. Research by the National Literacy Trust found that¹⁰:

- Young people that use their public library are nearly twice as likely to be reading outside of class every day.
- Public library users are nearly twice as likely to say that they enjoy reading either very much or quite a lot.
- Public library users are twice as likely to say that they talk with their family about what they are reading at least once a week and report that they get significantly more encouragement from their parents in reading

To encourage library use from the outset, children should be issued with library cards by their local authority when their birth is registered, without parents having to apply. In a public library parents and carers can access a wide range of material for children and will benefit from the expert guidance of library staff on children's literature and the suitability of a particular book for a particular child. Librarians can also intervene at an early stage if a parent or carer requires additional support in the development of their child's literacy skills.

2. What steps need to be taken to build capacity for everyone who works with very young children and their families (e.g. health visitors, nurseries, child care providers, speech and language therapists etc.) to make sure that every child has good early language development by the time they start school?

¹⁰ <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED515944.pdf>

Long term damage is done to a child's prospects if their language development stalls in their early years. The erroneous assumption that the teaching of literacy skills is something that begins when a child enters school, and is the preserve of schools, needs to be challenged. All parents and carers need to be made aware of the importance of early language development and the crucial role that they play in this, so the focus should be on educating and, if necessary, supporting them. To realise this, all agencies working with families and their children need to have a basic understanding of good early language development themselves. In addition, there needs to be a joined up approach and shared messaging across all these agencies and Local Authority services to build capacity. This is the key to ensuring that families don't fall through the net, that costs are reduced and that clear messages are given across all agencies involved with young children and their parents.

Having staff in public libraries and children's centres with the appropriate knowledge of books and the ability to share that knowledge with parents and with other professionals working with parents is important. As discussed above, public libraries can provide creative activities for families with young children that help to teach parents how to develop the language skills of their children. The availability of free learning activities in libraries and the wider community needs to be more widely publicised, as many of those parents who need them most are the very ones who are unaware of them.

Encouraging agencies that work with young children to look at how to make their spaces communication friendly may also build capacity. See www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk which offers an approach to this.

If those working with young children are to effectively influence parents and carers to adopt the necessary practices to develop language skills, they will need the resources to, for example, develop awareness raising material such as leaflets and posters, or to deliver practical advice sessions. This needs to be adequately funded.

3. What are the main issues and barriers that need to be overcome to ensure every child is able to read accurately, fluently and with enjoyment by the end of primary school?

Some of the key issues and barriers are set out below.

Poor parental literacy skills

Many parents have poor literacy skills themselves, which are often hidden due to the stigma attached to the problem, and this can impact on their children's skills and reading enjoyment. On occasion concern for their children's development will spur a parent/carer to address their own literacy difficulties and knowledgeable staff in public libraries, schools and other agencies need to be equipped to deal sensitively with requests for help.

Starting school with poor language skills and failure to catch up

Children starting school with poor language skills will already be at a disadvantage, so intervention strategies need to be in place within the school to bring their language and reading skills up to an appropriate level. Intervention strategies (normally involving one-to-one reading) often have a great impact on child literacy levels, but are sporadically applied. All primary schools need an intervention infrastructure whereby students who are struggling with their communication skills receive plenty of opportunity to practice. This need not be expensive to instigate as it can be achieved through investment in volunteer programmes and charitable organisation such as Beanstalk¹¹ or Primary Reading Partners¹². Paired reading of this type should happen out of school hours as well, at venues such as public libraries.

Developing a love of reading

Teaching children how to read is only a small part of turning them into readers. Even if a child can read, it does not mean he or she will do so if they do not enjoy it, so alongside teaching children how to read, a love of reading needs to be instilled. Support in schools for reading for pleasure is an absolute must to ensure that the skills, knowledge, experience and enjoyment of reading is embedded in children at a young age. Schools should break down barriers to reading for children, no matter what their reading capability, so that they become so called “free readers”. Choice is the key, not levels, banding or points scoring, and a well-stocked school library is essential for this to happen. Children respond better if allowed to choose what they read.

UK Literacy Association research carried out in schools in 2009 showed clearly that teachers do not have the up-to-date knowledge of children's books required to encourage wider reading and cannot always recommend titles that match a child's interest and/or ability¹³. In addition many do not have the experience or skills to set up reading programmes and activities to encourage reading for pleasure, and those that do, do not always have the time to put this into practice.

A professional librarian does have the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise. Librarians know of the rich variety of resources in all formats and media that are available not only in school libraries, but in other libraries, archives, museums and local studies centres that can help teachers to introduce children to new learning experiences based on access to exciting content that will in turn help nurture a quest for knowledge and a love of reading.

Innovative projects to develop children's love of reading include the EU project AMORES. AMORES is attempting to enable school children from age 10 -15 to discover a love for literature through digital collaboration and creativity. The project website can be found at: <http://www.amores-project.eu/> .

¹¹ <http://www.beanstalkcharity.org.uk/>

¹² <https://thebp.org/programmes/primary-reading-partners/>

¹³ UKLA, 2009. UKLA Research on Teachers as Readers <http://tinyurl.com/cetbxqj>

More research is needed about the role of digital technology and e-books in engaging children in reading for pleasure.

Funding for school libraries and the Schools Library Service

Financial constraints mean that not every primary school can have its own librarian, but they should all have a well-stocked library, with books chosen by a librarian, not a teacher. However, results of a survey of school libraries carried out by the School Library Association (SLA) in 2012¹⁴ found that 40% of responding primary schools had seen their budgets reduced, with only 18% having a rise on the previous year's amount. Adequate library space is also a problem; 81% of the 651 primary schools that responded to The UK National Survey of school libraries in 2010 had a designated library space, a reduction of 88% since 2007.¹⁵

Whilst relatively few primary schools have a designated school librarian¹⁶, they should be able to access professional support via the Schools Library Service.¹⁷ Schools Library Services are support services delivered by local authorities providing primary and secondary schools with advice and training on managing and developing their own school libraries and teaching resources, on teaching information and digital fluency to enable children to become independent learners and on helping schools create a reading culture. The Schools Library Service also lends, or makes available for purchase, carefully chosen resources to support teaching and learning in the classroom and to support wider reading for pleasure and enjoyment.

Schools Library Services are often a traded service to schools. When faced with tough budget decisions some schools are choosing to no longer use them, so children are missing out and the school as a whole loses the added value and economies of scale. Over the last decade the number of Schools Library Services has declined, and a survey of public library authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between July and September 2012 suggests that one in five could be facing the possibility of closure. In a quarter of respondent authorities that deliver a Schools Library Service, the Service is being reviewed and closure is a possibility. Budgets were being reduced in 40% of respondent authorities¹⁸.

¹⁴ School Library Association, 2012. *School Libraries in 2012 – the SLA Survey*. Swindon: School Library Association

¹⁵ Booktrust, 2007. *Library Books in Schools*

¹⁶ 247 Full-time equivalent (FTE) librarians were in publicly funded schools in England in 2012 (Source: Department for Education Workforce Census, 2012)

¹⁷ Streatfield, D, Shaper, S and Rae-Scott, S (2010) *School Libraries in the UK: a worthwhile past, a difficult present – and a transformed future*. London: CILIP

¹⁸ CILIP, 2012. *An Uncertain Future: Schools Library Services in England and Wales 2012* London: CILIP

4. How can parents best be supported (and support each other) to help their children with reading?

A joined up approach across agencies is needed to ensure they can support parents and carers easily and effectively, and that the messages they receive are consistent. There needs to be capacity within schools to advise parents and to enable them to meet to discuss books and reading. School libraries should be developed to meet those needs. Public libraries, school libraries and School Library Services need to work closely and co-operatively to support children and their families – a co-ordinated effective national campaign designed to increase parents confidence and knowledge of books could be one way of achieving this. The national message should be that everyone within a child's life should be supporting their reading. Engaging celebrities to talk about books / the books they share with their children, increasing the discussion and reviews of children's books in the media, particularly the tabloid newspapers, more TV programmes about books and a joined up media campaign across all media outlets and agencies. Schools and libraries should constantly highlight the importance of the home learning environment, encouraging parents to provide books in the home and to read to their children.

Many parents are not confident when it comes to their children's reading. This could be because they know little of the children's book market, are unsure as to the suitability of many titles, or because they have literacy problems themselves (as stated above, adult education programmes are essential to ensure parents and guardians have the literacy skills to transfer to their children). Again, professional librarians in schools and public libraries have the knowledge and expertise to support parents and carers by, for example, recommending titles based on a child's reading level, interests and age, and making suggestions as to how to make reading more enjoyable, linking it with other activities and the child's wider interests. Librarians also establish and co-ordinate reading groups of various types, for example, parent and child reading groups that encourage families to enjoy literacy as a communal activity, storytime and rhymetime for under 3s (as discussed above); "dads groups" to encourage fathers to read to their children, and "quick read" reading groups for busy parents.

Intervention strategies to foster parent-child interaction in the home learning environment that are helping parents to help their children with reading include Glasgow Life Libraries – Children Books & Play. Glasgow Libraries provides teachers, parents/ carers with access to Children Books & Play (CBP) bags, which contain toys and books. In a focus group conducted by Glasgow Life one of the parents said their child was now able to sit for a story, which had not been the case before they had the CBP bags in their home, and another parent who reported having personal literacy issues said the bags had allowed them to share stories with their child. 53% of parents reported feeling more confident in book sharing at home as a result of this resource support.¹⁹

¹⁹Glasgow Life Libraries – Children Books & Play case study, provided by Glasgow Libraries (available upon request)

5. How can all partners (including libraries, local businesses etc.) in the community best be involved to support and encourage children with early language and reading?

A clear message from Government that this is a community as well as a parental responsibility is required.

There is a need for local strategies to bring all the local resources together to support and encourage children with early language development and reading. Libraries should be part of such a local strategy, and in some instances will be in a position to take a leadership role, as they are instrumental in supporting the early language and reading of children. ASCEL's (Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians) recently published 'Children's Library Journeys' report funded by the Arts Council England highlights the importance of the repeated message about libraries at key stages of a child's life, responding to their changing needs.²⁰ As outlined above, a range of activities and programmes are being delivered in libraries by, or in consultation with, professionally qualified staff. Librarians have the skills to develop children's love of reading, and through properly resourced school and public libraries children and their parents and guardians can access a wide range of reading materials, both print based and electronic. Libraries should also be working together with other places in the community that children utilise to make children regard reading as exciting and special, and something they want to do.

Business can help by releasing staff to be reading volunteers. Businesses should also be looking at supporting workers who are themselves parents by improving their skills where relevant and increasing their knowledge of children's books, for example through a workplace reading group that focus on books to read with your children.

More collaboration and multi venue activities are required. Organisations and stakeholders need to be more active in marketing related services and clubs

6. What do you think is the most important priority for ensuring that every child achieves good early language development by age 5 by 2020, and why?

As one of the only national agencies working with children under five, public libraries play a crucial role in meeting the language development needs of this age group. However, funding cuts and the ongoing austerity programme means that the necessary resources may not be available to deliver this effectively. Sufficient investment in public libraries is critical to the attainment of the "Read On Get On" objectives. We strongly recommend that the "Read On, Get On" campaign should engage with the Leadership for Libraries Task Force set up by the Government in cooperation with the Local Government Association to help "reinvigorate" the public library sector in England. This will be an opportunity to help establish the development of reading for enjoyment

²⁰ Crossley, L, 2015. Children's Library Journeys report
<http://www.ascel.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/public/Children%27s%20Library%20Journeys%20report%20%20April%202015.pdf>

amongst the children and young people as a core part of the service. As members of the Task Force CILIP are happy to facilitate this engagement.

There should be a co-ordinated joined up approach with clear consistent and ongoing messages about the importance of reading and the value of a parent's role. This is about core life skills without which children will not access learning and will fall further and further behind as they move into adulthood. It is also important to provide support for parents so that their skills, knowledge and confidence increases and that they are motivated to build a language and reading enriched home environment for their children.

7. What do you think is the most important priority for ensuring that every child reads well by age 11 by 2025, and why?

The only place that a child is required to attend regularly between the ages of 5 and 18 is school, so every child should have access to library resources that support the National Curriculum and encourage wider reading, and the support of expert library staff who can advise and support them, their teachers and their parents/carers.

Investment in public libraries and other reading, writing and communication initiatives is also essential. Through investment in the infrastructure of literacy – the stock, the staff, the knowledge – the UK can improve its prospects by enabling everyone to have positive reading experiences that ensure lifelong learning and literacy skills.

8. Is there anything else you would like to add that hasn't been covered above?

Once the target of all children reading well by the age of 11 has been attained, it has to be sustained. If children do not carry on reading, trying different genres and texts, they will not progress in their reading skills and will stagnate. This means that, at secondary level, it is just as important for children to have access to a well resourced school library and a qualified librarian. Librarians in secondary schools also play an important role in the delivery of information and digital competencies. Without developing such skills today's children run the risk of being excluded and disenfranchised from day-to-day life as adults.

Numerous studies have concluded that a measurable improvement in children's educational attainment is achieved when librarians play active and collaborative roles with teachers²¹. A commitment to a literate society should therefore include the statutory provision of school libraries.

In conclusion, the message about the value and importance of good language skills and reading ability is crucial and needs to be effectively articulated in any national reading strategy. The strategy needs to recognise the different kinds of reading that children do

²¹ For a summary of the evidence see: <http://tinyurl.com/cdj6rgz>

in their daily lives and the range of people both within and outside of school (including libraries) who support this.