

The Reading Agency's submission to the Henley Review

"To read is to soar, to fly to a point of vantage." AC Grayling

Summary – what is cultural education?

The Reading Agency is delighted to submit a response to the Henley Review. We believe that Cultural Education is about helping young people to grow and learn through the arts and culture. It enables children to explore their inner creativity and their intellectual and social selves. It helps them understand themselves and others better, learn independently and live satisfying and stimulating lives

We are an independent charity specializing in spreading reading through libraries. Our mission is to inspire more people to read more, and we focus on innovation, social action and involving the public.

We specialise in working with the public library network because we believe it's vital that everyone has an equal chance to become a reader. We've developed a way of working which means we can mobilise the whole public library network (currently 3,426 English service points) through every local authority. We help them save money and make more impact through shared creative programmes and partnerships.

With this distinctive strategic role in mind, we have focused our response on the role of public libraries in cultural education. Our five main points are:

- Reading should feature strongly in the cultural offer because of its creativity and power to enhance children's well being and life chances.
- The Review should champion public libraries' role in the cultural offer and sweat a massive national asset harder. Libraries are key to reaching disadvantaged children and building a Big Society.
- There are new opportunities to get better value for money by joining up public libraries, schools and cultural partners. Libraries are running shared reading programmes which could be the pivot for a whole new era of cultural collaboration.
- Cultural education work involving reading should be child/youth led. There is a need for a new public involvement strategy.
- The Reading Agency is small but our strategy helps us work on a big canvas. We want to help lead new collaborative ways of working.

We've included lots of evidence and practical ideas. We have the partnerships and models to make a difference and would relish the opportunity to be part of the action going forward.

Our main points are:

- A philanthropically funded innovation fund would help catalyse change
- We propose a set of practical actions to be taken by every head teacher to create a new era of collaboration and improve the value gained through school and public library partnerships
- Instead of prescribed reading lists, we propose a new kind of reading challenge for children
- We wish to establish a new public involvement strategy - our MyVoice programme creates community reading hubs for young people and is eminently scaleable
- We are developing a new national public library reading offer as a framework to catalyse collaboration across the sector

1. What is the value of Cultural Education and how do you measure this value?

1.1 Reading and creativity

Reading is often overlooked when talking about cultural experience. But the creativity of reading makes its inclusion within a cultural offer vital. When you read you are plunged into a deep connection with the writer; your imagination fuses with theirs to create a new world, new linkages, new understanding. Your own images bring their words to life.

- Reading for pleasure is the most popular form of engagement with culture. 63% of the population reads for pleasure. ¹ Public libraries offer free access to reading.
- *"Reading is a creative activity in and of itself. It encourages connections and provides stimulus. It links to other types of cultural expression and other art forms. It helps young people to explore the world and enriches them educationally and emotionally".*²
- The value of cultural education can be measured by the impact it has on young people's lives and the communities in which they live, developing learning, resilience and skills, promoting creativity and supporting engagement.

1.2 Reading as the gateway to engagement in society

Reading isn't just a recreational activity; it is essential to being part of society and for accessing the broader cultural offer. Low literacy skills and lack of engagement with reading are major obstacles to further involvement in almost everything. There is overwhelming evidence that literacy has a significant relationship to a person's happiness, well being and success and that improvements in literacy – at any point in life – can have a profound effect on individuals and their contribution to society.³

Investing in building children's engagement with reading will save money further down the line. 70% of pupils permanently excluded from school have difficulties in basic literacy skills. 25% of young offenders have reading skills below those of the average seven-year-old. 60% of the prison population has difficulties in basic literacy skills.⁴

1.3 The importance of reading for pleasure – the "why" as well as the "how"

So literacy is vital to children and young people's life chances. Yet the most recent international Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) test for ten year olds shows that of the 45 countries involved:

- England's reading achievement score dropped from 3rd to 19th place between 2001 and 2006
- England is now outperformed by Russia, Italy and Latvia⁵

We recommend that the Henley Review focus strongly on the reading for pleasure agenda. Enjoyment and motivation are essential to the acquisition of literacy skills. Reading for pleasure is known to improve social mobility and life chances. The Henley Review could play an important role in building understanding of this and factoring it into cultural education.

In the last ten years a body research has confirmed how vital it is for children and young people to enjoy reading. The motivation that comes from enjoyment is essential. The "why" is as important as the "how".

OECD research in 2002 found that reading for pleasure is more important than either wealth or social class as an indicator of success at school.⁶ Recent Oxford University research found that reading books is the only out-of-school activity for 16-year-olds that is demonstrably linked to securing managerial or professional jobs in later life. *"According to our results there is something special about reading for pleasure. The positive associations of reading for pleasure aren't replicated in any other extra-curricular activity."*⁷

The 2009 PISA study of 15 year olds' reading showed that students who enjoy reading the most perform significantly better than students who enjoy reading the least (*OECD 2010*)

¹ *Taking Part Survey Briefing*, Arts Council England, 2006

² *Creative Reading: Young People, reading and Public Libraries*, J. Holden, Demos, 2004

³ *Literacy Changes Lives* National Literacy Trust

⁴ *Literacy Changes Lives, The role of literacy in offending behaviour* National Literacy Trust

⁵ *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*, National Centre for Education Statistics, 2007

⁶ *Reading for Change*, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2002

⁷ *Reading at 16 linked to better job prospects*, Mark Taylor, University of Oxford

Evidence is also building to show the importance of reading for pleasure in personal as well as in educational attainment.⁸ Three year olds who are read to every day have a vocabulary at the age of five that is two months more advanced than those who are not.

There is a new understanding of the relationship between reading for pleasure and literacy acquisition. The skill needed to decode words is linked to the motivation that comes from enjoying reading. The United Kingdom Literacy Association sets out the relationship thus:

Distinctions between Reading for Pleasure and Reading Instruction ref. UKLA Teachers as Readers www.ukla.org.uk	
<p>Reading for Pleasure is oriented towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •Choosing to read • •The will • •Engagement and response • •Lifelong readers • •Child direction • •Child ownership • •Achievement • •The maximum entitlement (a reader for life!) • Personalisation agenda 	<p>Reading Instruction is oriented towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • •Learning to read • •The skill • •Decoding and comprehension • •System readers • •Teacher direction • •Teacher ownership • •Attainment • •The minimum entitlement (reached Level "x" in school) • The Standards Agenda

1.4 Reading and well being

Children and young people need the wider benefits reading can bring. It contributes to quality of life and supports well-being.

- Research from the University of Sussex shows that reading works better than other forms of relaxation to calm frazzled nerves. It has been proven to reduce stress levels by 68%.⁹
- There is a growing body of evidence to show the well-being effects of belonging to a reading group. Taking part in social reading activity helps relaxation, combats isolation, improves self-esteem and social interaction, supports learning and develops concentration, memory and mental agility. It is also great fun.¹⁰

1.5 The UK has a major problem with reading for pleasure

The evidence supporting the importance of children's reading for pleasure is unassailable. So it is depressing that our performance in this area is falling.

- Only 40% of England's ten year olds have a positive attitude to reading. The figure for Italy is 64% and 58% for Germany.
- England's ten year olds are 37th out of 45 in terms of their attitudes to reading. This is a drop from the 27th position out of 35 held in 2001.¹¹

We would like the Henley Review to suggest that public libraries have an essential strategic role in tackling this. Their reach into disadvantaged communities and their emphasis on voluntary engagement makes them a powerful ally. Ask any author what has turned them into a writer and they'll tell you that the ethos and resources of the public library, and the sense of freedom that comes with them, were seminal.

1.6 What works – and doesn't - to get children engaged with and enjoying reading

The evidence base underpinning this paper suggests that a cultural offer around reading should major on the following features:

- Empowering children and young people – giving them a sense of freedom in their choice of reading
- Validation of all kinds of reading prepared to endorse everything from manga to blogs to joke books.

⁸ *Literacy Changes Lives*, Dugdale and Clark, National Literacy Trust, 2008, Bookstart Evaluation at www.booktrustadmin/kentlyons.com/downloads/BSHardoutcomes0308.doc

⁹ www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/5070874/Reading-can-help-reduce-stress, 2009

¹⁰ *Reading the Situation, Book Reading and Public Library Use*, The Reading Agency/BML, 2000; *Reading Groups and Public Library Research*, The Reading Agency/BML, 2002; *A National Library Development Programme for Reading Groups*, The Reading Agency, 2004

¹¹ Twist et al 2003, 2007. Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2006 (IEA)

- Tapping into children's own creativity and passions. For instance, young people's love of music can be harnessed to inspire an engagement with reading through song lyrics, rapping and factual reading about how to get into the music industry.
- A wide network of supportive people/role models who know about books and keep up to date with children's literature, who know the children well enough to understand what might fire their imagination. Children need these kinds of adults around them in and out of school.
- Access to good libraries. There is a strong relationship between children's use of libraries – public and school libraries, and school library services – and their reading attainment and later progress in life.

Case studies

The Summer Reading Challenge - primary school children

We started The Summer Reading Challenge eleven years ago by combining all public libraries' summer holiday reading activity into one big shared scheme with massive economies of scale. The Challenge costs £1 a child. By using a shared scheme, local authorities achieve key outcomes for children at a sixth of the price of running their own holiday activities

The Challenge now runs in 97% of UK local authorities and last year involved 760,000 children. 48,000 children joined the library to take part. A wide range of cultural partners are involved in running local activities to inspire children, from theatre to puppet workshops, storytelling to illustration sessions.

It challenges children to read six books of their choice over the holidays and rewards them with incentives along the way. It superbly illustrates the new look public library service – the experience is supported by expert staff and motivational teenage volunteers, has a creative web experience and involves children's publishers and authors. We ensure its accessibility, eg we have an RNIB partnership to ensure visually impaired children can take part. We support library authorities to work with schools and target disadvantaged families and those with English as a second language.

UKLA research shows that the Challenge helps keep children's reading levels up during the summer holidays and that children return to school better motivated and ready to learn. It also increases their reading range, confidence and motivation. There is evidence that the free choice element of doing the Challenge (no set texts) is very important.

The UKLA research recommended that Head Teachers include The Challenge in their school improvement plans. There is a major opportunity to build upon the growing co-operation between libraries, schools and others to develop a whole new collaborative era.¹²

Youth-led reading hubs

HeadSpace was a youth led Big Lottery Funded programme run by The Reading Agency with 17 local authorities. See www.readingagency.org.uk/young/headspace/. It supported young people to create the kind of library service they want. Free, local safe spaces with really engaging activities and the chance to make a difference in the community.

5623 young people took part, 40% at risk of exclusion. 2415 took up leadership roles, 309 took up long term volunteering roles and 419 are working towards or achieved an accredited outcome.

The learning from HeadSpace and other experimental work has now been built into an innovative MyVoice programme, run by The Reading Agency with 20 local authorities in areas of high social deprivation. Over three years 6,000 young people will be setting up 60 new reading hubs in libraries, schools and youth clubs in four regions. 27,000 young people will be planning and taking part in 760 writing and reading activities from performance poetry to lyric writing. 10,000 young people involved in reading inspired volunteering.

MyVoice will be a powerful, scaleable model for helping teenagers become creators. They will programme events, work with artists and spend budgets. Disadvantaged young people will have new opportunities to develop their creativity, skills and employability and become active citizens with the confidence to make a positive contribution.

¹² Summer Reading Challenge 2009 UKLA research

What doesn't work - prescribed lists

Recent research and practice suggests that prescribed reading lists are an unhelpful way forward. We hope that this will not be the Curriculum Review's recommendation. Rather than lists, we should focus on the quality of children's reading experiences and ensure they involve a sense of freedom and pleasure.

2. What cultural education do you think a child should experience at each key stage?

2.1 Public libraries and cultural education

We believe that public libraries should be a significant partner in creating and realising a new vision for cultural education working across the key stages. They offer a national, freely-available resource on everybody's doorstep. They can be frontline community hubs, open out of school hours, and a vehicle through which everyone can find a safe way into culture, especially for the otherwise disengaged. Let's not reinvent the wheel – we already have a network of centres devoted to culture and education in every community, working with an aspect of culture – reading – which is fundamental to children's life chances. There can be few other organisations with such potential to build a Big Society.

- There are currently 3,426 library service points in England. Current expenditure on English public libraries is £980m. Even after the cuts, this represents a huge resource¹³
- 75% of children aged 5-15 years use public libraries; 72% of young people aged 11-15 years use libraries.¹⁴
- Children who use the library are twice as likely to become above average readers¹⁵
- The vocabulary of a child taken to the library on a monthly basis from three to five is two and a half months ahead of an equivalent child at age five who did not visit the library so regularly.¹⁶

2.2 Libraries are changing fast

There is a major opportunity for the Henley Review to champion a new vision for public libraries within government, education and the cultural world, as lively, social community hubs for reading and learning with potential for major impact upon the well-being and life chances of local people.

The current reshaping of the local authority landscape is hitting libraries hard but it is also providing a focus for change, driving through a modernisation programme that is helping to shape a new twenty first century reading service.

Public libraries are changing fast – with new buildings, partners and services. Newcastle recently opened a new city library which is attracting 30 visits a year from every resident. Over the last four years there has been an 88% increase in library web site visits.¹⁷ In 2009/10 there was an increase of 8% in volunteering in public libraries. There were 271 million visits to public libraries in 2009/10. The network engages a very substantial percentage of the population - 39%. For some sections of the population this figure is much higher, eg for black and ethnic minority populations is it 50%.¹⁸

We are witnessing a profound re-imagining of libraries' reading service. There is a focused explosion of creative, engaging activity - reading groups, author events, summer reading holiday activity, baby rhyme times, websites, library festivals, city 'Read Ins'.

This new look reading service is reversing major trends. Children's work has been most intense and 77.9% of 5-10 year olds now use libraries.¹⁹ Children's book borrowing has risen for 6 years running.²⁰ Last summer 760,000 children took up libraries' Summer Reading Challenge (to read six books), an increase of 5%.²¹ There are now 10,000 library linked reading groups.²²

¹³ **CIPFA Public Library Statistics, 2009/10**

¹⁴ **Taking Part, Child Survey headline Report**, Arts Council, 2008/9

¹⁵ **Research** published by the National Literacy Trust on Save Our Libraries Day

¹⁶ **Cognitive Gaps in Early Years**, The Sutton Trust, 2010

¹⁷ **CIPFA Public Library Statistics, 2009/10**

¹⁸ **Taking part in the arts, Facts and figures 2009/10** Arts Council,

¹⁹ **Taking part in the arts, Facts and figures 2009/10** Arts Council

²⁰ **CIPFA Public Library Statistics, 2009/10**

²¹ **Summer Reading Challenge Report 2010**, The Reading Agency

²² **Reading Groups in Libraries, Mapping Survey Findings** – The Reading Agency, 2008

New “people power” models of work with young people are emerging. The Reading Agency’s MyVoice programme is just starting work in 20 local authorities, focused on areas of high social deprivation. It will create 60 reading hub spaces and activities designed by young people. The volunteering roles played by young people are accredited through partners such as ASDAN and the Duke of Edinburgh. By connecting this local work to national partners, we can showcase young people’s work on a big scale – for instance young people will curate part of World Book Night’s rally in Trafalgar Square in April 2012.

2.3 Partnerships with schools

Public libraries’ grassroots programmes have developed to a new point. They could be pivotal to a new era of creative collaboration between schools and libraries to stimulate a life-long cultural education around reading and associated art forms.

Much has been written about the importance of a strong, inter-connected library system to support children’s reading. We support the recommendations of the School Library Commission and have been helping to build partnerships with the School Library Association and others.

2.4 National reading offer as pivot for new partnership mechanisms to get public libraries’ role working in cultural education

With the Society of Chief Librarians and key partners, The Reading Agency is working up plans for a new shared public library reading offer to help libraries do fewer, bigger things together. Rather than reduce everything to a grey, pared down offer to the public, let’s have some multi-colour action across key stages! This would help strip out the cost of duplicated effort in local authorities and schools. It would use the same successful cost saving model of the Summer Reading Challenge.

2.5 Workforce development

The usual discourse about how to improve children’s reading typically focuses on what needs to happen in schools. We would like to see the Henley Review proposing a new workforce development programme which integrates the learning and creative practices of public libraries and schools library services.

For instance, there could be a skills sharing programme between teachers and libraries. This could share librarians’ stock knowledge, their experience of emerging models of child/youth led work, their knowledge of how to reach into disadvantaged communities, their understanding of how to work with writers and their skills in working with volunteers. The rapid changes to reading driven by digital developments and its increasing sociability need harnessing, and there is an opportunity to involve public libraries’ partners – such as publishers who are currently participating in Reading Agency training, helping libraries understand how to make the best use of author events.

3. What is it that works best about how cultural education is currently delivered?

3.1 What is the best?

We would like to see the Henley Review drawing on the research and practice of the last few years to champion the best in creative reading experiences and build opportunities for young people to have them in cultural education programmes. We need to listen to what children and young people are telling us. This includes:

- Free choice: Summer Reading Challenge research shows how much children value the chance to choose their own reading. Other research shows that children receiving free school meals who have no books at home raise their achievement when able to choose their own books²³
- Engagement and contact with writers, beyond the static “being read to” model, and involving everything from co-producing work to mentoring:
www.youtube.com/user/northerninsight#p/a/u/1/C0Cp-fIGq4I
- The widest possible reading resources and definition of reading: children and young people need to feel that all their reading experiences are valued and validated. Some analysts suggest that boys’ reading has suffered because of an overemphasis on fiction and the lack of male role models in primary schools. 15 year olds who engage extensively in online reading are generally more proficient

²³ Clark and Foster 2005; Clark and Akerman 2006; Allington et al 2010

readers. Students who read varied texts (non-fiction, newspapers, and magazines) score better than those who concentrate only on fiction.²⁴

- Engaging, creative, social reading experiences that use multiple platforms, stimuli and incentives: reading challenges, reading groups, whole city read ins, promotions, contact with authors, blogging, storytelling sessions, live readings combined with music... Research shows that engagement and book ownership reduce underachievement and offset the effects of economic deprivation.²⁵
- Expert help from librarians and teachers and a supportive family reading environment

4. What is it that could or should be working better in the way that cultural education is currently delivered?

The most crucial areas needing to change are around collaboration. Organisations need to make sure that they recognise their own specialisms and then join up to make things happen. Some schools are overloaded by initiatives and creative offers from charities, others are not. Sometimes the same schools are approached by different charities to deliver the same activities.

We are up for change, challenge and improvement. We're already pushing hard on collaboration. We are clear about our public library specialism in the sector, and collaborate from that basis. For example we ran the library section of the National Year of Reading, working alongside the National Literacy Trust, and we work with BookTrust to deliver the library aspect of programmes like BookTime and Booked Up.

We work carefully to consult with our audiences and stakeholders before launching new activities to make sure that they are fit for purpose, meet the needs of local communities and operate effectively in a national context. We would like to see the Henley Review being a catalyst to support collaboration, creativity and effective use of fundraising and resources.

5. If we had a blank sheet of paper, what would be your view of the ideal funding and delivery structure for cultural education?

4.1 Innovation Fund

Challenge funding has been crucial to supporting innovation and raising the profile of public libraries' work with reading. The Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge fund 2000-2002 has probably been the single most important intervention in the history of reading development. It resulted in a strategic re-positioning of the reading pleasure agenda against key priorities, built expertise within the sector and created new ways of doing things that are sustained today. Refocusing the challenge fund approach around the priorities of cultural education could be a key driver for change.²⁶

Public libraries have always benefited from philanthropic support - think of Carnegie. Public support for libraries has rarely been stronger. We would like the Henley Review to urge government to build on this to establish a new, philanthropically-funded version of the Wolfson Fund.

There may also be opportunities to involve corporates. We are experiencing new interest from businesses in our work with libraries. This is driven by the huge public support for libraries, and protests about cuts. We have had three recent approaches from major businesses.

4.2 A new era of collaboration and improved value for money - more joined up work between schools and libraries

We would like to see the Henley Review issuing some simple calls to action. These would inject a new force into cultural education by getting public libraries and schools to work differently together. They include:

- Asking every HeadTeacher to integrate public libraries and specific actions into the school improvement plan (see recommendations in UKLA research, 2009)²⁷
- Wiring into the plan a more integrated working methodology between the school library, the School Library Service (where they exist) and the public library. We support the implementation of the recommendations of the School Library Commission: one of the key agencies which school libraries and school library services could and should be working more closely with is the public library. All

²⁴ OECD 2010

²⁵ Twist et al 2003,7; Kirsh et al (2002)

²⁶ *Reader Development: A Brief History*, D Hicks, G. McKeone, Arts Council, 2009

²⁷ Summer Reading Challenge 2009 UKLA research

pupils should be encouraged to have a library card and be introduced to and encouraged to use their public library. The resources of the public library and the different skills sets of the staff who work there should be being harnessed to broaden and enhance the reading and information offer of the school. Partnership with the public library service allows the school library to demonstrate the role it plays as a vital resource for the whole community.²⁸

- Initiating a new creative reading workforce development plan with skills sharing between professionals at its heart, and a real commitment to working with and listening to young people.

Practical actions for the plan

- Making this new way of working a criteria for Arts Mark and Arts Award
- Encouraging every school, or school cluster, to partner with a public library
- Ensuring that every school child is a member of his or her public library and has visited it
- Ensuring every primary school child gets the chance to meet an author and undertake the Summer Reading Challenge
- Where any new funding streams are available, make a condition of funding that joint signatures from the head of libraries and the Head Teacher are in place (this has worked well in Wales)

4.3 A new kind of reading challenge

We would welcome the opportunity to work with government and the sector to harness all the learning about what works to inspire children to read, and have a joined up step change. We can bring powerful creative industry partners into play to achieve this, from the BBC to 40 publishers, World Book Day to Quick Reads.

We propose creating a new kind of reading challenge – an all year round a menu of innovative reading for pleasure activities which span the school year - delivered by well resourced school libraries in term time and through public libraries and their national and community partners out of school hours. This would create a seamless reading year with many opportunities for wider reading and personal creativity.

Public libraries have established, cost-saving and widespread programmes like the Summer Reading Challenge. These are a powerful starting point. They have the formal support and involvement of authors like Malorie Blackman, Jacqueline Wilson and Michael Rosen.

4.4 A new public involvement strategy

We would like to see the Henley Review pushing for improved cultural education opportunities and engagement created by harnessing the public's support and involvement. This would include reading volunteers, parental involvement and youth led approaches to shaping provision.

The Reading Agency would be delighted to bring its models, experience and library partners to the table. We have developed pioneering young people's volunteering work with great results.²⁹ This is underpinned by staff training, and an accreditation framework with national providers. We can facilitate young people's involvement in big cultural moments, from World Book Night to the Olympics. We hope to establish a new Public Involvement post to enable us to involve 20,000 people as community reading champions.

Contact

Miranda McKearney OBE, Director

Miranda.mckearney@readingagency.org.uk

07976 749742

²⁸ School Libraries: A plan for improvement, School Library Commission MLA, NLT

²⁹ *Summer Reading Challenge Volunteering Report 2010*, The Reading Agency