

GETTING READING TO WORK

Unions, libraries and
the Six Book Challenge

unionlearn

with Yorkshire and
the Humber TUC

read

readingagency.org.uk

Contents

Introduction	1
A Yorkshire success story	2
Working with libraries	3
Finding the right books	3
Royal Mail, Bradford	4
Fox's Biscuits, Batley	6
HMP Moorland, Doncaster	8
Corus Steelworks, Scunthorpe	10
Fletchers Bakeries, Sheffield	12
Tesco, York	14
Further information	16

Introduction

Getting people talking about what they've read or want to read can be a great way to break down social barriers. It can get them thinking about their interests, the things they have in common and their skills. Above all it can lift them out of their daily routine, open up new opportunities and lead to new ideas – all of which can contribute to a motivated and successful workforce.

This booklet celebrates the achievements of union learning reps (ULRs) and public libraries in running an annual national scheme called the Six Book Challenge in a range of workplaces in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Run by The Reading Agency, the Challenge is targeted at less confident readers, inviting them to read six books and record their reading in a diary to get a Six Book Challenge certificate. Now in its second year, the scheme has been shortlisted for the national Libraries Change Lives Award by CILIP, the Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals.

We are grateful for the support of unionlearn for Yorkshire and the Humber in encouraging project officers and ULRs to take up the Six Book Challenge and introduce it to their colleagues. Seven workplaces in the region took part in 2008, nearer 40 in

2009. Many run the Six Book Challenge with local library services who can supply the books and a friendly space for readers to pursue their new reading habit.

The stories featured here give a taste of how the Six Book Challenge can get reading to work whether it be in a distribution depot, food factory or office space. We hope that other regions will pick up on these ideas so that the Challenge can become a real force for change in the workplace.

The Reading Agency

See www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk to find out how to get your workplace involved in The Reading Agency's incentive scheme for less confident readers.

"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 ULRs across the country to promote this excellent scheme in their own workplaces."

Liz Smith OBE, unionlearn director

A Yorkshire success story

It is appropriate that using the Six Book Challenge in the workplace should have been pioneered in Yorkshire and the Humber. The Six Book Challenge was created by Hull Library Services in 2006 and trialled by library services across the region the following year. It was then launched as a national scheme in 2008 by The Reading Agency.

Over the years public library services have supported reading activities in workplaces with visits from mobile libraries. The idea of working more closely came out of The Reading Agency's Vital Link programme which brought library staff and ULRs together at an event in Leeds in February 2007. But it took the introduction of the Six Book Challenge to really clinch the deal for ULRs. They knew about the Quick Reads initiative for emergent readers but here

was a simple scheme which ULRs could use to add real purpose to their promotion of the new books each year.

The main activity for each year's Six Book Challenge runs from January until the end of June – the deadline for entries to a national prize draw for Challenge completers sponsored by Costa Coffee offering the winner and guest a trip to London. But organisations are welcome to run the Challenge at any time and workplaces are in an ideal position to do this.

Seven thousand people across the UK took part in the Six Book Challenge in 2008, among them 250 employees from workplaces such as Fletchers Bakeries, Fox's Biscuits, Royal Mail, Corus and HMP Moorland which are featured in this booklet. Impressed by the impact of

“Unionlearn in Yorkshire and the Humber has been really thrilled to partner The Reading Agency on the Six Book Challenge. ULRs and learners can boast fantastic results and there is a tremendous enthusiasm for this motivating initiative.”

Dr Alan Roe, unionlearn regional manager



the scheme, unionlearn for Yorkshire and the Humber invested in materials for around 40 workplaces to take part in 2009. New participants include Tesco, the Department of Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and several food manufacturing factories. The Challenge has since been taken up by unionlearn in the North West and by individual workplaces in other areas of the country.

Working with libraries

Seventy-two per cent of library services across the UK are running the Six Book Challenge in partnership with local learning

providers such as colleges, adult education and family learning as well as workplaces. Libraries play a central role in supplying

appealing books, reaching out to participants, celebrating their achievements and offering them a way of sustaining their new enjoyment of reading. They can provide library tours, visits to workplaces and creative reading activities such as reading groups, storytelling sessions and author events. Support for informal and formal adult learning is a priority at local, regional and national level for the public library service.

“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.”

Fiona Williams, head of libraries and heritage, York City Council, and president of the Society of Chief Librarians

Finding the right books

The Six Book Challenge is targeted at ‘emergent readers’ – adults who can read but who have yet to discover the pleasure of choosing and reading books for their own enjoyment. They range from people who have never read a whole book to those who haven't read since school or who have never felt that reading was

something for them. They may have missed out on education through ill health, experienced difficulties with learning or they may be recent arrivals in the UK. The important thing is that they get a chance to try out a range of books so that they can make their own choices.

Most workplaces have made extensive use of the Quick Reads, the series of short books by well-known authors that have been published since 2006 to encourage less confident readers. But there is nothing prescriptive about the Six Book Challenge. Participants can read whatever they like.

“Reading can open so many doors. I'm delighted to have got involved with Quick Reads and the Six Book Challenge seems a great way to get people reading and talking about the books.”

Gervase Phinn, author of *All These Lonely People* for Quick Reads

Royal Mail depot Bradford

A Royal Mail depot in Bradford was one of the first workplaces to launch the Six Book Challenge in 2008. ULR Diane Gledhill didn't find it easy to get people signed up at first but in the end 60 took part. She worked with a team of union learning reps, but the fact that she could be in the same place each week to catch people coming off or going on to a shift proved key in promoting the Challenge to staff.

The depot linked with Bradford Libraries but they also had a small number of Quick Reads and other titles on site which became the core books for the Challenge. This generated excitement about which were the best, and they were quickly snapped up. Diane kept records of what people read

and could tell people when a book they wanted became available.

People were given small incentives as they reached different stages of the Challenge - a mug and a Kit-Kat, a DVD voucher from the library or a free book. They did the Challenge for a variety of reasons: to join in with friends, to get back into reading or to try something new.

Twelve learners completed the Challenge and were awarded certificates by regional unionlearn manager Dr Alan Roe during Adult Learners' Week. This year Diane is aiming to get the night shift involved so that people will be reading for pleasure day and night at Royal Mail.



"I'd get a book and sit down but once I'd picked it up I couldn't put it down. That's what interested me. They weren't like books that you'd put down halfway through - you'd read them all the way through."

Angela Garforth, sorting machine operator

"Even when I was away for two weeks the group continued to meet and swap books."

Diane Gledhill, lead ULR, Communication Workers Union





Fox's Biscuits Batley



Fox's launched their Six Book Challenge for 2009 at a special Family Learning Day at Batley Library. The partnership with the library began with the previous year's Six Book Challenge, and the ULRs were looking for ways to bring in people who had previously not taken part.

The hook they chose was a variation on the Challenge for which parents would read six books to their children. This felt like a great way of encouraging people to read with their kids and might also support some people's literacy difficulties. Batley Library supplied the children's books and organised the Family Learning Day for a Saturday at the end of January. The ULRs promoted the event heavily to staff at Fox's and on the day set up a stall with old photographs of the factory which proved a real talking-point.

At least 60 families from Fox's attended the day at the library. There was a storyteller for the younger children, and henna tattoos and necklace making for the teenagers.

For many people it was their first visit to a library for a while, and many were pleased to see the more welcoming environment and the wide selection of books for children and adults on offer.

From that day the scheme has continued to expand with some parents doing the Six Book Challenge with their children and a larger group doing it for themselves. The Family Learning Day gave the Challenge a much higher profile at Fox's and with over 70 people signed up this year it has done really well.

"The storytelling was great. My son Bailey loved it."

**Ash McDaid, ULR,
Bakers, Food and
Allied Workers Union**

"With this event and the Six Book Challenge itself, we've proved that we can really reach out to working families."

**Judith Robinson, library
support coordinator,
Kirklees Libraries**

"The Challenge is going to be really successful this year. The ULRs have taken ownership of it and are really proud of the results they're getting."

**Stan Dakin, ULR, Bakers, Food
and Allied Workers Union**

HMP Moorland Doncaster

You can find union-run learning centres in all kinds of workplaces. HMP Moorland is spread over three sites near Doncaster all of which share the same learning centre so it seemed the logical place to host the Six Book Challenge. ULRs wanted to reach prison officers who come to the centre for learning and also those who were not regular visitors. The centre is well used by prison staff who do a variety of courses and the Quick Reads have always been popular.

World Book Day 2009 was celebrated in style in the learning centre with a visit by local author Gervase Phinn whose Quick Read *All These Lonely People* was published that day. He generated much laughter among the audience of ULRs from across the region as well as

drawing attention to the need to promote reading for pleasure to adult learners. He also presented an award to Trish Vollans, ULR for the Communication Workers Union at BT, for her winning entry to a short story competition run by the regional unionlearn team.

Staff at the learning centre have seen an increase in the number of Quick Reads issued since the launch of the Six Book Challenge for 2009, but take-up for the scheme has been slower than anticipated with prison officers saying they were 'too busy' to take part.

Other workplaces have encountered this initial reaction and gone on to gain many participants. The key is to find what works for each group of employees. Here, at HMP Moorland, Sandra Davis at the

learning centre is trying to identify a bigger local prize to grab people's attention. Several prison staff entered Costa's national prize draw in 2008 but the aim is to build numbers for this year's Challenge.



"I hadn't read anything myself for seven or eight years. It was the Quick Read by Gordon Ramsay that got me back into reading. I never liked him so I wanted to know what it was all about."

Sandra Davis, learner support worker and regional administrator, Prison Officers Association

"I hadn't read anything in a number of years and the centre encouraged me to take home a Quick Read. I was amazed as to how much I enjoyed it and have since read another two titles."

Dave Taylor, prison officer, HMP Moorland



Corus Steelworks Scunthorpe



With 4000 people on its Scunthorpe site, Corus Steelworks is one of the largest workplaces to take up the Six Book Challenge. Working with North Lincolnshire Libraries, ULRs decided to target office staff first as it was easier to access them and to tell them about the Challenge via the company intranet. There had been some success with the Challenge the previous year, so it was hoped to expand on that in 2009 despite the gloomy economic conditions. Other areas of the site were targeted with a poster campaign.

The Six Book Challenge was launched in March with a visit from the mobile library. This resulted in a number of people joining the library on the day and

also a huge interest in taking the Six Book Challenge.

Within two weeks ULR Stephen Miller was ordering more reading diaries as demand outstripped supply - possibly due to the fact that Corus was offering an iPod as a star prize for completing the Challenge.

Management at Corus is giving lots of support to the Challenge, so much so that the library service are hoping to make the steelworks a permanent stop on their mobile route.

For the second year running, a group of ancillary workers have also been enticed to take part in the Six Book Challenge. And there are high hopes of spreading the Challenge to other parts of the site as word gets round.

"This is the first time I've done anything like this. I was very reluctant to start but now I can't wait for each book."

**Brenda Shaw,
ancillary worker**

"Anything we do which encourages colleagues to take up or expand a joy of reading is a definite plus."

Pat Cutts, facilities manager

"This is largely an untapped audience. A lot of people can't get to the library because of their work so we have to get to them."

Yvonne Lea, adults and communities team, North Lincolnshire Libraries

Fletchers Bakeries Sheffield

The Six Book Challenge has proved a roaring success at Fletchers Bakeries in Sheffield – despite not getting off to an easy start in 2008. The factory had suffered a fire and a number of redundancies. A mobile library visit from Sheffield once a month sparked little interest. The learning centre was underused and ULRs Alan Oakes and Mick Neville were new to the role. It was a difficult time for them to think about taking on a reading project.

But Alan and Mick had both enjoyed the Quick Reads and wanted to use the Six Book Challenge as the focus for their efforts to attract new learners. They quickly learnt that just putting up posters didn't work

and they set about talking to people individually and passing the message on that way. This proved much more effective and soon they had lots of people signed up.

The ULRs got their HR manager involved and with her permission arranged for anybody completing four books to get a free meal in the canteen. This proved very popular and ensured that they were working with full management approval.

Sixty people took part in the Six Book Challenge in 2008 with 14 completers entering the national prize draw sponsored by Costa Coffee. The library gained over 30 new members and visits now

attract more users. Interest in courses such as NVQs, Skills for Life and Train to Gain shot up. Mick and Alan's work was recognised by the government's National Year of Reading campaign for 2008 which made them Reading Heroes for their outstanding contribution to promoting reading.

The aim for 2009 has been to double the numbers taking part and to involve parents at a local school as well as staff at Fletchers. This new emphasis on reaching beyond the immediate workforce should mean that the impact of the Six Book Challenge can continue to grow and grow.

"We've had at least 50 people take up learning opportunities since the Six Book Challenge. Some of those are people who took the Challenge, some that were attracted by the higher profile of the learning centre and union learning reps due to the Challenge."

Alan Oakes, ULR, Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union

"You just have to go for it. I was apprehensive at first, but the Challenge has been one of the best things I've ever done."

Barry Burton, bakery supervisor





Organising learning for supermarkets is not always easy. Despite the support of employers it's harder to get people to take part in activities off site. The fact that the Six Book Challenge is available to staff at the place where they work is one of the factors that have made it so successful at Tadcaster Road in York.

Staff have really shown an interest – not just the checkout staff but those on the fish counter, electrics, deli and the meat counter have all wanted to get involved. Without

a permanent ULR on site things had to be set up so that readers could operate the Six Book Challenge themselves. But ULR Tracy White and library staff from York Libraries visited regularly to stamp the reading diaries and make sure everything was going smoothly. Putting the books and the promotional materials in the canteen worked really well and made the scheme visible.

Tracy leads by example. She's read all the latest Quick Reads herself. It makes it easier for her to talk about the books and have an idea which ones will suit particular people.

Readers were surprised to find that they enjoyed filling out the diaries, saying that it gave them a chance to reflect on why they'd liked or not liked what they'd read. This gave them something else to talk about when they were comparing books with colleagues.

York Libraries have given two free DVD loans to anyone who gets to their third book and are holding a celebration event to present a certificate and a Quick Read to everyone who has completed the Six Book Challenge.

"It's been a very successful initiative. What's made it work has been the support of libraries and making it visible in the workplace."

Tracy White, ULR, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

"Having an enthusiastic union learning rep, who knows the staff, has been key to making the challenge work well at Tesco. It has been great to see staff prepared to try reading something different, talking about books and reading, and even bringing in their own books to swap at work."

Tricia Raxworthy, Reading Development Librarian, York Libraries

Further information

The **Six Book Challenge** is run by The Reading Agency who also lead the Vital Link programme to encourage partnership working between public libraries and learning providers with a particular focus on reading for pleasure. See www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk for more information or www.readingagency.org.uk/shop to purchase Six Book Challenge materials.

The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It has close links with the public library service and also works with schools, adult learning providers, prisons and workplaces and with partners such as NIACE, the BBC and publishers. See www.readingagency.org.uk

The Reading Agency leads the Vital Link programme in partnership with the National Literacy Trust whose Reading Champions scheme is being

trialled in Yorkshire workplaces. Reading Champions uses the motivational power of reading role models to inspire others to read more. The scheme provides an ideal way to sustain and spread a reading culture in the workplace. See www.literacytrust.org.uk

This work to promote reading for pleasure through trade unions to employees has been funded by the **Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills**.

Unionlearn in Yorkshire and the Humber exists to help trade unions, members and workers throughout the region to further develop and embed the learning culture and make a positive difference to the quality of life, through the development of skills and training both in and out of the workplace. See www.unionlearn.org.uk/yorkshirehumber

Quick Reads are short fiction and non-fiction titles by well-known writers designed to encourage less confident readers to pick up a book. The Vital Link has created learning resources to support use of all the Quick Reads published to date. See www.quickreads.org.uk

See www.firstchoicebooks.org.uk for more than 600 books recommended by The Vital Link for emergent readers.

See www.vitallink.org.uk to download *Reading for pleasure: Ideas to inspire people in the workplace* created by NIACE and The Reading Agency.

See www.readingforpleasure.org.uk to download a CPD module for ULRs on promoting reading for pleasure in the workplace created by NIACE.

Thank you

The Reading Agency would like to thank the following trade unions and public library services in Yorkshire and the Humber for their support and enthusiasm for the Six Book Challenge.

Unions

Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, Communication Workers Union, Fire Brigades Union, GMB, Prison Officers Association, Public and Commercial Services' Association, UNISON, Unite, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

Library services

Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, East Riding, Hull, Kirklees, Leeds, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, Rotherham, Sheffield, Wakefield, York

Project manager David Kendall

Editor Genevieve Clarke

Photographs Justin Sutcliffe

Design Cog Design

Printers Salvo

Please see www.unionlearn.org.uk/freebooks if you would like further copies of this booklet.

June 2009



