



THE  
**READING**  
AGENCY

# Summer Reading Challenge

Summer Reading Challenge  
Cross-Authority Pilot 2021-23:

## THREE YEAR EVALUATION SUMMARY REPORT



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**

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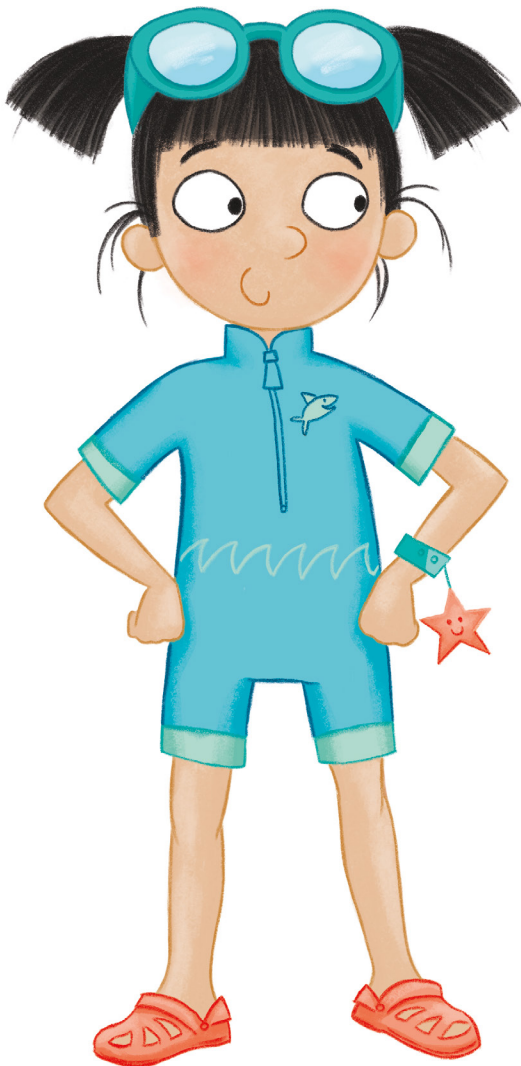
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# Foreword

**At The Reading Agency, we are committed to empowering children across the country to read.** Reading can be a place of connection; a place of escape; a place to learn or a place to feel good. For over 20 years with our public library partners, we've been delivering the national Summer Reading Challenge to spread the joy of reading during the school holiday.

Reading data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) shows a concerning decline in children's reading engagement nationally, with many children reporting that they don't find reading enjoyable. Our ongoing evaluation shows that the Summer Reading Challenge consistently delivers a different story: inviting children to see reading differently, expanding reading horizons beyond the classroom and showing what a powerful tool for the imagination a book can be. Our research shows that children who participate in the Summer Reading Challenge read more frequently, enjoy it more and feel more confident about it. Those who took part also reported feeling calmer, more relaxed and better equipped to manage challenging emotions.



With an annual theme chosen with children and librarians, and in line with wider interest pathways for the age group, the Challenge sees innovative activities, events, and resources made available, with local library services creating exciting new partnerships every year. This was especially true last year, with our sport and game-themed 'Ready, Set, Read!' Challenge. It saw dance classes, football sessions and sport equipment loans all supporting the Challenge and encouraging children to keep up their reading over the holiday.

Our cross-authority approach has tested new partnerships for libraries and for delivering the Summer Reading Challenge. It is increasing participation and driving new families and children into the library to access the wealth of reading materials and support on offer. The gender gap is well documented in children's reading habits, but by forging connections between the public library and other local partners, including education, health and social services, we've found that boys' participation increased significantly. New library memberships and book loans have also increased in our cross-authority sites year on year, which is really exciting.

The feedback from our valued library partners is that this approach helps to raise the profile of their work within local authorities, demonstrating the wealth of reading material,

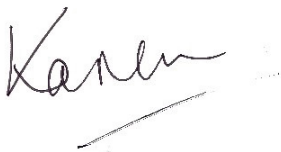
cultural experiences, support and information that libraries can offer. It also helps them effectively demonstrate how their work directly supports wider local government priorities, such as supporting children’s mental health, fostering community cohesion and boosting educational opportunity.

Reading opens doors, makes us more aware and brings us together. Our evidence shows that the Summer Reading Challenge is fundamental in bringing those opportunities to children. For so many children, the Summer Reading Challenge is the first step in creating an ongoing reading habit, providing people with the rewards and advantages that come from being an avid reader long into adulthood.

The Summer Reading Challenge wouldn’t happen without the dedicated passion and support of our library partners, who I’d like to thank for their tireless work. Thank you also to Arts Council England and DCMS for continuing to recognise the need for the Summer Reading Challenge in communities across the country. We are committed to widening this access even further, bringing the Summer Reading Challenge and life-changing power of reading to every child in the UK. The Challenge is already delivering demonstrable impact nationally, but with your involvement and support, we could reach even more children to share the power of reading for pleasure. We hope you will work with us and look forward to you being in touch.

**Karen Napier MBE**

**CEO**



# Introduction



**The Summer Reading Challenge is the UK’s biggest summer reading for pleasure programme for children, delivered by The Reading Agency in partnership with UK public libraries since 1999. It is designed to address the tendency for children’s reading engagement to dip over the summer holidays, by encouraging children aged 4 to 11 to read books of their choice during the six-week break and receive rewards for their reading. Independent research shows it delivers proven reading engagement outcomes as well as other benefits relating to health and wellbeing and social connectivity.**

Over the last three years, The Reading Agency has piloted a new model of delivery based on cross-authority partnerships. This involves library services working strategically with other relevant areas of the local authority, such as Public Health teams and Education or Children’s Services, to extend the reach and impact of the Challenge in areas of disadvantage or low literacy.

In 2021, ten library services around the UK took part in the first phase of this pilot, trialling different approaches to reaching children experiencing disadvantage, from targeted work with schools to offering automatic library membership to all primary-age school children. The following year, The Reading Agency extended the pilot with library services in 30 areas around the UK, expanding to 34 library services in 2023, for a total of 39 library authorities over the three-year pilot.

Each year, library services further developed the pilot model in their area by building on the learnings captured through our evaluations. Many have worked closely with small numbers of local schools or Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) teams and providers to target children experiencing disadvantage or those who have not participated in the Challenge in the past. This work has resulted in an ability to leverage new funding for the Challenge and a strategic approach to building relationships, particularly with schools.

Thanks to funding from Arts Council England, The Reading Agency partnered with Renaisi to evaluate the Summer Reading Challenge in **2021** and **2022**, exploring the impact of delivering the cross-authority pilot on library services, schools and other partners, and the children taking part. In 2023, this evaluation report offers additional insight into the the value and impact of this method of delivery and provides recommendations for future rollout.



## The cross-authority partnership model

The driving principle of the cross-authority pilot model involves strategic partnerships between the library service and other directorates of the local authority to reach children experiencing disadvantage or literacy challenges including those new to the library.

Library services delivered the cross-authority model through two key approaches, as informed by their local context:

- **Universal approach:** enrolling all children within the local authority or across a set of schools or year groups onto participation in the Challenge
- **Targeted approach:** engaging children with specific barriers to reading by working within a smaller number of schools or priority areas

Many have also trialled **automatic library membership** to all children in their area or in selected schools/year groups as part of their pilot delivery.

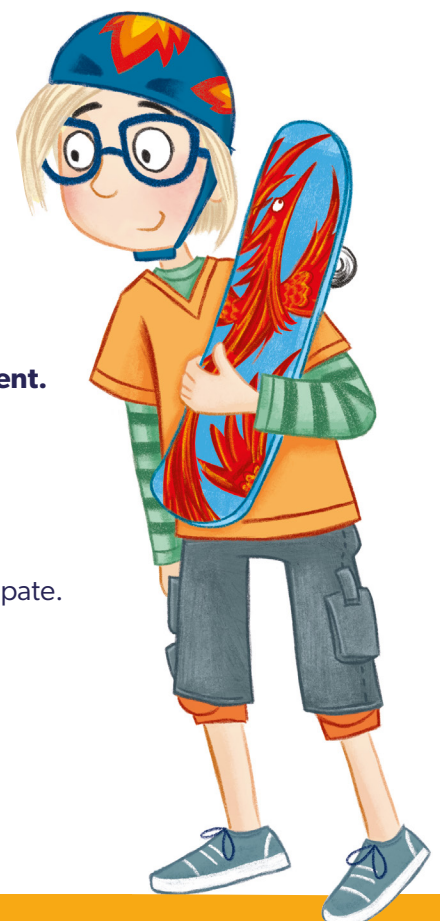
In addition to working with **Education Services** and **Public Health**, several library services also engaged the **HAF programme providers** in their area. The HAF programme provides activities and a hot meal during the holiday period for children eligible for free school meals and is typically delivered by a range of local organisations, including community centres, museums, leisure centres, and youth organisations.

As part of its support package to pilot library services, The Reading Agency offers ongoing engagement opportunities and communication throughout the year, including case for support documents, research insights, peer support, and bespoke data outputs.

## Key aims of the evaluation

A core set of research aims drove our evaluation approach over the three years of the pilot:

- **Test the impact** of the Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot model **on children's reading engagement.**
- Explore the value of cross-authority working in **reaching underserved audiences.**
- **Understand the barriers to engagement** and the **support needed** to encourage parents and children to participate.
- Identify **benefits** to the **local authority** and **relationships formed** with local communities.



## Highlights of children's participation in the Summer Reading Challenge using the cross-authority model: 2021-2023

Data from the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS), a large-scale international study, shows that pupils who enjoy and are confident in reading are more likely to have higher average reading achievement than those who do not enjoy reading and who are not as confident.<sup>1</sup> However, this same study also showed that far fewer pupils in England reported that they enjoyed reading and were confident in reading compared to both previous years and global counterparts, making them less likely to take part in reading outside of an academic situation.

Where national and international data such as PIRLS shows a concerning decline in children's reading engagement, the Summer Reading Challenge and the cross-authority delivery model have been proven to buck this trend:

- Scientific evidence demonstrates the success of the Summer Reading Challenge in enhancing children's reading engagement:
  - Children who take part in the Summer Reading Challenge enjoy reading more, read more frequently and feel more confident reading.
- Our research shows the wellbeing impact of reading over the summer as part of the Challenge, with children feeling calmer, more relaxed and more equipped to manage challenging emotions.
- Reach and impact of the Challenge can be expanded through strategic cross-authority partnership working, increasing reading for pleasure and library use amongst those who need it most.
  - Boys accessed the Challenge in greater numbers in pilot areas, narrowing the gender gap in reading for pleasure.
  - The model reached children experiencing disadvantage, key to helping close the attainment gap.
  - New library membership and children's book issues have both increased in pilot areas year on year.
- Libraries have successfully leveraged this method of partnership working to raise their profile across the Council and community and demonstrate the value of reading and library use in delivering against Council priorities such as post-Covid recovery and tackling the children's mental wellbeing crisis.



<sup>1</sup> PIRLS 2021: national report for England ([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://publishing.service.gov.uk))

## Across the three years of cross-authority pilot model delivery...

**On average, 1 in 3 children signing up to the Summer Reading Challenge were in pilot authorities.** The pilot model recorded over half a million sign-ups to the Summer Reading Challenge over the three years – 509,732 in total. As many children take part each summer, this equates to an average of 1 in 3 children signing up to the Summer Reading Challenge were in areas where the pilot model was delivered.<sup>2</sup> With only 1 in 5 library authorities delivering the model, this means that children signed up to take part at a much higher rate proportionally, widening reach and engagement through this method of working.

### Case Study: Norfolk

The team at Norfolk Libraries shared the following story with us:

“ Through the pilot, we targeted three areas of high deprivation: Great Yarmouth, Mile Cross (Norwich) and North Lynn (King’s Lynn). We have shared data, set improvement targets and provided extra promotional materials to all 34 schools involved. In return, schools agreed to hand out these resources and promote the Summer Reading Challenge, local library activities, and library membership via their newsletters.

We also ran ‘Feed and Read’ sessions every Tuesday as part of the pilot for around 50 children in North Lynn. Through these sessions, we worked with a new, HAF-funded partner, a leisure centre situated in our target area. We provided a pop-up library in the leisure centre where children used the time to read books, listen to stories being read aloud and talk to library staff and the leisure centre coaches about reading. We encouraged children to join the library and the Summer Reading Challenge and adapted our systems and worked with our partners to gain parental consent and make it easier to join. As a result, the school closest to the Feed and Read venue grew from only 2 children taking part in the Challenge in 2022 to signing up 42 children in 2023.

We also worked closely with one school on a plan to increase their joining rate as part of the pilot. This included library activities offered exclusively to this school and a prize raffle for all completers. In line with the Ready, Set, Read! theme, many of the prizes were signed Norwich City Football Club (NCFC) shirts, and Captain Canary, the NCFC mascot, attended a celebration assembly. With 32% of children on the roll taking part in the Challenge, the school exceeded their 25% target and now plans to continue regular library visits across the year.

We have also seen increases in engagement across the pilot, including:

- 75% increase in primary-aged joiners for library branches new to the pilot.
- 37.5% increase on Junior fiction book issues for these same library branches.”

<sup>2</sup> An average of 169,910 children per year took part in pilot areas. For comparison, an average of 398,848 children signed up to take part through library authorities delivering the traditional Challenge model in these same years.



## Across the three years of cross-authority pilot model delivery...

### The number of book issues increased year on year in pilot areas

Children borrowed 6,602,037 library books, eBooks and audiobooks across the three years of delivery.<sup>3</sup> The number of books issued each year reflects a much larger increase than those issued in authorities delivering the regular model of activity. For example, in 2023, there was a 116% increase in book issues in pilot areas on 2019, compared with +81% through non-pilot delivery.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that regardless of whether or not children completed the Summer Reading Challenge, they were continuing to read more books as a cohort in pilot areas.

### On average, 1 in 5 children receiving a completer's certificate were in pilot authorities

The cross-authority approach to delivery has led to 192,899 children receiving a completer's certificate from their local library across three years.<sup>5</sup> As many children receive a completer's certificate in more than just one year, this equates to an average of 1 in 5 children completing the Summer Reading Challenge in areas where the pilot model was delivered.<sup>6</sup> Just under 20% of local authorities deliver the model, meaning that, even in areas where a universal approach was taken, children were completing the Challenge at the same rate as in those areas offering traditional delivery – areas where parents and caregivers needed to take the extra step to signing their children up. This indicates that barriers to summer reading for children who might not have started without the cross-authority approach are reduced when access to the Challenge is provided equitably to all children within a defined area.

## Case Study: Manchester

The team at Manchester Libraries shared the following story with us:

**“ Manchester has delivered the cross-authority model across all three years of the pilot. In 2023, 42 primary schools took part in the offer for a second year running. Pupils in these schools were automatically registered for the Summer Reading Challenge, receiving their core pack and other resources directly in school. Children who were not already library members were also automatically joined to the library. Both pilot and non-pilot schools were offered a suite of Summer Reading Challenge engagement sessions including library staff speaking at school assemblies, launch celebrations and meet-the-author sessions.**

Our headline data in Manchester for 2023 shows:

- 57% of all library books read over the summer were by children from pilot schools, despite being only 31% of the total number of primary schools in Manchester.
- 16 pilot schools are in the top 20 schools for the number of children borrowing at least one item.
- 21 of the 35 top-performing schools for Challenge completion – including the top 5 schools – are all pilot schools.”

<sup>3</sup> 172,231 book issues in pilot areas in 2021; 2,613,670 in 2022; and 3,816,136 in 2023

<sup>4</sup> Excluding Wigan, Westminster and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and Barnet where data is unavailable from the previous year.

<sup>5</sup> 26,173 children in 2021; 84,426 children in 2022; and 82,310 children in 2023.

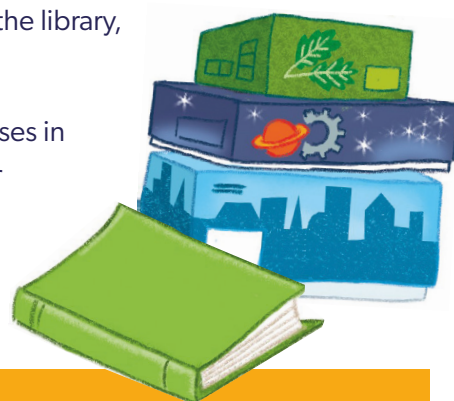
<sup>6</sup> An average of 64,300 children per year completed their Challenge in pilot areas. For comparison, an average of 209,318 children per year completed their Challenge through library authorities taking a traditional approach to delivery in these same years.

## Across the three years of cross-authority pilot model delivery...

### On average, 2 in 5 children who became new library members were in pilot authorities

The cross-authority approach to delivery has led to 153,296 children becoming new library members across three years.<sup>7</sup> This means approximately 2 in 5 children who became new library members across the three years of delivering the model were in pilot authorities.<sup>8</sup> With just 1 in 5 libraries delivering the model, this indicates that children became new library members at a much higher rate proportionally, widening reach and engagement.

- 30% of all participants reached by the pilot were those new to the library, compared to 20% in non-pilot areas.
- Many library authorities taking part in the pilot saw large increases in new membership in their first year of delivery, providing further evidence that the new model extends the reach of the library service to those families who are either underserved or may experience other barriers, including disadvantage.



## Case Study: London Borough of Newham

The team at Newham Libraries shared the following story with us:

**“ In 2023, all primary schools across the Borough were invited to visit the library from the first week of June. In these sessions, children learned about the Challenge, borrowed their first two books to read over the summer, and received their core pack. After three years of delivering the Challenge in this way, we have found that teachers and families are becoming more used to this style of delivery, leading to an improvement in engagement. There is now competition for library visit places from schools as teachers are beginning to see the correlation between bringing children into the library and the percentage of children who go on to complete the Challenge.**

**Our completer rate is showing an increase each year which is a strong indication that this model has had an impact on people’s engagement with the library. We have introduced a year-long booking system for schools to encourage regular library usage which we hope will lead to greater participation and completion of the Summer Reading Challenge as well as more independent regular engagement with the library.”**

<sup>7</sup> 60,881 children in 2021; 46,575 children in 2022; and 45,840 children in 2023.

<sup>8</sup> This equates to an average of 51,099 children per year, compared to 81,332 children per year in library authorities delivering the traditional model.

## Reaching new families

Our evaluation findings show that parent and caregiver engagement is a key barrier to participation for children and families experiencing disadvantage, reflecting wider research on this topic.<sup>9</sup> Over the three years, we worked together with parents and caregivers, teachers, and librarians to better understand the factors driving these barriers to participation, and methods for overcoming them.

A key aim of the pilot delivery model of working is to increase opportunities to reach and engage underserved local communities. Our data shows that this method of delivery successfully engaged under-represented groups:

- Schools agreed that the pilot reached children living with disadvantage (68% agreed) and those new to the library (60% agreed).
- More boys engaged in summer reading through the pilot: 46% boys & 53% girls took part in pilot areas over three years, compared with 44% boys & 55% girls through non-pilot delivery.

**“ I didn’t really like books before, and I used to not read, because I didn’t really like reading. I was just busy watching YouTube and TV and stuff. But like, after the Summer Reading Challenge, I like fiction, and I like reading lots of different books”**  
– Boy, 9-10 years old

Our evidence shows that both universal enrolment and providing automatic library membership played an important role in removing barriers to access found to present a hurdle for many families. There were a range of approaches that were found to work well in engaging these families:

- Reaching out to schools and other partners at an early stage, and maintaining strategic relationships throughout the year
- Utilising the Challenge theme to form connections with local stakeholders, for example, local science centres alongside the Gadgeteers theme in 2022 or leisure centres alongside the Ready, Set, Read! theme in 2023
- Engaging children living with disadvantage in a familiar setting (e.g., HAF provider), alongside additional incentives provided through these settings such as food and play
- Taking library services to communities, via mobile library units or book drop-offs in schools

**“ [The Summer Reading Challenge] tied in absolutely perfect to what we do as a HAF programme [...] we thought, well this is brilliant, because it ties really nicely into our ‘English on the move’ [initiative].”**  
– HAF provider



<sup>9</sup> Cremin, et al. (2023) *Reading and Writing for Pleasure: An Executive Summary of the Research*, The Mercers' Company

## Raising the library profile

Our evaluation has also found strong evidence that the cross-authority model of delivery helps raise the profile of the contribution of libraries and reading in addressing key local authority priorities, including learning catch-up, children's wellbeing and some impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Delivering this approach has enabled libraries to raise their profile and form stronger links with other parts of the local authority, such as education and public health. These connections are formed at a more strategic level, by building on existing relationships and offering a cost-effective method of connecting the Summer Reading Challenge with wider Council priorities.

**“I think the difference this year was the really high-level strategic stuff. [...] This is how [area] Council's going to help address the problems of COVID and address the gaps. And that was the higher level. I've never been to a meeting with the Head of the Council before.”**

– Pilot library authority



## Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this three-year evaluation showed that the **reach and impact of the Challenge can be amplified by this new way of working** to increase access to opportunities for reading for pleasure, and library use for those who need it.

Engaging parents and caregivers of children experiencing disadvantage is vital in enabling children's participation; our evidence indicates that the cross-authority partnerships formed through this delivery model are successfully helping to address this barrier. These can be further supported through efforts such as removing barriers (like registering for a library card) and by meeting families where they are (like schools and HAF providers).

The Challenge and the cross-authority model of delivery were found to result in a measurably positive increase and **improvement in reading engagement, motivation, confidence and communication skills**, as well as **supporting children's creativity, wellbeing and family connectedness** – all vital in the current landscape. The **gender gap in summer reading has narrowed in pilot areas**, and **new library membership has increased dramatically**, driven in part by universal enrolment to the Challenge as well as the trial of automatic library membership.

The evaluation also showed the strong wellbeing impact on children who took part in the Summer Reading Challenge over the summer holidays, with children developing their imagination and creativity through reading, feeling an increased sense of calmness and an improved capacity to manage challenging emotions.

Finally, the evaluation has demonstrated the efficacy of the pilot model in helping **raise the profile of the contribution of libraries and reading in addressing key local authority priorities**. Libraries have been successfully able to highlight their value in educational support and public health as part of ongoing pandemic recovery and the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis across the Council and community.

To deliver this model effectively, the evaluation has highlighted the importance of establishing connections with local authority partners, HAF providers and other local organisations at an early stage to facilitate strong, high-level strategic partnerships. Offering opportunities for library services to share case studies and best practice with each other and within their local authority can help to support this process.

Moving forward, The Reading Agency are recommending cross-authority partnerships as best practice Summer Reading Challenge delivery. At a cost of as little as £1 a child, this method appears to offer cost efficiencies in delivering against Council priorities, such as increasing children's reading engagement, reducing the attainment gap and supporting community wellbeing and cohesion.



# Appendix

## Evaluation approach

In 2021 and 2022, the cross-authority pilot was independently evaluated by Renaisi, with funding from Arts Council England. The same evaluation framework was used in 2023. We conducted a mixed-method evaluation, drawing on the following data sources over three years:

- Programme monitoring data across 192 library authorities, allowing for benchmarking and comparator analysis
- A baseline and endline pupil attitudinal and behaviours survey, completed by more than 3,800 pupils
- Post-programme school survey completed by staff at 43 schools and a family survey completed by 304 parents/caregivers within the pilot areas
- Over 70 interviews with library staff, HAF coordinators and other key local authority stakeholders
- In-depth case studies in 12 library authorities
- Focus groups, group workshops and interviews with children and their parents/caregivers in 16 primary schools

## 2021 in Focus: Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot engagement

In 2021, 10 library authorities delivered the cross-authority pilot model: Leeds City Council, London Boroughs of Islington and Newham, Manchester City Council, Newcastle, Northern Ireland (Libraries NI), Oldham MBC, Portsmouth City Council, Staffordshire County Council, States of Jersey.

Evaluation data for 2021 shows...<sup>10</sup>

### Participation increased significantly in pilot areas, even compared to pre-pandemic levels

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. By contrast, library authorities delivering the traditional model recorded a drop on their pre-pandemic reach.

### The number of boys participating in the Challenge increased in pilot areas

In pilot areas, the number of male and female participants both increased significantly → by 60% and 42% respectively. However, the increased number of boys taking part in pilot areas led to a more even gender split than in previous years → from 46% boys and 54% girls in 2019 to 48% boys and 52% girls in 2021.

### The number of new library members grew dramatically in pilot areas – by 684% compared to 2019

Libraries in pilot areas gained 60,881 new members → 46% of the overall total of new members in 2021. 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.

<sup>10</sup> Comparison data does not include Northern Ireland, which did not deliver the Challenge in 2019.

## 2022 in Focus: Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot engagement

In 2022, 30 library authorities delivered the cross-authority pilot model: Bradford; Coventry; Essex; Hampshire; Kent; Leeds; Leicester; the London boroughs of Barnet, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Newham, and Westminster; Manchester; Newcastle; Norfolk; Nottingham; Oldham; Portsmouth; Rochdale; Sandwell; Shropshire; South Gloucestershire; Staffordshire; Stockport; Surrey; Torbay; Wigan; States of Jersey; and Scottish authorities East Lothian and Renfrewshire.

Evaluation data for 2022 shows...<sup>11</sup>

### **Pilot areas continued to record steep rises in participation and completion through the model**

212,454 total children participated in pilot areas in 2022 across 714 libraries → 35% of the overall total of participants in 2022. Participation continued to increase in pilot areas in 2022 compared to those same areas for both 2021 (+29%) and 2019 (+11%).

84,426 children met or exceeded their personal or their library's reading targets in pilot areas in 2022, a 34% increase compared to 2021.

### **More children became new library members in pilot areas compared with those delivering the traditional model**

46,575 children became new library members in pilot areas in 2022 → an increase of 94% on 2019. An average of 1,552 children signed up as new members per pilot area, more than three times the average number of new members reported per non-pilot area (486).

## 2023 in Focus: Summer Reading Challenge cross-authority pilot engagement

In 2023, 34 library authorities delivered the cross-authority pilot model: Bradford; Essex; Hampshire; Jersey; Leeds; Leicester; the London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Newham, and Westminster; Manchester; Newcastle; Norfolk; Nottingham; Oldham; Portsmouth; Rochdale; Sandwell; Shropshire; South Gloucestershire; Staffordshire; Stockport; Surrey; Torbay; and Wigan.

Evaluation data for 2023 shows...<sup>12</sup>

### **Pilot areas reached more children on average per library branch than authorities delivering the traditional model**

A total of 202,435 children took part in the Summer Reading Challenge in pilot areas in 2023 → a 7% increase in sign-ups compared to 2019. By contrast, library authorities not taking a cross-authority approach have not yet returned to their pre-pandemic levels of engagement.<sup>13</sup> While library authorities taking part over multiple years tended to see the biggest increase in their first year of pilot delivery, longitudinal data shows that they were able to maintain these levels and became stable over time.

<sup>11</sup> Comparison data does not include Wigan and East Lothian, which did not deliver the Challenge in 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Comparison data excludes Wigan, which did not deliver the Challenge in 2019.

<sup>13</sup> 360,929 participants in non-pilot areas in 2023 compared to 416,005 across these same areas in 2019.

An average of 296 children per library branch took part in pilot areas in 2023 compared to 173 per library outside of the pilot.<sup>14</sup> The children who took part in pilots make up 32% of the overall total of in-person participants in 2023 despite being drawn from only 18% of library authorities delivering the Challenge.

### **Library membership almost tripled in pilot areas compared to 2019**

45,840 children became new library members across pilot areas in 2023 → a 69% increase in new library members compared to 2019.<sup>15</sup> In fact, 22 of the 34 pilot areas in 2023 experienced increases of more than 10%, 10 of which increased by more than 100%. Some highlights include Staffordshire, which increased the number of children signing up to the library service by 901% on 2019, and Jersey which saw a 710% rise on 2019.

By contrast, whilst library authorities taking part in the traditional model of delivery also saw a rise in the number of children becoming new library members in 2023 as compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019, this rise (+28%) represents a 40 percentage point difference to the rise experienced by authorities running the pilot model of delivery (+69%).



<sup>14</sup> 202,435 children across 683 libraries in pilot areas compared with 432,240 participants across 2,504 libraries in non-pilot areas.

<sup>15</sup> New library members in 2023 (42,297) and these same areas in 2019 (25,099). Excluding Norfolk, Swindon and Wigan.



**About The Reading Agency** | The Reading Agency is a UK charity with a mission to empower people of all ages to read. Evidence shows that reading improves health and wellbeing, life chances and social connections. The Reading Agency champions access to the proven power of reading by providing activities for all ages. Working with public libraries, prisons, hospitals and other community settings, we reach over two million people a year. But with a UK population of over 67 million that's not nearly enough. We want to get more people fired up about reading because everything changes when you read. Get in touch today to find out more about what we do and to help us on our mission. [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk) @readingagency

The Reading Agency would like to thank Arts Council England for funding two years of this research; Renaisi for conducting the evaluation in 2021 and 2022; 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.

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## Summer Reading Challenge

WILD WORLD  
HEROES

GADGETEERS

Ready, Set, Read!

**About the Summer Reading Challenge** | The Summer Reading Challenge is run by The Reading Agency for children across the UK and is delivered in partnership with public libraries. It has been running for the past 24 years and aims to foster a lifelong love of reading and tackle the drop off in reading that can happen over the school summer holidays. Children are challenged to read books over the summer, given incentives and rewards for their reading and encouraged to enjoy reading for fun. Each year has a different theme – 2023 was 'Ready, Set, Read!', 2022 was 'Gadgeteers' and 2021 was 'Wild World Heroes'. [www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk](http://www.summerreadingchallenge.org.uk)



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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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**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. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £440 million of public money from Government and an estimated £93 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)



**About Renaisi** | Renaisi is a social enterprise that helps people and places to thrive. Founded in 1998 to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods in Hackney, East London, today we do three complementary things: Support people to learn work and connect with their community. Help organisations across the UK to understand and evaluate their impact on communities; and Develop collaborative strategies for improving places. We're constantly learning from the different perspectives we see from working directly with marginalised communities, with the providers of services and the investors in communities. It gives us a unique perspective on how systems work and how to improve places fairly. We care about creating the conditions for strong, inclusive communities to thrive. Find out more at [www.renaisi.com](http://www.renaisi.com) Follow us on [Twitter \(@Renaisi\)](#) or on [LinkedIn](#)

THE  
**READING**  
AGENCY

# Summer Reading Challenge



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