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Six Book Challenge targets workplaces for 2011

The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge has exceeded all expectations for 2010 and is focusing on building the scheme in workplaces for another record-breaking year in 2011.

With Skills Minister John Hayes having recently called on employers to encourage informal learning, evidence from the first three years of the Six Book Challenge demonstrates that it can engage adults in a new reading habit, improve their skills, motivate them to continue learning and get them sharing their experience with family, friends and work colleagues. (Please see 'Notes to editors' for more details.)

The Six Book Challenge was launched in 2008 and encourages emergent readers to develop a reading habit through choosing, reading and expressing their views about books. Participants are invited to read six books, such as the "Quick Reads" and keep a reading diary. They are rewarded by a certificate and supported by incentives and creative reading activity along the way.

During 2010, 13,500 adults across the UK took part in the Six Book Challenge through libraries, colleges, adult and community education, workplaces and prisons - up 50% on 2009. Over two-thirds of library services across the UK got involved and an estimated 4,656 people joined their library in order to participate. 83% of survey respondents said they felt more confident about reading as a result of the Six Book Challenge and expected to use a library more in future.

Case studies of successful Six Book Challenge completers from around the UK are available, including Ken Bakker from Bolton, who says: "The Six Book Challenge can open up all sorts of doors for people. I can't really put into words how glad I am that I did it, and I'm still reading!" Ken, 39, completed the scheme at Bolton College and now plans to get his work colleagues at Littlewoods Clearance involved in his role as a union learning representative.

The Reading Agency will be working 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.

"We would actively encourage other employers and HR managers to think about running the Six Book Challenge," says Garry Thompson, HR manager at Warburtons. "It certainly increases camaraderie between departments and generates a buzz in the learning centre with an element of healthy competition! If an employee feels more confident in their reading ability or more comfortable picking up a book then the Challenge has achieved its goal at our bakery. We will continue to promote it heavily to increase the number of employees taking part."

Ninety workplaces ranging from Transport for London to Warburtons took part in the Six Book Challenge in 2010, many of which link to their local library service. The story of their success is told in a free booklet *Six Book Challenge at Work* produced with unionlearn.

“We’re really encouraged by the increased participation this year and the ways in which libraries, adult education and colleges are managing to scale up the scheme,” says The Reading Agency’s adult literacy specialist Genevieve Clarke. “It’s a great example of libraries’ ability to reach out to and support new audiences who wouldn’t otherwise get a chance to discover that reading can be a pleasure.”

Packs of promotional materials for the Six Book Challenge 2011 are now available to order from www.readingagency.org.uk/shop They include reading diaries, certificates, posters, flyers, bookmarks and emergent reader book recommendations. Incentives available for purchase include branded pens, keyrings, coasters, notepads and mugs.

The Reading Agency is also linking with the Campaign for Learning for a second year in 2011 to offer a prize draw for workplaces that run both the Six Book Challenge and the Campaign for Learning's Learning at Work Day. The prize will be a visit by a top author courtesy of Transworld Publishers. This year's winners were the Royal Bolton Hospital who hosted a highly successful event at which top US crimewriter Tess Gerritsen talked about her bestselling book *The Killing Place*.

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Note to editors:

- Skills Minister John Hayes has recently called on employers to encourage informal learning. “By promoting a learning culture in the workplace, businesses of all sizes make learning a part of everyday life. They reap the benefits of that investment in the shape of a more productive, engaged workforce, reduced operational costs and an enhanced corporate reputation in their communities.” (Foreword to *Learning to Connect: Building the Café Culture Movement* published by Business in the Community.)
- See www.readingagency.org.uk/adults/reading-for-pleasure-impact/ for the Six Book Challenge 2008 Impact Report and contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk for an evaluation of the Six Book Challenge 2010.

- 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)
- 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 for completers (a weekend in London) and for participating prisons and workplaces (a visit by a top author).
- The Reading Agency is offering training on 10 November in London for those running the Challenge through libraries, colleges, adult education, workplace and other settings and on 4 November in Birmingham for those running the scheme in prisons and YOIs.
- 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 or can be downloaded from www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk/news
- The Reading Agency works closely with other initiatives for emergent readers such as the Quick Reads (www.quickreads.org.uk)