



First Minister's Reading Challenge Advisory Group

Minutes

20 March 2018

10.00am – 12.00pm

Scottish Book Trust, Sandeman House, Trunk's Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1SR

Present:

Caitlyn Bannatyne – Graphic Novelist

Angie Crawford – Waterstones

Sue Ellis – Strathclyde University

Jen Harwood – Scottish Book Trust

Lucy Jukes – Chair

Simon Kelly – Alexandra Parade Primary

Jennifer Lambert – Blake Stevenson

Margaret Leitch – National Parent Forum of Scotland

Catriona Mackenzie – Scottish Government

Sarah Mallon – Scottish Book Trust

James McParland – St Maurice's High School

Amina Shah – Scottish Book Trust

Rosie Sim – Scottish Book Trust

Pamela Tulloch – Scottish Library and Information Council

Katherine Wilkinson – Scottish Book Trust

Apologies:

Antonia Clark – Scottish Book Trust

Helen Fairlee – Education Scotland

Rosemary Ward- The Gaelic Books Council

Lindsey Fraser – Fraser Ross Associates

Derek Brown – Association of Directors of Education

James Robertson – Writer

Susan Morton – School Librarian at Inverclyde Academy

1. FMRC Book Gifting Research (Blake Stevenson)

Blake Stevenson conducted research into the efficacy of book gifting on behalf of Scottish Book Trust and updated the Advisory Group on their findings.

A literature review looked at book gifting programmes nationally and internationally. Key themes looked at were the role of pupil choice, how often and when books were gifted, and the impact this had on attainment.

Specific countries looked at included the UK, Norway and the US, each with different approaches to book gifting.

From a review of these different programmes, the following models emerged:

- Universal gifting programmes where all children are gifted books, often with an element of choice as to which books they receive.
- Targeted gifting programmes aimed at specific age groups, or perceived need (for example, pupils from deprived areas).
- School-led programmes where schools voluntarily opt-in to a book gifting programme and organise the distribution of the books themselves.

The literature review found that book gifting programmes have been evaluated to varying degrees. Overall, the following themes were important for increasing impact:

- Choice: impact was greater when pupils were given an element of choice over the book they were gifted. Guidance from a teacher in their choice was important.
- Timing of book gifting has an impact on pupils' engagement with reading (depending on context, greater impact was at the beginning/end of school term, end of the day).
- Delivery/distribution of books: whether given directly to the pupils or to the school as a whole, the context in which the gifting took place and how books were gifted made a big difference to overall pupil engagement.

In addition to the literature review, interviews with learning professionals in Scotland were also conducted. Based on these interviews, the following conclusions were made:

- Book gifting is welcomed and perceived as effective at increasing attainment, although more research is required.
- Gifting schemes that tie in with other initiatives have greater impact.
- Pupil choice is crucial.
- Book gifting is a means of 'hooking' pupils in, for example by gifting the first book of a series.
- Timing is very important. Some schemes used book gifting during the transition between primary and secondary, or at other celebrated times of year to help create excitement around reading.

- Every school is different. Flexible schemes where schools decided when and how to gift to their pupils had greatest impact.
- Costs don't have to be high. Partnerships with local bookshops can help with this.

A discussion of the evaluation followed and the Group agreed on the following:

- Book gifting is effective at promoting reading for pleasure. However, it is not a solution on its own and should be part of a wider effort to change habits, routines and reading cultures within schools and their wider communities.
- There should be coherence across the curriculum.
- Make it clear that reading is not homework or work-related but rather something to do for fun.
- Make it sociable – facilitate child-led reading groups, games and activities.
- Support resources and CLPL for teachers on contemporary children's literature and guidance on how to maximise impact on reading for pleasure are crucial.
- Parental engagement – schools should be given guidance on how to engage parents. Communicating directly with parents on an individual basis (for example, at the end of the school day) is more effective than simply sending letters out.

Other aspects the Group raised in relation to book gifting include:

- Potential impact on authors: any gifting programme should be mindful of how this may impact on the livelihood of authors. The Group agree that giving pupils a wide choice of books is a way to mitigate any negative impact of this.
- Role of libraries: the Group acknowledge that book gifting could be a way to encourage book borrowing. Involving libraries is key to increasing the number of pupils reading for pleasure longer-term.
- Evaluations should look at impact on attainment, but also impact on emotional wellbeing
- Large, whole-school celebration events and ceremonies might not always be the best way to engage more reluctant readers. Smaller, lower key and personalised gifting can be more effective at reaching reluctant readers who may shy away from public celebrations.
- Any gifting programme should avoid adding to teacher workload and be mindful of avoiding 'initiative fatigue'. It should be easy, quick to carry out and flexible enough that schools can adapt it to suit their environment.

2. Update from SBT

Scottish Book Trust updated the Group on the overall progress of the Reading Challenge. SBT are now focussing communications activities on ensuring a high

number of participants submit an entry for the awards – the deadline for submissions is 2nd May.

The expansion of the FMRC to secondary schools, libraries and community groups was announced by the First Minister on Monday 19 March at Riverside Primary School. This went very well and received positive press attention.

The second round of Inspiring Classrooms funding has been confirmed. 69 applications were received, with 50 schools receiving funding.

Scottish Book Trust has been working with Local Authorities and schools to deepen engagement with the Reading Challenge. There is a perception from some schools that the Reading Challenge is only about filling out Reading Passports. Scottish Book Trust has been conducting CLPL and communications work to address this.

Further, feedback from a National Literacy Network meeting was that some schools still see the FMRC as a competition to read the most books and perceive this as a barrier to their taking part. As above, SBT is working to make it clear that the Challenge is not solely about the number of books read but rather pupil and school reading journeys and wider reading cultures.

- Actions:
 - SBT to continue communications activity to encourage submissions.
 - SBT to continue to provide resources and CLPL, and liaise with schools and Local Authorities to ensure that learning professionals understand that the Challenge is not only about the number of books read but rather the broader reading cultures and position of reading for pleasure in schools and communities.

3. Update on Secondary School Pilot (SBT)

Scottish Book Trust updated the Group on progress of the secondary school pilot. Members of the Attainment Team had a successful visit to Sgoil Lionacleit on Benbecula. Due to staffing changes the school started later than the others and are making good progress. They are starting various initiatives as part of the Reading Challenge including working with a local radio station and building a reading garden with help from local businesses. Due to the remote location, access to books is a barrier to reading and there are no bookshops on the island. The school would therefore like to invite a retailer to visit the island with support from Scottish Book Trust.

- Action:
 - SBT to provide support to Sgoil Lionacleit to host a bookseller on the island.

4. AOB

The Group are reminded that they are entitled to claim back any travelling expenses incurred by attending the meetings. A claim form has been distributed by email. Members are asked to complete and return this form to claim back any travel expenses.

The Group review the final version of the Terms of Reference document.

The date for the FMRC's Celebration Event has been confirmed as Wednesday 20 June.

The next Advisory Group meeting will be held on **Tuesday 22 May**.

- Actions:
 - SBT to change wording of 'classroom teachers' to 'teaching professionals' on the Terms of Reference document.
 - SBT to confirm a venue for the Celebration Event.