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SPEECH AT LGA CULTURE CONFERENCE

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I'm kicking off with a plea to have the right kind of discussion about culture and growth. Sometimes it feels as if we're making too narrow an argument about how culture produces economic growth – talking just about how investing in the arts and culture creates jobs.

Maybe we can broaden the arguments. Surely economic growth at any price is not what we want. Isn't it that we want the right KIND of growth? Some societies – look at Russia or Saudi Arabia - have growth based on oil, or mining, but the fruits of that growth are bitter because its benefits are not distributed fairly.

Investing in culture makes sense not only because it results in jobs and regeneration but also growth which results in the kind of places we want to live in, and the fully realised lives we want everyone to live - democratised, sustainable and socially harmonious growth rooted in a society which will distribute its benefits equally. This kind of growth can only happen if we support the development of an educated, cultured, literate population able to participate fully in democracy; enterprising and resilient people more likely to be able to understand and weather the changes necessary to produce growth in a post-industrial, increasingly digital world.

all of us close up to working with culture in communities know how profoundly it can make people happy and feel better and so I wonder if any of you are fellow Richard Layard groupies? What a hats in the air moment it was to see this highly respected Professor talking to government about well-being indices, and winning the argument that happiness is inextricably linked to economic health. I also really like the work of the New Economics Fdn, which is making similar arguments.

READING, LITERATURE, LIBRARIES

This takes me neatly to the areas my charity is working in – reading, literacy, libraries. I make no apologies for focusing the rest of my slot on these areas because they have such profound implications for producing the kind of growth I've been talking about. Also, since we're talking money, investment in these areas is a really smart move, because it can help prevent expensive social problems further down the line. And finally local government spends over a billion pounds annually on libraries, let's sweat that expenditure and asset to engineer growth.

I'll start with **reading and literature**. From Shakespeare to JK Rowling – literature is a huge part of our society's DNA, our heritage, our cultural exports, our appeal to tourists. I find it weird how reading is so often missed out of the picture when talking about the arts and culture because reading is such an huge participative art form; 70% of us read for pleasure. And because the reading process is such a hugely creative one, activating our imaginations, and stimulating our learning like nothing else.

Literacy but if you struggle with reading you can't participate fully in education, employment, democracy or community life. Literacy skills are a fundamental building block for prosperity and social mobility. Most jobs now need high order reading and writing skills. Employers complain regularly about the lack of these skills and a CBI survey shows that 35% of employers are dissatisfied with literacy levels in the workforce. For a developed society with free education we have a shocking literacy problem. There are those who read and love it, and those who can't and don't, with dire social consequences. If you have poor literacy skills you are more likely to live in a low income, smoking, non voting household. In England alone 5.1 million working aged people have inadequate literacy skills; 48% of the prison population has skills below those expected of an 11 year old. If we could blow those terrible statistics out of the water we would do so much for growth.

Libraries have a crucial role to play here, giving everyone free access to reading materials, inspiring the enjoyment of reading so crucial to literacy acquisition, and helping people build and practice their reading skills.

Libraries are such an asset in other ways too, a potent symbol of people power, a massive part of our cultural fabric with their 4000+ branches and a cross generational footfall that other local authority services can only dream of. I find commentators are regularly surprised by the extent of library use. New Carnegie Trust research shows, for instance, that 55% of England's 15-24 year olds use libraries.

Libraries are unique in the way they blend culture with other roles – like acting as a gateway to information to support adult learning and employment. And an increasingly important role in building the digital literacy skills without which we can't build a Digital Britain, better businesses or super connected cities. Last year libraries helped 2m people get on line for the first time and with the introduction of Universal Credit they will play a pivotal role, by providing free or low cost internet access and teaching people the skills to manage their benefits online

The Reading Agency

Before moving on to explore the potential to sweat our library assets harder, and improve reading to drive local growth, can I give you bit of background on the work of The Reading Agency? The idea started at my kitchen table with fellow consultants and fantastic librarians who were all alarmed that so many people's lives were still being blighted by literacy problems. We were then - and still are - driven by our mission, which is to give *everyone* an equal chance in life by helping people to become confident and enthusiastic readers. We aim to help those who just don't have an equal chance because they're struggling with reading and to do all we can to help public libraries maximize their impact on people's life prospects.

The charity focuses on helping people needing extra support to become readers – children in their formative years, disadvantaged young people and adults with poor literacy skills. We equip librarians, teachers, prison staff and college tutors with practical tools and training so they can reach out and inspire people to read through activities like reading challenges, reading groups and reading based volunteering.

We now reach roughly 1 million people a year and research shows that our programmes increase people's reading enjoyment, motivation, confidence and skills. Those terrible literacy stats won't shift unless people **enjoy** reading and are therefore motivated to do more of it – all the evidence from the OECD, Oxford University and other research institutions screams the bedrock importance of reading for pleasure to literacy acquisition.

We run our programmes in a close strategic partnership with public libraries and in one way or another, we'll be working with pretty much every local authority represented here. You may know us through our Summer Reading Challenge which runs in 98% of UK libraries. Last summer The Challenge was part of the Olympics' London 2012 festival and three quarters of a million primary aged children took part. They are challenged to read six library books in the break from school and get a much prized medal at the end, and I'm guessing some of you here may have presented those medals in your local community?

The Challenge's simple magic can totally transform children's reading behaviors and attitudes. It helps prevent the summer holiday dip in literacy skills that is so costly for the education system, and it's especially important for boys and disadvantaged children. The programme accounts for 20% of the children's books borrowed from libraries and every year it encourages around 50,000 children to join their library. Last year we introduced a digital Booksorter which created a fantastic crowdsourced reading recommendation list of 100k titles.

The programme is a powerful platform on which to build new partnerships between education and libraries to get children reading – there is no way schools can crack this imperative on their own. With the landmark 2012 Ofsted recommendation that every school should have a reading for pleasure policy, there's a major new opportunity to get public library partnerships into every school improvement plan. So that's our biggest programme and it creates big efficiencies of scale: in the shared scheme the cost per child is roughly £1.10, which is anything from 7 to 330 times cheaper depending on the size of authority. And it has other benefits including national media partnerships, for instance with Blue Peter, shared impact evidence and a powerful new shared website.

The charity's model is interesting in the context of the increasing interest in voluntary sector partnerships with local authorities. We can act as a developer and aggregator, offering a combination of value for money with innovation, and we help individual library services across the UK make more impact by working together across local authority boundaries to share costs and good practice, and to lever in partnerships and local investment.

We work not just with individual local authorities, but also in a strategic partnership with the main library bodies, especially the Society of Chief Librarians, and I'm delighted to be here with Janene Cox, the Society's President, a very special partner. We are one of the Arts Council's National Portfolio Organisations, and our funding agreement supports our library development role in key areas including strategy, workforce development and innovation.

We also play a brokerage role, connecting partners – from the BBC to the TUC – to libraries to build better opportunities for people to become readers. We partner 43 of the country's leading

publishers to improve local reading opportunities, and are changing publishers' working practices so they build libraries into their marketing plans and author tours.

Through our work on reading we're helping drive growth by increasing social mobility and getting people work ready. Our adult literacy **Six Book Challenge** runs in 60% of library authorities, 100 prisons and a quarter of the college network. If you've never read a single book, the effect of being incentivized and supported to read six can be life changing.

LIBRARY INNOVATION WORK

I'll now turn to current library innovation work. It drives me mad that so little of the discourse about libraries focuses on the exciting transformation of their support for reading in communities. They are driving social change through a much more creative, digital, social offer. The sharpest focus for this work has been children, and it is not accident that children's book borrowing has risen for eight years running.

The Reading Agency is proud to have worked with the Society of Chief Librarians to create a new strategic framework to help drive this work forward called the Universal Reading Offer. This aims to combat the effects of an age of austerity, to ensure continued innovation, and to keep partners like publishers, World Book Day and the BBC investing in local service development. It helps focus on the stuff that really counts, provides a basis for efficiency improvement and simultaneously underpins libraries' ability to prevent the escalation of future costs by improving individuals' skills and resilience.

The Universal Reading Offer is one of the four offers announced by the Society in January and Janene Cox will be talking more about this work later on in what promises to be a great session. SCL is leading the sector's adoption of this offer and The Reading Agency played a thought leadership role in developing this framework, and led the consultation work to get the buy in of 98% of local authorities last summer.

The Universal Reading Offer defines what public libraries should provide, and users expect of their reading service, using an approach based on the Local Govt Association's logic model methodology. These two left hand columns constitute the definition and you'll see go far beyond the provision of book stock. To deliver this, the URO prioritises some big reading programmes used by 60% or more of authorities, which every authority or volunteer run library can draw down on, to strip out the cost of duplicated effort and lever in partnership investment.

The framework includes a digital innovation strand, and we are working on two areas, funded by the Arts Council as part of their Library Development Initiative, in which the LGA is a key partner. We paired 10 library authorities with 14 publishers in a digital skills sharing initiative, exploring how to build the skills of librarians to promote reading in a digital age. There has been lots of vital learning, including the need to loosen local authority restrictions on the use of social media. Here is the site address where the learning and resources are shared. We are also working on a Library 21 R&D project, exploring the appetite of key stakeholders for a reimagining of the library space and support for reading in a digital age. A major step change in the access libraries can give users to an unprecedented range of digital reading and learning materials, whilst protecting authors' copyright. This is one of the Arts Council's Library Development Initiative projects.

And now **health**. As part of January's national offers announcement, you may have caught the big flurry of media interest in one particular aspect - a new Books on Prescription scheme which will launch across English libraries in May. And some of you will have heard about this at a recent LGA members' seminar. It's a major step forward for libraries and from TRA's point of view the fruition of a major piece of work as we've been working on this area since the late 90s, seeing reading as an alternative, cost effective strategy for keeping people well, and linked to this, helping position libraries as a pivotal partner delivering preventative work to tackle society's expensive health problems, through their heartland reading and information role. We all know that resilience supports growth, and well being is of course crucial to people being resilient and enterprising.

There is a growing evidence base showing that self help reading can help people with certain mild to moderate mental health conditions get better, especially anxiety and depression. Reading Well BOP will enable GPs and health workers to prescribe patients what is known as cognitive behavioural therapy through a visit to the library. On visiting the library they can get books to help them understand and manage their condition. The scheme works within NICE guidelines, and uses a common list of 30 books agreed by national health partners as having evidenced CBT benefits. GPs and health workers can monitor the effectiveness of the book as they would for a drug prescription.

For the first time the new English scheme has the backing of really key stakeholders including Royal Colleges and Department of Health. we got an email yesterday from a Nottinghamshire GP who said "I think the BOP scheme is the best idea I've had in ages!". This phase of the work is funded by the Arts Council/ LGA on LDI .

Books on Prescription is very simple and cost effective. It creates economies of scale through shared development of materials and many schemes will be funded by local health commissioners and agencies. The scheme deploys TRA's model as a voluntary sector developer and aggregator. Libraries have been running some fantastic local schemes, many inspired by the successful Welsh approach, where a national scheme was launched in 2005. Working closely with the Society of Chief Librarians and individual authorities in a development group, we have led the research, thinking, national partnership development and the practical work of getting the materials in place for a new national scheme in England. A great example of how local expertise can inform national development which in turns improves local work and partnerships.

The 2013 step change, part of the national offers work led by SCL, sees English libraries combining forces to save money and make more impact with one big shared scheme which for the first time is formally backed by major health partners, and also incorporates creative reading opportunities. A perfect example of how to sweat library assets, developing libraries' information and reading roles to improve public health and an example of collective working to lever in both national and local investment.

Young people

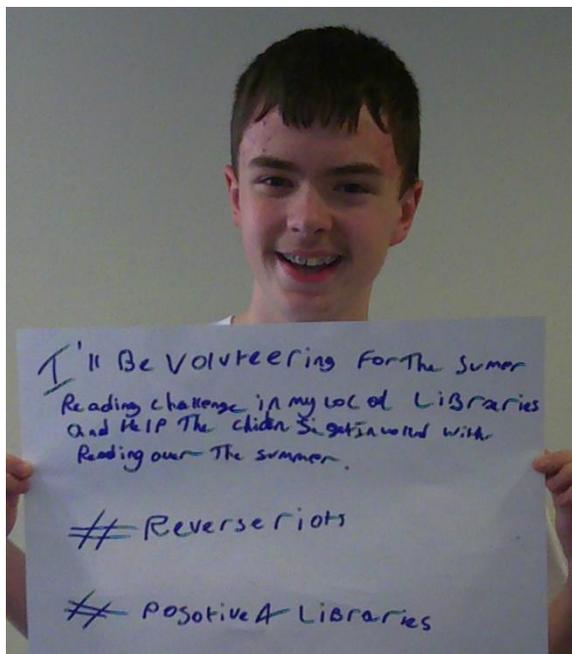
I'm going to finish with an audience we're particularly passionate about - young people. It's an anxious time for them, with UK youth unemployment standing at 1 million. Our Reading Activists programme aims to get 11-24 year olds enjoying reading. 2011 Oxford University research shows

that for 16 year olds, reading for pleasure is the only out of school activity demonstrably linked to securing a better job. Reading Activists gets them creating reading hubs in libraries, volunteering and building skills to help them get ready for work.

The scheme has two elements. The first is an in depth programme with 18 local authorities, funded by the Big Lottery and operating in areas with high levels of social deprivation. We work with librarians to involve teenagers by giving them real power. We're finding that young people are eager to join steering groups and roll their sleeves up to help shape the future library service and deliver a local programme of reading events. Evaluation shows that they are growing in resilience, confidence, and a range of skills. They are increasingly asking to do work that enhances their CVs and increases their job prospects. Services like Gateshead are reporting that the approach is helping them deliver strongly on the council's priorities.

The second aspect of Reading Activists is a drive to get young people across the country volunteering with libraries. When competition for first jobs is so fierce, librarians' expert support for volunteering can give young people a unique chance to develop their life skills and job prospects.

Through grants from the Cabinet Office's Social Action Fund and the John Laing Charitable Foundation, we work with the Association of Snr Children's and Education Librarians to provide training and resources to help libraries develop a growing army of young volunteers. Here are fifteen young people we took to No 11 in January to announce that in 2012 there was a 49% increase in the number of young volunteers helping deliver the Summer Reading Challenge - 4,382 to be precise!



We honored the work of young volunteers from Gateshead, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Warrington and Westminster, and love how effective the programme is in involving young men. James did 175 hours over the summer. And here is Tom, from the Padgate area of Warrington. He has had a difficult time, and is finding his involvement in Reading Activists life changing. He spoke so very well in front of the Minister for Civil Society, Frances Osborne and a load of other dignitaries – a definite lump in the throat moment. I'm tipping him as a future prime minister! These young people are acting as motivational mentors to younger children and in turn gaining skills and accreditation through schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award and ASDAN, increasing their chances of getting a place at college or a first job.

How fantastic if every library could have a Reading Activist hub where people like Tom can grow. A place where the local youth council meets, with a team of young people building their literacy skills whilst helping co-create the service, and design apprenticeships. Do talk to us – here's my

email - if you're interested in that idea or others for driving innovation and growth, and our model to support both cost reduction and lever in investment. And most of all, I hope that together we can help more and more people develop a life changing love of that alchemical, powerful engine for growth, reading.

Thank you and here's my email.

ENDS