Summer Reading Challenge
Cross-Authority Pilot 2021:
EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT

Authored by Renaisi, commissioned by The Reading Agency with funding from Arts Council England
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot: Key findings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of the pilot on library use and engagement with the Summer Reading Challenge</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Library Membership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participation and Completion in Pilot Areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s experiences of the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impact on Reading Engagement and Behaviours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impact on Wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Library Visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learnings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools’ engagement in the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of the pilot on library authorities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships with Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relationships with Local Stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learnings from the different models tested</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and recommendations</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

Reading is at the heart of all children’s development. In addition to the joy of getting lost in a good story, here at The Reading Agency we know that reading galvanises children’s imaginations, connects them to others and helps to support all forms of learning. But as many parents and carers will know, during the summer holiday months children can get out of the habit of reading. This so called ‘reading dip’ – exacerbated during the pandemic – is something that The Reading Agency has sought to address through our flagship children’s programme, Summer Reading Challenge, for over 20 years.

In 2021, as they approached their summer holidays, children across the UK were still facing disruptions to their learning and wellbeing due to the ongoing closures of schools and public libraries. With the support of generous funding from Arts Council England, The Reading Agency adapted to these complex circumstances, piloting a new cross-authority model for the Summer Reading Challenge, to inspire all children to get reading over the school holiday. Our goal was to both dramatically increase reading over the summer months for primary-school aged children, targeting those children who had missed out the most during the pandemic.

In partnership with public libraries, the new model fosters partnerships and innovative ways of working between public libraries and other local authority partners including education services, social care, children’s services, Holiday Activity Funds and public health bodies, supporting targeted access to summer reading activity for children.

The cross-authority pilot alone reached almost 100,000 children, increasing engagement from children living in areas of disadvantage who might not regularly read for pleasure. Since the pandemic began, we know that many of these children have felt acutely the impacts of upheavals to their access to education and social opportunities, which have far-reaching effects on their health, wellbeing, and connections to others. This evaluation report shows the positive impacts that the Summer Reading Challenge has on those who took part. Benefits have included: children developing their imagination and creativity through reading, feeling an increased sense of calmness and an improved capacity to manage challenging emotions.

As we move forward, we want to understand and develop the lessons of this pilot and encourage and inspire new partnerships between libraries across the country to further extend the reach of the Summer Reading Challenge and the vital social impacts it brings.

I would like to thank all our wonderful library partners, as well as Arts Council England, for continuing to help us forge new partnerships and tackle some of the big challenges faced by young people across the country through the proven power of reading, and of course huge thanks to all the fantastic and inspiring young people nationally, who took part in the Summer Reading Challenge 2021!

Karen Napier MBE
CEO
Introduction

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are being felt acutely by children, parents/carers, and the education system. Primary school-aged children are estimated to have lost an average of 61 to 66 days of schooling in 2020-21 – or around a third of their learning in reading – following disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools report that primary school-age children in particular may have got out of the habit of reading and that a priority for them is ‘rekindling’ the love of reading with this age group.

The Summer Reading Challenge, run by The Reading Agency in partnership with UK public libraries since 1999, is one of the biggest reading for pleasure promotions for children in the UK. Free and open to all 4-11-year-olds, the Challenge encourages children and their families to read for pleasure over the summer holidays, whether that’s by choosing books to take home from their local library, listening to audiobooks or reading online. Prior to the pandemic, the Challenge reached over 700,000 children annually through 95% of UK public libraries working through holistic outreach with schools.

In 2021, The Reading Agency piloted a new delivery model for the Summer Reading Challenge in ten areas around the UK. The new approach aimed to build cross-authority partnership models to support public libraries to broaden the reach of the Challenge, making it accessible to more children living with disadvantage and those likelier to experience setbacks with their reading in relation to the ‘summer slide’ and the impact of Covid-19. These children were reached through schools, early years and other community settings.

Thanks to funding from Arts Council England, Renaisi was commissioned by The Reading Agency to evaluate the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot, focusing particularly on the impact of the Challenge on the ‘summer slide’ in reading engagement; the impact of a model based on cross-sector partnerships supporting universal access; learnings from pilot delivery; and the difference the Challenge made in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

---

1 Major, Eyles and Machin (2021), Learning loss since lockdown: variation across the home nations, Centre for Economic Performance
2 Ofsted (2020), Children hardest hit by COVID-19 pandemic are regressing in basic skills and learning
4 A loss of knowledge and dip in literacy levels over the summer holidays when children are not in school.
As part of our evaluation, we conducted:

- **Quantitative analysis of survey data from 3,800 pupils.** Pupils from participating schools completed surveys before and/or after the summer to measure the impact of the Challenge on reading behaviour, attitudes, and wellbeing.

- **Quantitative analysis of data submitted by library authorities** including Challenge participation and completion figures, rates of library membership and demographic information on age and gender.

- **Qualitative fieldwork in three pilot areas** (Manchester, Newham and Newcastle). As part of this fieldwork, we conducted interviews and focus groups in twelve primary schools, four in each pilot area.

- **Stakeholder interviews** with library and local authority staff involved in delivering the Challenge in the ten pilot areas.

This summary report provides a snapshot of some of the themes which have emerged from our analysis. Our final evaluation report, which will be published in spring 2022, will explore the themes outlined below in more detail. It will also offer further insight on the efforts of public libraries to engage children from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who might not otherwise have taken part, and the value of strategic cross-authority working to broaden reach and engagement.

**Cross-Authority Pilot Partnership Models**

Library authorities in the ten pilot areas sought to work at a strategic level with other local authority services to engage more children, especially in areas experiencing higher levels of deprivation. Library authorities employed two approaches to enrolment: a universal approach, enrolling all primary-age children in the area, and/or a targeted approach, in which library authorities and partners focused their enrolment on specific areas and schools where children are more likely to experience disadvantage. The model was also supported in some areas by piloting automatic library membership to support engagement.

Library authorities employing a universal approach to enrolment included Newcastle, Leeds, the London Borough of Newham, and Jersey. Library authorities taking a targeted approach included Oldham, Staffordshire, Manchester, Portsmouth, the London Borough of Islington, and Libraries NI (Northern Ireland). Those trialling automatic library membership as part of their approach included Manchester, Newham, Newcastle and Jersey.
Value of Reading for Pleasure

Research shows that reading for pleasure is more important for children’s cognitive development than their parents’ level of education and is a more powerful factor in life achievement than socio-economic background.¹ This is supported by a wide evidence base demonstrating the positive impact of reading engagement on reading comprehension and achievement.² The benefits of reading reach far beyond support for learning into wellbeing and social connections: for example, children who enjoy reading and do so regularly are three times more likely to have high levels of mental wellbeing than children who are less engaged with reading and writing.³ Reading has also been found to help give children and young people the ability to connect imaginatively with others.⁴

¹ Sullivan and Brown (2013), Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading, UCL
² OECD (2000), Reading for Change; Barber and Klauda (2020), How Reading Motivation and Engagement Enable Reading Achievement: Policy Implications, Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 7:1, pp. 27-34; Fridkin (2018), The Impact of Motivation on Children’s Reading Comprehension, UCL
³ Clark and Teravainen-Goff (2018), Mental wellbeing, reading and writing, National Literacy Trust
⁴ Department for Education (2012), Research evidence on reading for pleasure: Education standards research team
Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot: Key findings

Summer Reading Challenge in numbers

- In 2021, a year of Covid recovery, the Summer Reading Challenge was delivered in 193 local authorities across the UK, with a total of 503,856 children participating nationally as well as an additional 7,400 children internationally through the British Council.

- Of the 503,856 children that participated in the UK in 2021, 233,755 completed the Challenge.

- 98,950 children participated in pilot areas, including those who took part via their local library and online. The number of participants in pilot areas increased by 67% compared to 2019 (excluding Libraries NI which did not take part in 2019).

- 5,220 libraries took part in the delivery of the Challenge in 2021, including 253 in the 10 pilot areas. 131,373 children and families joined these libraries as new members in the summer.

- 48% of starters in pilot areas were boys and 51% were girls.

“I feel like I have achieved something.”

Year 4 pupil expressing that they feel happy when reading because they achieved something.
Findings from Library Data

- In pilot areas, the number of male and female participants both increased significantly – by 60% and 42% respectively.
- Libraries in pilot areas gained 60,881 new members – 46% of the overall total of new members.
- The number of boys increased in pilot areas, leading to a more even gender split – from 46% boys and 54% girls in 2019 to 48% boys and 52% girls in pilot areas.

Findings from Our Quantitative Analysis of Survey Data

- We conducted a multi-regression analysis to compare the outcomes of children who participated in the Challenge versus those who did not. Our analysis found statistically significant increases in reading frequency, reading enjoyment and reading confidence.

Findings from Our Interviews with Teachers, Pupils, and Library Authorities

- Children who took part in the Challenge through the pilot found new books they enjoyed, developed their reading confidence, and were inspired to read more books over the summer.
- Participation also resulted in a range of positive impacts on children’s wellbeing. Many children reported feeling happier and calmer when reading over the summer, and a sense of pride and accomplishment in completing the Challenge.
- Library authorities across the ten pilot areas forged stronger relationships with both local schools and other branches of their local authority through their delivery of the cross-authority pilot.

“I learned something.”

Year 4 pupil expressing that reading makes them happy because they learnt something.
Impact of the pilot on library use and engagement with the Summer Reading Challenge

Library Membership

- **5,220** libraries took part in the delivery of the Challenge in 2021, including **253** in the 10 pilot areas. **131,373** children and families joined these libraries as new members in the summer.

- **Significantly, libraries in pilot areas gained 60,881 new members – 46% of the overall total of new members.** Of these new members in pilot areas, **68% (41,683) were from the four pilot areas that trialled a universal access model** (Newham, Jersey, Leeds and Newcastle), with **64% (38,735) coming from Newham alone.**

- **In pilot areas, the number of new members increased by 684% compared to 2019.** This may have largely been driven by the new universal access model piloted in those areas, and in particular models that supported all children in participating schools to become automatic library members, such as in Newham and Manchester.

Number of new members by pilot area / non-pilot area and year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pilot areas (excluding NI)</th>
<th>Non-pilot areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>7849</td>
<td>86409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>58700</td>
<td>72673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1 – Number of new members by pilot area/non-pilot area and year*
The pupil survey revealed some differences between boys and girls in self-reported library attendance after completing the Challenge. The proportion of female participants saying they went to the library at least once a week rose from 30% at baseline to 38% at endline. For male participants, the proportion going at least once a week remained at 35%. While these results were interesting, further research would be required to determine exactly why we observed this disparity in attendance after completing the Challenge.

![Proportion of participants who report going to the library at least once per week by gender (%)](image)

**Proportion of participants who report going to the library at least once per week by gender (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Endline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation and Completion in Pilot Areas**

The figures this year show that the Summer Reading Challenge reached more children and narrowed the gender gap in the ten pilot areas than in the previous years:

- **There were 86,213 participants** in the pilot areas in 2021, **an increase of 67% from 2019**, when 51,491 children engaged in the same localities.

- **The number of boys participating in the Challenge increased in pilot areas.** The number of boys who took part increased by 60% while the number of female participants increased by 42%. This led to a more even gender split than seen in previous years, with 48% of in-person participants in pilot areas being boys and 52% being girls, compared to 46% and 54% respectively in 2019.

---

1 While the pilot was delivered in 10 areas, the below figures only cover 9 of the areas and excludes Libraries NI (Northern Ireland). In 2019, the Summer Reading Challenge was not delivered in Northern Ireland. Including these participants in the 2021 figures would lead to an incorrect comparison.
• **A greater proportion of boys were reached** through library authorities delivering the Challenge **through pilot approaches** than in library authorities using a traditional method of delivery. Comparatively, the gender breakdown in non-pilot areas remained similar to 2019, with boys making up 45% and girls 55% of all in-person participants.²

However, a smaller proportion of these children went on to complete the Challenge compared to previous years. There are several factors which may have contributed to the lower completion rates observed:

• **The way in which some pilot areas recorded participation / Challenge starters**
  In some of the pilot areas, all pupils who participated in a library visit (virtual or in-person) launching the Challenge through their school were registered as starters.

• **The successful engagement of a wider range of children, including those who were less likely to participate in the Challenge in the first place**
  Through their engagement of children who have not participated in the Challenge in the past, library authorities may have reached children who are less confident or less keen readers. For these children, the six-book target may have proved more difficult and reading even one book – for some, the first book they had ever finished – will have been a significant achievement.

• **The disruption caused by Covid-19**
  Several of the library authorities involved in delivering the pilot in 2021 experienced an increase in cases in the summer of 2021, and local restrictions remained in place in some areas. As a result, some library authorities were unable to support in-person engagement, such as school visits, which were regarded as a crucial means of explaining the Challenge to children and families and encouraging sustained engagement over the summer. Reduced opening hours and library closures also made it more difficult for children to visit their local library over the summer.

• **Pilot areas saw lower rates of in-person completion in 2021 than in 2019**, at 26% and 53% respectively. However, **the gap between the total number of completers in pilot areas in the two years was less striking**, with 21,106 in-person completers in 2021 and 27,538 in 2019. The factors outlined above – the way in which some pilot areas counted participants, the successful engagement of a broader range of children, including less confident readers, and the impact of Covid-19 – may account for the difference in the completion rates between 2021 and 2019.

• In addition, **the in-person completion rate of pilot areas was lower than non-pilot areas in 2021**, with 54% of in-person participants in non-pilot areas completing the Summer Reading Challenge. This further reflects the different levels of prior engagement with reading for children reached by the pilot as compared with traditional delivery.

---

² Gender was not reported for all Challenge participants. The % have been calculated out of those participants for whom the gender was known.
Findings from our analysis of pupil survey data

As part of our quantitative analysis of pupil survey data, we conducted a multi-regression analysis to compare the outcomes of children who participated in the Challenge versus those who did not.* To do this, we compared the pre- and post-Challenge survey responses of pupils who participated in the Challenge against a sample of pupils who completed the surveys but didn’t participate in the Challenge. Our analysis found statistically significant increases in:

- Reading frequency
- Enjoyment of reading
- Reading confidence

for children who participated in the Challenge compared to those who did not. However, it is important to recognise that there are a host of other factors which may explain or contribute to these changes; our analysis was not able to account for these other variables.

* For full details of our multi-regression analysis, including its limitations, please see our forthcoming full report.
Experiences of Children Involved in the 2021 Challenge

Overall, participants reported a positive impact on children’s reading engagement, reading behaviours and general wellbeing. This section is split into two sections, highlighting some of the themes which emerged from our interviews with children and teachers:

1. Impact on Reading Engagement and Behaviours
2. Impact on Wellbeing

Impact on Reading Engagement and Behaviours

Participating children and teachers reported several positive impacts on children’s reading engagement and behaviours. Most felt that children were more likely to read after participating in the Challenge because:

- The Challenge helped them to find books they enjoyed
  
  “I found a really good book during the Summer Reading Challenge which made me find what I actually like reading.” – Year 6 pupil

  “In the first place I felt that reading is so boring, then when I read Summer Reading Challenge books then I knew reading is good.” – Year 4 pupil

- They liked the rewards and incentives, and were motivated by them

  “I got to read all the books and I won the prize. It made me quite happy because I won a medal and I got a nice certificate with my name on it.” – Year 5 pupil

- Reading more regularly over the summer increased some children’s reading confidence as they were able to develop their vocabulary and practice reading aloud

  “I like reading a lot, my vocabulary has improved, [I’ve] started to read more books than I used to.” – Year 6 pupil

- Some children were also inspired to write their own stories and share recommendations with others

  “Once I have read something, I will just write what I have read or I will write a new story because I got ideas for it and I want a fun way to get ideas on paper.” – Year 5 pupil
Impact on Wellbeing

Children reported a range of positive impacts of the Summer Reading Challenge, and reading more generally, on their wellbeing, including:

- **Reduced feelings of stress and an increased sense of calmness** – many children noted that reading helped them to feel calm and to improve their capacity to manage challenging emotions.

  
  “I love to read because when you get stressed or angry it just helps you to calm down.” – Year 4 pupil

- **Happiness and excitement when reading new books or about new topics**

  “Excited because you don’t know what every book is about and you can just read it and see if you like it or you don’t… you get to read new things and read interesting facts you didn’t know and tell everybody.”

  – Year 3/4 pupil

- **A feeling of pride and sense of accomplishment** – some children attributed this feeling to tackling difficult books such as chapter books or long books with advanced vocabulary.

  “It was like reading was an accomplishment. You got stickers after finishing two books and you could put them on the paper.”

  – Year 5 pupil

- **Developing imagination and creativity through reading** – more broadly, reading sparked children’s imagination, as many reported being absorbed in the books they read while completing the Challenge.

  “When I read, I get to find a new world… I imagine myself in the books… I imagine the sea and me being there… I get to find out more things.” – Year 6 pupil

- **Identification with the Wild World Heroes characters** – the diverse nature of the Wild World Heroes characters also made some children feel a sense of connection and happiness, as they saw themselves and their families reflected in the Challenge.

  “Yes, it’s because the characters some of them has disabilities. And the summer reading Challenge is making me feel like anybody whoever you are, if you’re black, or you have any disabilities, you can still do reading.” – Year 4 pupil
Feedback from Children

“Nice. Proud.”
A child’s response to “How does reading make you feel?”

“I feel confident because I read lots of books each year.”
A response to “How confident do you feel when you are reading?”

“I feel like I am in the book”
Response to “How do you feel when reading after the summer?”

“Like I am drifting into the book”
A student’s response to “How does reading make you feel?”
Library Visits

For children who participated in the Summer Reading Challenge in 2021, visiting their local library was often an enjoyable experience, as it offered them access to books in a welcoming physical space:

- **An exciting opportunity to find new books** – going to the library enabled children to identify and pick up new books that they wanted to read.

  “When I go to the library, I feel really excited because there are so many fun books... they have pictures and are fun to read.”
  – Year 5 pupil

  “I like to go to the library and check out all their books and find the one I like.” – Year 6 pupil

  “I liked getting new books from the library... you could choose the books you liked.” – Year 3 pupil

- **A welcoming environment:**

  “The people who work at the library are very nice, and just the smell of the books are nice.” – Year 6 pupil

  “I loved going to the library because the people there are very kind, and I was able to sit there and be quiet, so I was able to concentrate on reading more.” – Year 5 pupil

  “When I see the library, it makes me happy because it’s so colourful.”
  – Year 5 pupil
Learnings

While most children indicated that their experience on the Summer Reading Challenge was positive, some experienced issues which affected their overall enjoyment of the Challenge. It is important to note this was a year of Covid recovery in which there were periods of lockdowns and restrictions impacting public libraries.

- **Accessing the library** – library closures and difficulties getting to their local library were frequently identified by children as challenges which prevented their full engagement with the Challenge.

  “I found it really hard because the library is closed so much I didn’t get to choose a book.” – Year 3 pupil

- **Availability of books** – some children were unable to borrow books they wanted to read from the library due to low stock levels.

  “Difficult [to get books out] because you don’t know which books to get because I can’t find the books that I want.” – Year 3 pupil

- **Six-book target** – the completion target was identified as one of the more daunting aspects of the Summer Reading Challenge. This was particularly the case for children who were slower or less confident readers, those who were busy over the summer with other activities, or those who wanted to challenge themselves to read longer books.

  “Maybe they could have less books that you have to read. [...] Because it’s a bit hard to read all of the books in the short amount of time.”
  – Year 6 Pupil
Schools’ engagement in the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot

Schools and teachers spoke positively about the Summer Reading Challenge and reported high levels of excitement among pupils who had participated. There were several aspects of the Challenge which teachers felt were particularly successful:

- **Providing Challenge materials and library cards to pupils directly**: Receiving the materials directly enabled teachers to distribute them to all pupils in their classes and generate excitement around the Challenge. In particular, the Challenge-specific library cards which some library authorities provided to participating pupils were identified as one of the most successful features of the pilot. Providing cards to pupils removed one of the barriers associated with participation in the Challenge (signing up for membership in a library) and encouraged children to feel more invested in the Challenge.

  “Having the library card ready and the resources ready for us to hand out was perfect... Although not every child took part, every child was informed.” – Teacher

  “Having the library cards has been the main one. It would have been nice to be able to go to the library to get the cards... they were quite excited... a lot of them didn’t have library cards.” – Teacher

- **Library visits**: Some schools were able to organise library visits before the end of the summer term. Many teachers stated that library visits were one of the key drivers of engagement with the Challenge, by creating excitement among pupils and introducing them to their local library.

  “It was nice to have the library visits. It was nice to have people working with the library you know, explaining about Summer Reading Challenge and promoting it to the children. So that was good rather than us doing it or teachers doing it.” – Teacher
- **Relationships with libraries:** The relationships formed between schools and local libraries through collaboration on the Challenge were also highly valued by participating teachers. Some teachers reported that they were able to connect with libraries easily due to an existing relationship. Others valued the support library staff offered during the Challenge and noted that this strengthened their relationship with local library staff.

  "The support from public libraries when I had questions was helpful and sending the resources that was really helpful, not having to pick them up." – Teacher

  "I feel much more inclined now to pick up the phone to the public libraries. I actually have done so, and they were so helpful, make sure I had the information I need." – Teacher

For some schools, collaborating with their local library also helped to raise the profile of the local library among teaching staff, offering new opportunities for engagement in the future.

  "The Summer Reading Challenge has ensured that teachers know it’s there as well, like going over to the library. [...] now that they know that service is there, they would also use it and talk to the children about it, you know, ‘have you been to the library?’ and things like that.” – Teacher
Impact of the pilot on library authorities

Relationships with Schools

Library authority staff reported that forming relationships with schools through delivering the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot was one of the most positive aspects of their participation.

Delivering the pilot affected library authorities’ relationships with schools in several ways:

- Several library authorities reported that close communication and collaboration helped them to establish stronger relationships with local schools.

  “Our relationship with schools is better than two years ago. The meetings with literacy coordinators and headteachers organised centrally by the agency helped as did better and more consistent comms.” – Library staff

- Relationships were formed at a more senior level – with headteachers and literacy coordinators rather than individual class teachers. This made it easier for library authorities to engage more pupils, as headteachers could coordinate participation in the Challenge at a whole-school level.

  “To be talking to people at head level was quite important, not just talking to teachers. They have control of their schools so having a way in there makes a difference.” – Library staff

  “There are these schools now, I could go back and speak to principals, and they would know who I was and I would feel comfortable lifting up the phone and speaking to them because we have built up a relationship during this project.” – Library staff
• Some library authority staff noted that working with schools in a more coordinated fashion reduced the workload of library staff, as teachers could distribute packs directly to their pupils.

  “It has had a phenomenal impact on our relationship with schools. We have gone from standing outside the school gates handing packs out to getting teachers to do that for us.” – Library staff

• Staff in several library authorities felt that they would be able to build on the relationships formed with schools to collaborate further in the future. Some library staff noted an increased demand for library visits following the Challenge, as schools saw the value of collaborating with their local libraries.

Relationships with Local Stakeholders

Local authority partners

Several library authorities reported that their relationships with other branches of the local authority, especially education teams, improved and deepened as a result of their collaboration on the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot:

• Relationships were formed with staff at multiple levels within other parts of local authorities – including at a strategic level with heads of service.

  “The pilot enabled those connections, from the level of the head of service, the head of education, public health – at the strategic level.”
  – Library staff

• Some library authorities reported that the pilot enabled them to restore relationships that had weakened over time as key contacts had moved on.

• Through working collaboratively with other branches of the local authority, library authorities were able to raise their own profile as an important stakeholder supporting literacy and education.

  “It’s been great in terms of raising a profile and really kind of putting the Summer Reading Challenge onto people’s agendas rather than it’s something that libraries do. Also the learning doesn’t just happen in schools, it happens through other services.” – Library staff

• This was regarded as being particularly important in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as local authorities sought strategies to encourage educational recovery and catch up following successive periods of lockdown.
Other stakeholders

Some library authorities worked with other local stakeholders when delivering their Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot.

By doing so, these library authorities formed new relationships with other stakeholders supporting children and young people over the summer which created further opportunities for collaboration.

“This pilot scheme has put in touch with other providers that provide activities for young people, there might be potential for future working together that I think can be very positive.” – Library staff

“It created opportunities for the future... We built good relationships with those who were running the Summer Reading Challenge activities to the extent that they have approached us and are running stuff again at half term.” – Library staff
Learnings from the different models tested

Cross-Authority Pilot Approaches

Across the ten pilot areas there were some variations in how the models were rolled out, depending on the priorities of local partners and the needs of their local population. Broadly, the pilots can be separated into two distinct approaches:

- **A universal approach**: aimed at broadening the reach of the Summer Reading Challenge to all children in the local area, by offering the same service to all.
- **A targeted approach**: aimed to broaden the reach of the Challenge with selected groups of typically under-served children, by focusing outreach activities on certain groups – e.g., by targeting certain schools.

### Key benefits and challenges of the approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of model</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Universal</strong></td>
<td>Helped to develop coordinated approach in some areas and promote culture of reading.</td>
<td>In areas which offered library cards to all Challenge starters, GDPR and data governance policies made it difficult for libraries to access data and coordinate delivery of the cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enabled library authorities to reach more children, including less confident readers, and led to new children and families visiting their local library for first time.</td>
<td>Some library authorities found engaging different schools and academy trusts in their area time consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staffing and resource required to support library visits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targeted</strong></td>
<td>A targeted approach made it easier for libraries to engage under-served schools and communities.</td>
<td>In some areas, efforts to promote the Challenge in under-served areas were not as successful as expected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raising the profile of the Summer Reading Challenge in areas and schools less likely to participate.</td>
<td>Making initial contact with schools was very time consuming for some library authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library authorities worked closely with local authority partners to engage children.</td>
<td>Some authorities experienced data governance issues when attempting to coordinate their targeting approach with local authority partners.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developing the Cross-Authority Pilot Approaches

Stakeholders interviewed had some thoughts around how the pilot approaches could be developed, which centred around two key themes:

- Doing more to drive parental engagement
- Earlier engagement of schools and partners

Doing more to drive parental engagement

School and library authority staff interviewed identified several barriers which prevented pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds from engaging with the Challenge and reading more generally. Both schools and libraries recognised the pivotal role that parental engagement played in children’s reading behavior and engagement with the Summer Reading Challenge. They reported several factors that may lead to parents from disadvantaged backgrounds being less likely to engage with reading and the Summer Reading Challenge, including parents’ reading confidence, negative experiences of the education system, or the ability to take their children to the library.

Both schools and library authorities talked about the need to increase parental engagement. This was felt to be particularly true during the summer holidays when teachers would not be in contact with children, who would instead be at home with their parents or carers for long periods of time. In areas which trialled it, automatic library membership appears to have encouraged parental engagement, removing one of the barriers which may have prevented parents from taking their children to the library.

“It always kind of depends on the parents, they’re the ones that seem to have an impact on whether [the children] have good access to books at home as well as encouraging [their children] to read.”
– Year 3-4 teacher

Earlier engagement of schools and partners

Teachers reported that the short time between receiving the Challenge materials and the end of the summer term prevented them from fully supporting the Challenge, as they had limited time to prepare and found it difficult to fit the Challenge in alongside their other end-of-term activities. These challenges were further exacerbated by staff absences caused by Covid-19. Engaging schools earlier in the academic year, and ensuring that materials arrive in time to support earlier engagement, could counter the time pressures experienced by schools at the end of the summer term.

Some library authorities also faced difficulties when attempting to work with other local authority services. One of the key challenges experienced related to data sharing with other services, such as Education, to support universal enrolment and the provision of library cards. For some library authorities, agreeing processes for the sharing of pupil data proved difficult and time consuming. Earlier engagement with local authority partners could help to make the mass enrolment process easier.
How could these learnings be used to develop delivery?

Stakeholders interviewed had a range of ideas for how points around driving parental engagement and earlier engagement across the local authority could be addressed, including:

- Inviting parents to library visits to introduce them to the library and generate buy-in for the Challenge.
- Targeting parents more specifically in collaborative initiatives between libraries and schools.
- Inviting parents into set activities in schools/libraries to read with children.
- Activities to boost parents’ language abilities and confidence in their own reading skills so they are more likely to read with their children.
- Earlier engagement with local authority partners could help library authorities to overcome any operational difficulties associated with data sharing and GDPR.
- Guidance on how to secure approval for data sharing, either provided centrally by The Reading Agency or from authorities that were able to facilitate mass library membership enrolment, could help other library authorities to manage data sharing effectively in the future.
- Ongoing dialogue and the sharing of learning between library authorities delivering the Challenge.
# Conclusion and recommendations

## Recommendations

There were many elements of the cross-authority pilot which worked well to broaden reach and engagement in the Summer Reading Challenge and libraries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worked well?</th>
<th>Why did it work well?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Providing children with library cards on enrolment (and delivered with packs in schools) | This reduced one of the main barriers which can prevent parents from taking their children to their local library (uncertainty surrounding what is required to sign up for membership and access the library).  
It also generated considerable excitement around the Challenge among children, raising their awareness of it and encouraging them to ask their parents to take them to their local library. |
<p>| Offering library visits or online library visits to schools       | Library visits were seen by teachers and library staff as one of the most effective ways of engaging children. During library visits, library staff could introduce the Challenge to children and explain its core features. This was especially important for children who had not previously participated in the Challenge and less confident readers, as library staff could address any worries children had and help them to find books which interested them. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What worked well?</th>
<th>Why did it work well?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging different elements of the Challenge (e.g., theme, competitive element) to appeal to a wider range of children</td>
<td>Different elements of the Challenge appealed to different children, e.g., some were enthused by the theme while the prize and competitive element encouraged others to read more books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater coordination of engagement with schools</td>
<td>In some areas, engagement with local schools was coordinated by local authority partners. This reduced the pressure on library authorities, enabling them to focus their efforts on delivering the Challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Library authorities formed relationships with schools at a more senior level. This made it easier for libraries to reach more pupils, as headteachers could coordinate participation and engagement at a whole-school level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The relationships formed with headteachers and school Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) offer opportunities for further engagement with schools in the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This summary report has highlighted some of the central themes that emerged from our evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot. Participating children found the Summer Reading Challenge an enjoyable experience, and were motivated to read more as a result. Libraries piloting new models of delivery valued the new and strengthened relationships they formed with schools and other partners in the local area.

Our full evaluation report will expand upon the themes and learnings presented here and explore other aspects of the Challenge in more detail, including further insight on the efforts of public libraries to engage children from disadvantaged backgrounds or who had not taken part before, and the value of strategic cross-authority working to broaden reach and engagement. It will be published in spring 2022.
About The Reading Agency | The Reading Agency is a national charity that tackles life’s big challenges through the proven power of reading. We work closely with partners to develop and deliver programmes for people of all ages and backgrounds; our vision is for a world where everyone is reading their way to a better life. We help 1.9 million people benefit from reading every year, through our programmes, our tireless campaigning, our excellent networks and our power to influence, challenge and make change happen. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England.

The Reading Agency would like to thank Arts Council England for funding this research; Renaisi for conducting the evaluation; the library authorities and schools for providing data and supporting the evaluation; and all of the children and families who took part in the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot.

Find out more at http://www.readingagency.org.uk/ Twitter | Facebook | Instagram

About the Summer Reading Challenge | The Summer Reading Challenge is run in partnership between The Reading Agency and UK public libraries. Children’s reading can ‘dip’ during the long summer holidays. The Challenge regularly helps get over 700,000 children into libraries each year to keep up their reading skills and confidence, encouraging children aged 4 to 11 to read six books during the long summer holiday. Find out more at www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk

About Arts Council England | Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let’s Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies administering the Government’s unprecedented £1.96 billion Culture Recovery Funds. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19

About Renaisi | Renaisi is a social enterprise that helps people and places to thrive. Founded in 1998 to regenerate neighbourhoods in Hackney, East London, today we work directly with communities that are marginalised by society and support charities and investors in communities to understand and improve their work. Working across the system gives us a unique perspective on how to improve places equitably. Find out more at www.renaisi.com Follow us on Twitter (@Renaisi) or on LinkedIn