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## Charity calls on prisons, colleges and workplaces to take new approach to tackling literacy

With one in six people in the UK struggling with literacy<sup>1</sup>, The Reading Agency is calling for new approaches to tackling the country's skills problems. It is urging more organisations to sign up to its Six Book Challenge for 2011 and wants every prison and college to be using the scheme.

The Six Book Challenge was launched in 2008 by The Reading Agency, the charity which works to inspire more people to read more. It attracted 13,500 participants in 2010 through libraries, adult education, prisons and workplaces – up 50% on the previous year – and is fast becoming a major transformational tool for those struggling with reading and writing.

“We're thrilled by the way the Challenge is growing,” says The Reading Agency's adult literacy specialist Genevieve Clarke, “but there's a long way to go. We have to find creative ways to tackle the serious skills problem in this country and the Six Book Challenge is definitely one of them. We're keen to talk to any prison or college urgently about how they can get involved in this year's Challenge.”

The scheme encourages less confident adult readers to develop a reading habit through choosing, reading and expressing their views about books. Research confirms that engagement in reading for pleasure through the Six Book Challenge increases confidence, motivation and skills (see “Notes to Editors”).

It has proved particularly successful in prisons and YOIs where skills problems are particularly acute - 48% have a reading ability below that expected of an 11 year old<sup>2</sup>. “The Six Book Challenge has demonstrated the value of additional knowledge, escapism and calmness all in one despite one's surroundings,” comments Roger Plant, Governor of HMP & YOI Warren Hill in Suffolk, where nearly 100 young people took part and 60 completed the Challenge in 2010.

“It's as good an intervention as there is and it's illustrated to the young men that all occupations/hobbies don't have to be physical and tough looking to be cool,” he continues. “The added spin-off in prison is that the Challenge and the habit of reading can be started in a controlled environment and hopefully continued on release, thus alleviating some of the boredom that in some cases keeps them on the streets, and maybe prevent re-offending.”

More colleges are coming on board too, following the example of Northampton College which has run the scheme since 2008 and registered 138 participants last year. “I felt the Six Book Challenge contributed to students' learning goals and re-engaged those learners who were reluctant or not confident readers,” reports Catherine Hays, Curriculum Manager for Supported Learning. “It encouraged them to use the library and to interact with other people.” Supported Learning students aged 16-19 who took

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<sup>1</sup> *Literacy: State of the Nation*, National Literacy Trust 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Prison Reform Trust 2008.

part in 2010 achieved better final results not only in literacy but in numeracy with results going up as much as 7%.

The Reading Agency aims to increase the involvement of workplaces in the Six Book Challenge through a partnership with the TUC's learning arm unionlearn and the continuing support of employers and trade union learning representatives (ULRs). Several new workplaces have signed up for 2011 including more NHS Trusts, an Argos/DHL distribution centre and De Montfort University in Leicester.

- The life-changing impact of the Six Book Challenge is demonstrated by case studies from around the country ([www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/support/case-studies/](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/support/case-studies/))
- Six Book Challenge contact: visit [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) or contact Genevieve Clarke: [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk) Packs of materials for the Six Book Challenge 2011 are available to order from [www.readingagency.org.uk/shop](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/shop)
- For more media information please contact: Debbie Hyde, Oasis Media [debbie.hyde@oasismedia.co.uk](mailto:debbie.hyde@oasismedia.co.uk) or 07956 320 486

Notes to editors:

- Participants in the Six Book Challenge are invited to read six books – or short stories, magazine articles, poems and even video games – and record their reading in a diary. They are rewarded by a certificate and the chance to enter a national prize draw and supported by incentives and along the way. For more general information about the Six Book Challenge, please visit [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk)
- See [www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/](http://www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/) for the Six Book Challenge 2008 Impact Report and contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk) for an evaluation of the Six Book Challenge 2010.
- The Reading Agency is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. ([www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)).
- The main activity for the Six Book Challenge 2011 will run from January to June but organisations are welcome to use the scheme at any time in 2011. The Reading Agency offers a prize draw with a deadline of 30 June 2011 for completers (a weekend in London) and for participating prisons (a visit by a top author in association with the Reading Agency's Reading Partners scheme) and for workplaces (a visit by a top author in association with the Campaign for Learning's Learning at Work Day and Transworld Publishers).
- The free booklet called Six Book Challenge at Work published by The Reading Agency with the TUC can be ordered from [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk) or can be downloaded from [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/news/new-booklet-features-six-book/](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/news/new-booklet-features-six-book/)