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## Reading at work: changing lives

Trade unions and public library services can share innovative approaches to encouraging reading in the workplace through a new Reading Agency publication, which outlines how it can be a powerful force for social change.

Getting Reading to Work: unions, libraries and the Six Book Challenge will be launched at the third annual unionlearn conference at Congress House, Central London on 11 June 2009.

It tells six inspirational stories of how union learning representatives in Yorkshire and the Humber have worked with libraries to use the Six Book Challenge, an incentive scheme for adults who are improving their literacy skills and just getting into reading for enjoyment.

The workplaces include Tesco, Corus Steelworks, Royal Mail, Fox's Biscuits and Fletchers Bakeries.

- Redundancies, a fire and poor use of the workplace learning centre were some of the problems facing Mick Neville and Alan Oakes when they became union learning representatives at Fletchers Bakeries in Sheffield.
- They chose the Six Book Challenge as a simple but powerful learning tool, and promoted it hard to colleagues, gaining visible management support by giving a free meal in the staff canteen to anyone who completed four of the six books.
- 60 people signed up for the Challenge, the visiting mobile library gained 30 new members, and Alan and Mick won a Reading Heroes award for their outstanding National Year of Reading contribution to promoting reading. This year 98 of their colleagues are participating in the Six Book Challenge.

“The Six Book Challenge project has clearly been successful in changing attitudes to reading and learning in workplaces. Unionlearn is delighted to play a role in enabling union learning representatives across the country to promote The Reading Agency’s excellent scheme in their own workplaces,” says Liz Smith OBE, unionlearn director.

The Challenge was piloted by libraries in Yorkshire and The Humber, and launched nationally in 2008 by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is sponsored by Costa and runs through public libraries working with a wide range of partners. Participants are invited to read six books, supported by incentives and creative reading activity. In 2008, 7,000 adult emergent readers took part and take-up of the scheme is growing fast.

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“Everyone wants a literate and motivated workforce and using the Six Book Challenge in workplaces helps people become confident readers. Talking about reading can also break down barriers, lift people out of daily routines and open up new ideas and opportunities,” says Miranda McKearney, director of The Reading Agency. “It’s excellent that unionlearn has helped us publish Getting Reading to Work - we hope masses more library services, trade unions and employers will be inspired to use this approach to spread reading in the workplace.”

The Six Book Challenge has now been shortlisted for the 2009 Libraries Change Lives Award by CILIP. It has also been taken up by unionlearn in the North West and by individual workplaces in other areas.

“Libraries have a huge role to play in supporting learning and helping people to discover the joy of reading. Working with trade unions is an exciting opportunity for us,” says Fiona Williams, head of libraries and heritage, York City Council, and president of the Society of Chief Librarians.

- For a free copy of Getting reading to work, please visit [www.unionlearn.org.uk/freebooks](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/freebooks)
- For more information about the Six Book Challenge, please visit [www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk](http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) or contact Genevieve Clarke on
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#### **Notes to editors:**

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. ([www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk))
- Recent Six Book Challenge evaluation showed that it made many participants realise that they could enjoy reading - 61% said they enjoyed reading “a lot” compared with 41% at the start. 60% of participants reported literacy gains – a benefit endorsed by tutors. 75% said they would be increasing reading-related activities in the coming year. (Six Book Challenge 2008: The Impact on Readers, by Sarah Grylls, Learning for Learning. Copyright The Reading Agency and The Vital Link, December 2008. Available at: [www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/evaluation.html#sbc](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/vitallink/evaluation.html#sbc))
- Unionlearn is the TUC’s learning and skills organisation, which, together with trade unions, has trained over 24,000 union learning reps. They encourage colleagues in the workplace to re-engage with learning. More information can be found at [www.unionlearn.org.uk](http://www.unionlearn.org.uk).

