

First Minister's Reading Challenge: Reflection Research



Executive summary

The First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) run by Scottish Book Trust (SBT), has been a positive, high-profile programme since 2016. It offered resources and opportunities for primary and secondary schools, libraries, and community groups to implement ways to develop a reading culture and increase levels of reading for pleasure.

FMRC has made significant progress in establishing a reading culture for Scotland's young people, with transformational change being described for schools, staff and pupils. The programme achieved a high level of engagement with schools, especially primary schools with 1,665 schools registering to take part in at least one year since 2016.

Scottish Book Trust managed a range of challenges in implementing FMRC, from promoting the concept of developing a reading culture in the first place, to the annual management of a national awards programme. An initially high level of uptake in Year 1 reduced in subsequent years, with the programme heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as schools closed for two periods in 2020 and 2021. While some found ways to continue literacy activities, many FMRC activities were put on hold because of changed priorities or practicalities.

The evaluation found examples of:

- schools which made significant progress in establishing a reading culture, with transformational change identified for schools, individual staff and pupils. This includes adopting daily working practices to incorporate reading into school life;
- teaching and librarian staff changing their view on their roles and the contribution of reading to attainment across the curriculum, and
- young people who have increased or developed a new love of reading.

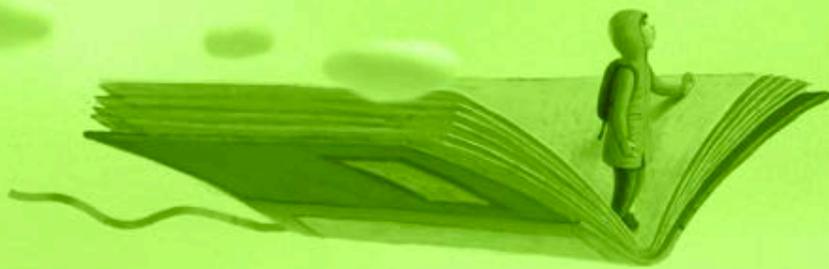
There are challenges in attributing changes in attainment specifically to FMRC, however the qualitative evidence is strong about its contribution to an improved reading culture in a learning environment and the positive atmosphere and focus this brings. Crucially, the evaluation established a clear link between FMRC and pupils enjoying discovering and sharing a knowledge and love of books.

An increase in reading for pleasure and an improved reading culture was reported by 97% of schools which participated in the evaluation, with 18% attributing this fully, and 71% partially to FMRC.

As First Minister's Reading Challenge approached its original planned ending in June 2022, a successor programme called Reading Schools was launched, following a two-year pilot. However, following consultation with Scottish Government, FMRC and Reading Schools will both continue to be delivered. Reading Schools is an accreditation scheme offering schools the opportunity to achieve bronze, silver or gold status for their work in developing reading for pleasure. Schools which engaged in the FMRC appear well-informed and equipped to take part in this new programme. Resources and support have been key to the implementation of FMRC in schools. The continuation of similar encouragement and practical help for school staff through Reading Schools, will help to ensure that FMRC's achievements in developing reading for pleasure in schools and communities around Scotland are likely to be sustained and further developed.

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Introduction

Introduction

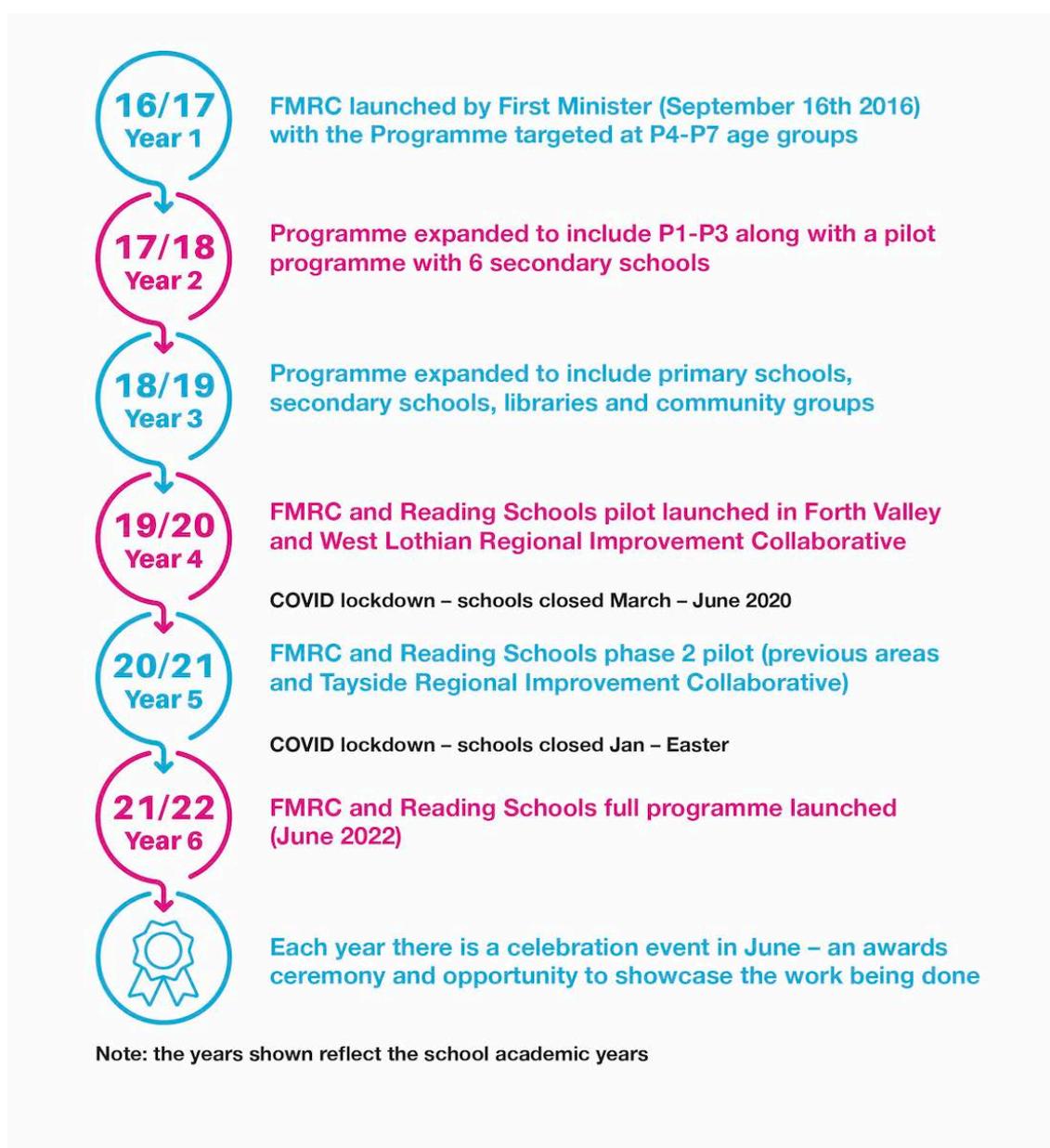
- 1.1. Launched in August 2016, the First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) was designed to encourage pupils to read for pleasure and to develop a life-long love of reading. Funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by Scottish Book Trust (SBT), the programme focused initially on certain primary school year groups before expanding to other ages and to secondary schools, libraries and community groups.
- 1.2. The programme aimed to support the development of a sustained culture of reading in schools and communities across Scotland. This was to be achieved by the provision of resources, training, funding opportunities and engagement through an awards process.
- 1.3. The Lines Between, an Edinburgh-based social research company was commissioned to evaluate the FMRC, and this report sets out the evaluation findings. It covers school involvement in FMRC, achievements in the past six years, successes and challenges in the development of the programme, and individual stories of impact. The report also considers the connection between FMRC and Reading Schools and identifies lessons from the efforts made to support the establishment of a reading culture within schools and wider communities.

Programme outcomes and format

- 1.4. FMRC aims to positively impact attainment by building reading cultures in schools, families and communities which support and nurture reading for pleasure. It was designed to work alongside other reading programmes in which participants may also be active, with inclusivity and flexibility as part of its ethos.
- 1.5. The programme's objectives are universal for the work in primary and secondary schools, libraries and communities and include supporting and promoting the value of reading for pleasure, having flexible and inclusive programme design, and supporting attainment. There are additional specific objectives for secondary schools and community groups, shown in Appendix 1.
- 1.6. A key part of FMRC was an option for schools to submit entries to different challenge categories, which were judged annually with winners and commendations being awarded. The six challenges for primary schools were School Reading Journey, Gaelic Medium Education Reading Journey, School-Community Partnership Reading Journey, School Reading the Most Books, Pupil Reading Journey and Pupil Reading the Most Books. For secondary schools there was a Reading Inspiration Challenge. Schools were also encouraged that they could develop their own personalised reading challenges.

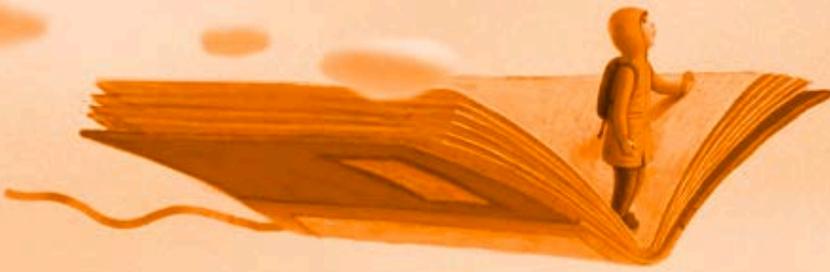
Timeline

- 1.7. FMRC began by being launched with specific primary school year groups and then expanded with each new school academic year to eventually include secondary schools and libraries and community groups. A timeline of developments and other milestones is shown below.
- 1.8. In 2021/22, FMRC was planned to be in its final year. Its successor is Reading Schools (see Appendix 2), an accreditation programme which has been piloted over the previous two years. Reading Schools builds on principles and approaches developed during FMRC and is targeted at schools committed to building a culture of reading for their learners and communities.
- 1.9. Following consultation between SBT and Scottish Government in summer 2022, FMRC and Reading Schools will both continue to be delivered.



Methodology

- 1.10.** The evaluation used mixed methods to analyse data already gathered by Scottish Book Trust and new data from engaging with a range of FMRC stakeholders. Findings in this report are based on:
- A review of participation data collected by Scottish Book Trust over the programme and some submissions from past entrants to the challenge categories of FMRC;
 - Online survey completed by primary and secondary school staff (headteachers, classroom teachers, literacy leads, classroom assistants and librarians) (44 responses – the profile of survey respondents is shown in Appendix 3);
 - Follow-up telephone interviews with 13 survey respondents, representing the roles outlined above;
 - Telephone interviews with staff from five schools used to develop case studies;
 - Telephone interviews with three Scottish Book Trust staff who had been involved in, or had knowledge of FMRC, and
 - Telephone interviews with five members of the FMRC Advisory Group.
- 1.11.** Due to turnover since 2016 in staff roles relating to FMRC, there were no Scottish Book Trust staff available for interview with direct knowledge of the earliest days of FMRC. Those most closely involved with the programme recently participated in interviews. Similarly, members of the Advisory Group had been involved at different points in the life of the programme, with some joining once FMRC was underway.
- 1.12.** Responses to the survey were lower than in previous years, despite extensive efforts to promote the survey through school contacts, previously used by Scottish Book Trust.
- 1.13.** The survey was undertaken during a period when the education system was recovering from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and being aware of pressures on school staff, evaluators agreed with Scottish Book Trust not to push for survey responses too many times. This lower level of engagement with the evaluation may also reflect the declining engagement of schools with FMRC over the years.
- 1.14.** There was a high level of participation in the survey (82%) from schools engaging with the programme in 2021/22, with varying involvement in the preceding years. Schools which had taken part in FMRC in previous years, but were not currently involved, formed a small proportion of responses (18%).



School engagement in FMRC

- 2.1. This chapter sets out the main evaluation findings, covering the establishment of FMRC, engagement in the programme concept and participation by schools. Results for 2021/22 are presented separately in Appendix 4.

The early days of FMRC

- 2.2. An Advisory Group was formed as a sounding board for the development of FMRC. Members all had an interest in developing a reading culture and representatives included parents, publishers, authors, literacy specialists and education professionals.
- 2.3. The starting point of FMRC, in promoting the importance of reading for pleasure, was identified by Advisory Group members as being fundamentally important. They valued the programme's national approach and highlighted its unique nature and innovative emphasis on promoting reading for pleasure.



It did really give a statement of intent, that Scotland was serious about helping children to read.

Advisory Group member



This was actually about encouraging people to read for pleasure, not because they had to read a set text, you know for exams or because it was a school project.

Advisory Group member

- 2.4. The concept also presented challenges, because the idea of developing a reading culture was not fully understood or embraced by key stakeholders and because encouraging all young people, of all reading abilities, was an inclusive but challenging target.



We had a lot of work to change the mindset of the learning professionals that we work with in schools but also in local authorities and to champion this idea of building reading culture.

SBT staff member

- 2.5. Breadth across the programme was viewed as necessary to create a reading culture. There was a recognition that if the project was delivered solely in schools, then only part of the picture of reading within Scottish communities was being addressed.



It was very obvious and important, I think for most of the Advisory Group that we pulled in as many other kinds of practitioners...libraries, playgroups, other organisations and a whole range of people that actually may really love to be involved in this but wouldn't be if you only kept it within the classroom.

Advisory Group member

- 2.6. The scope and scale of FMRC was described as important because with the vision of a change in reading culture at its heart, significant impact could not be expected to happen quickly.



It was a fantastic, really brilliant idea, but it needed to be in place for a considerable length of time in order to see any real long-term benefit in terms of turning Scotland into a reading nation and our young people into people who really enjoyed reading for pleasure. **Advisory Group member**

- 2.7. On a practical level the initial rollout of the programme took place with a short lead-in time, but there was a high level of interest in the first year as 1,558 schools registered to take part.

Participation in FMRC by schools¹

- 2.8. Analysis of participation in FMRC demonstrates the extensive reach of the programme across schools in Scotland. In Year 1, 75% of Scotland's primary schools registered with FMRC; participation by secondary schools followed when the criteria expanded to include this part of the education sector. Secondary schools then became an increasing proportion of registered schools over the years.
- 2.9. However, across the six years, there was an overall downward trend in registrations with a peak of 1,558 in year 1 to 546 in year 6.

Number of schools taking part in FMRC

- 2.10. Across the entire programme 1,665 schools took part in at least one year of FMRC. An analysis of FMRC participation data is presented on the next two pages.
- 2.11. To summarise:
- There was representation from across all 32 local authority areas, but Glasgow (8%, 139) and South Lanarkshire (8%, 125) accounted for the highest proportions of school registrations, followed by Aberdeenshire (6%, 99), North Lanarkshire (6%, 93) and Highland (5%, 86) (Figure 1);
 - Primary schools accounted for over three-quarters of the participating schools (78%, 1,301) (Figure 2), and
 - Nearly all schools were local authority-funded (96%, 1,596), and 69 independent schools also took part (4%) (Figure 3).

¹ When calculating the statistics about the number of schools involved and the number of registrations, 'through schools' that offer both primary and secondary education have been counted twice – once as a primary school and once as a secondary.

Figure 1: Proportion of participating schools broken down by local authority (n=1,665)

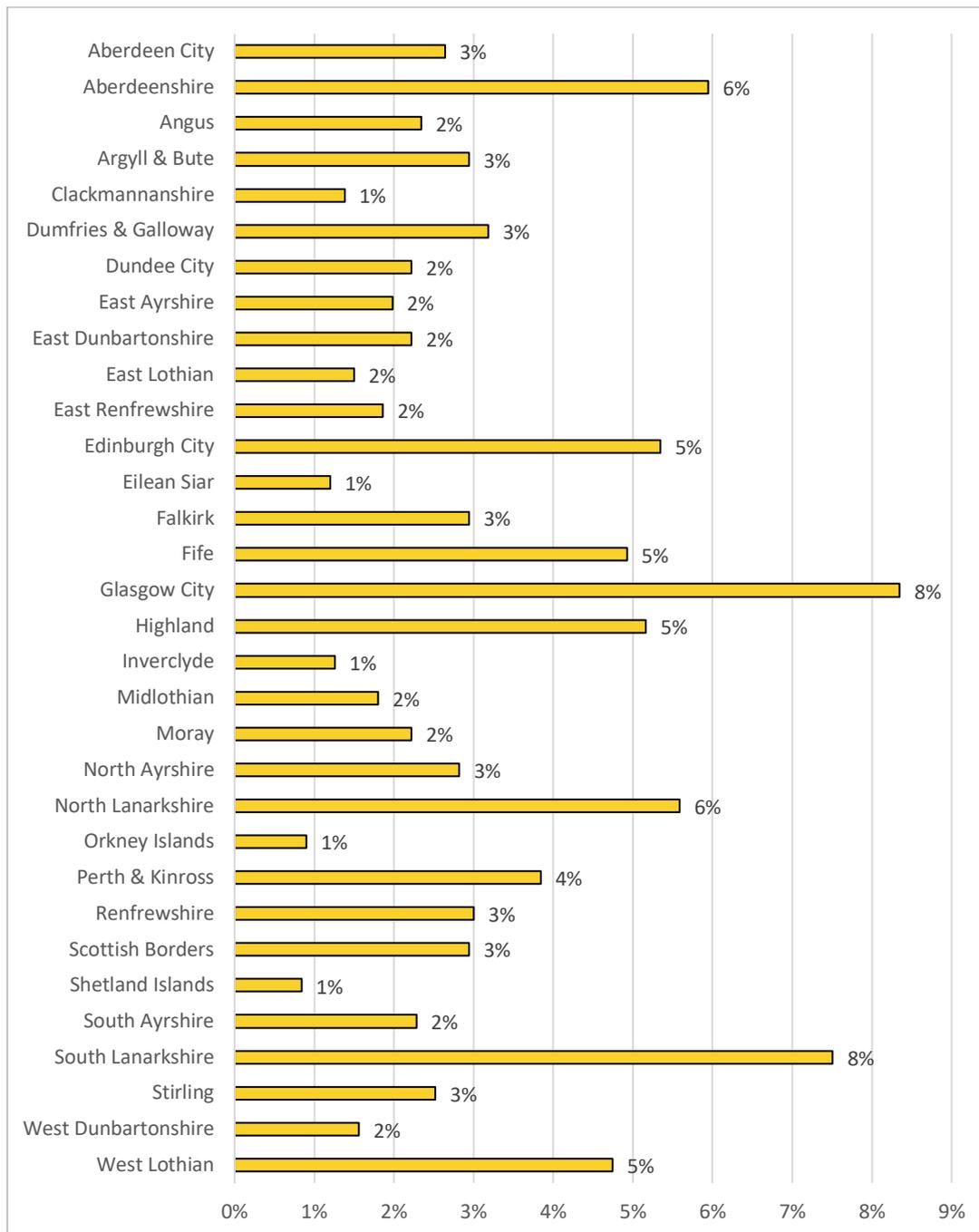


Figure 2: Proportion of participating schools broken down by type (n=1,665)

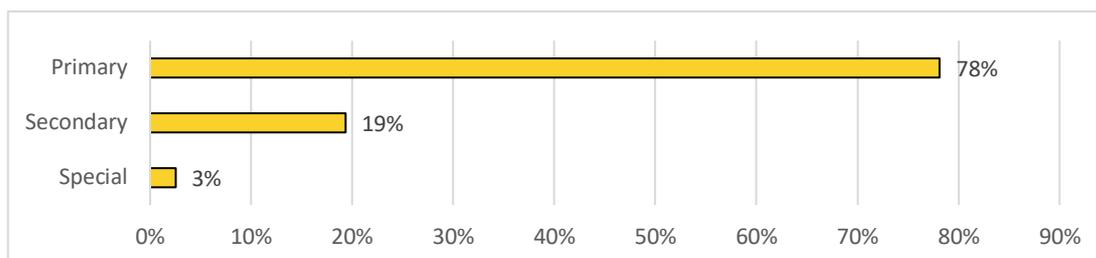
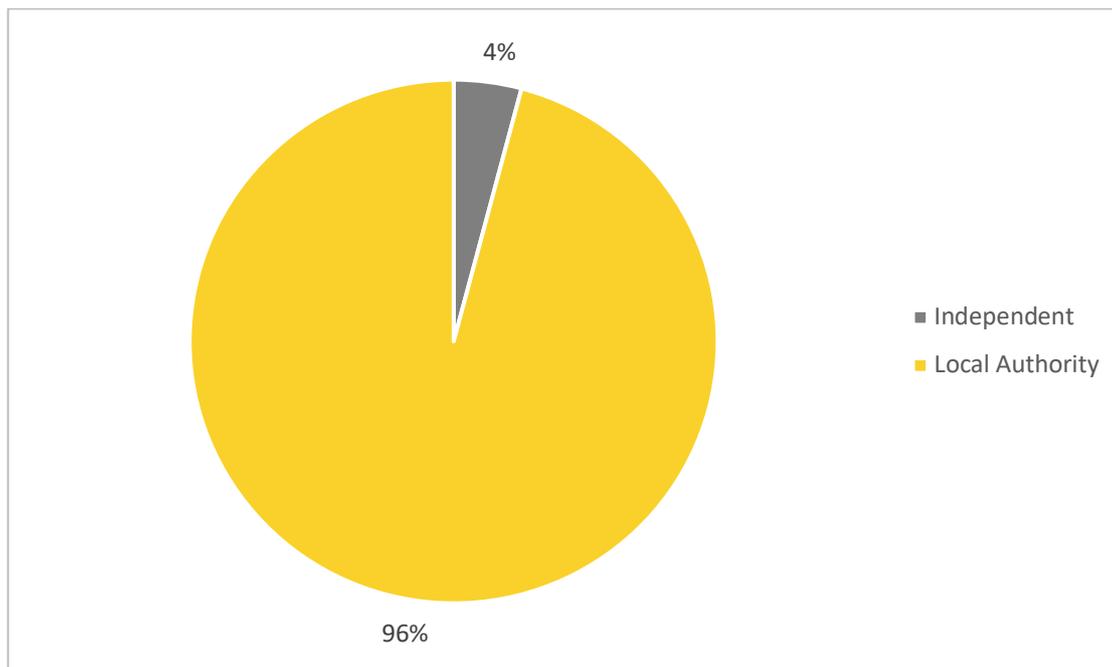


Figure 3: Proportion of participating schools broken down by local authority funding and independent status (n=1,665)

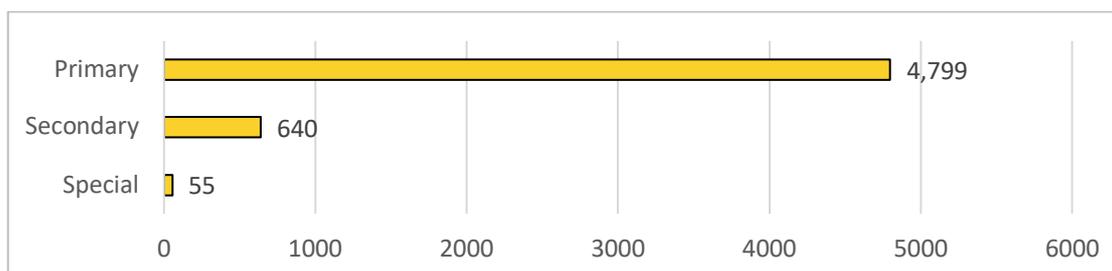


Number of registrations to FMRC

2.12. Across the six years of FMRC, there were 5,494 registrations for FMRC (Figure 4). This includes repeat registrations from schools across multiple years.

- Most registrations (87%, 4,799) were from primary schools (although it should be noted that in the programme’s first two years it was only open to primary schools);
- 12% (640) of registrations were from secondary schools, and
- 1% (55) were registrations from special schools.

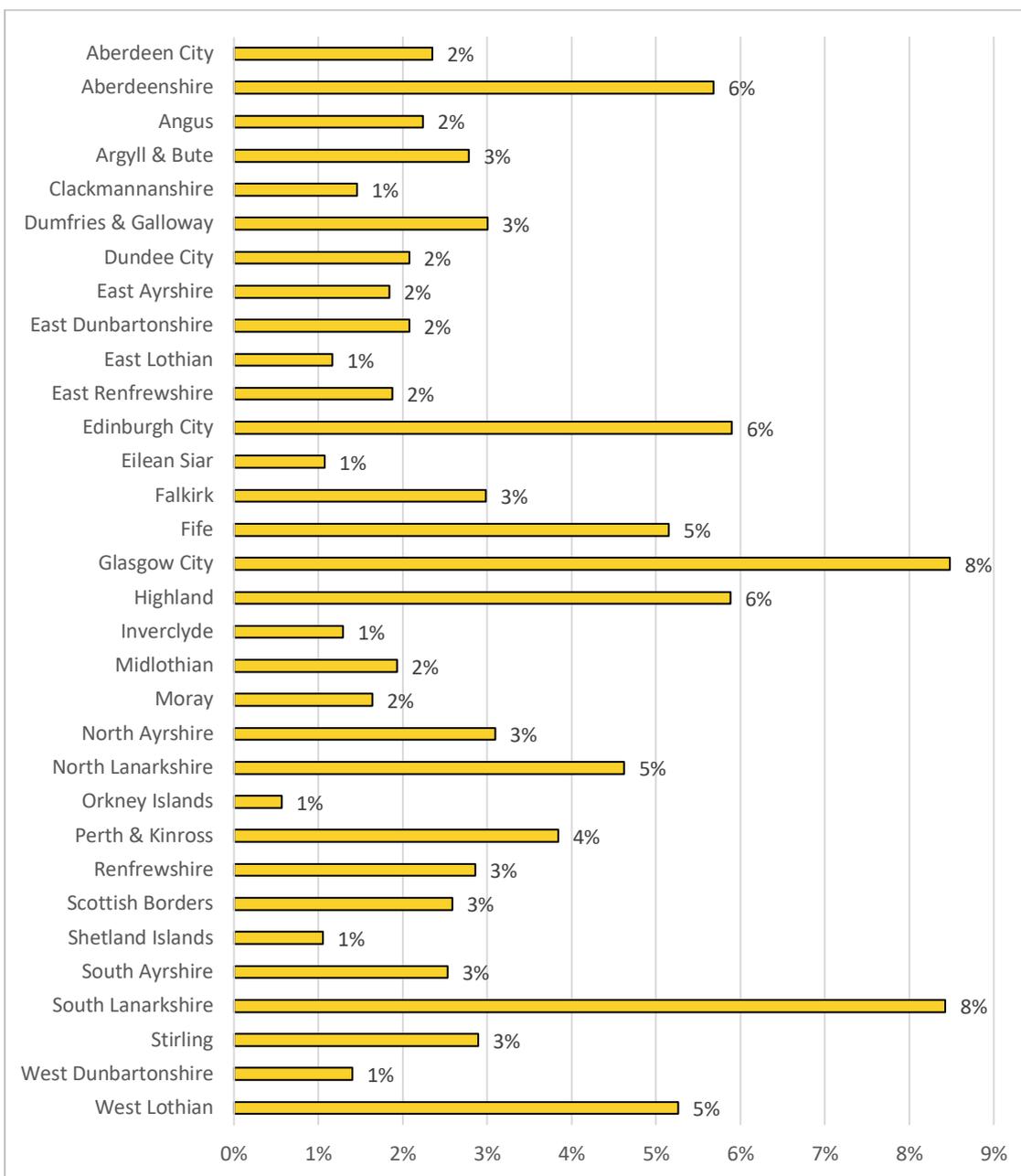
Figure 4: Number of registrations to FMRC over the life of the programme



2.13. Across the six years of the programme, 97% of registrations (5,345) were from state schools and 3% (149) were from independent schools.

2.14. There were registrations from each local authority area in Scotland in each of the six years of the programme. Similar to the data related to the proportion of participating schools, Glasgow accounted for the highest number of registrations (466, 8%), followed by South Lanarkshire (463, 8%), Edinburgh (324, 6%), Highland (323, 6%), and Aberdeenshire (312, 6%) (Figure 5).

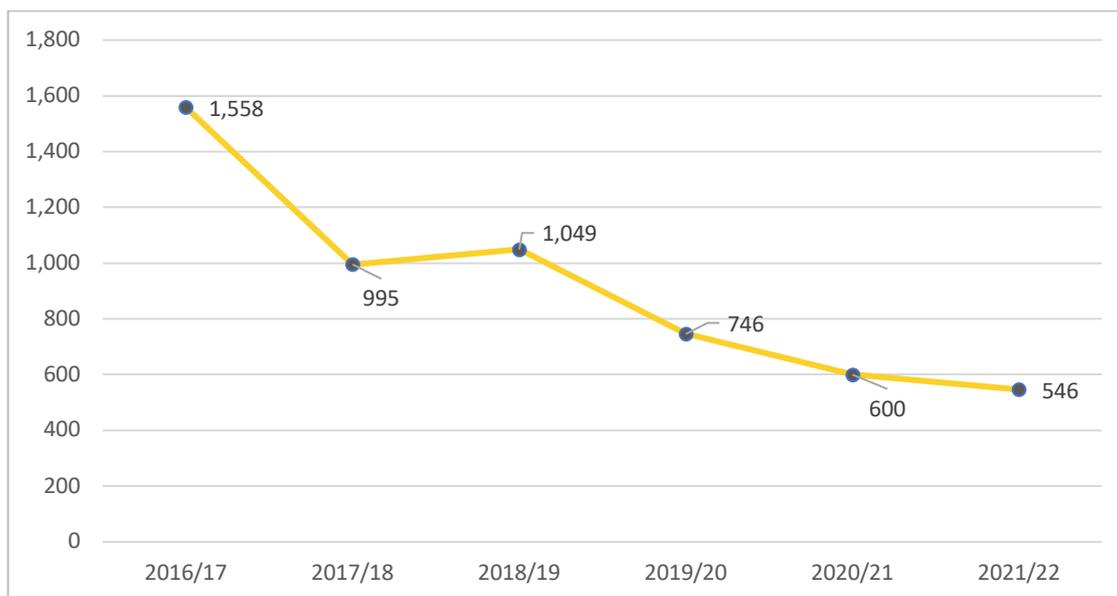
Figure 5: Proportion of registrations by local authority (n=5,494)



Trends in registration numbers across the six years

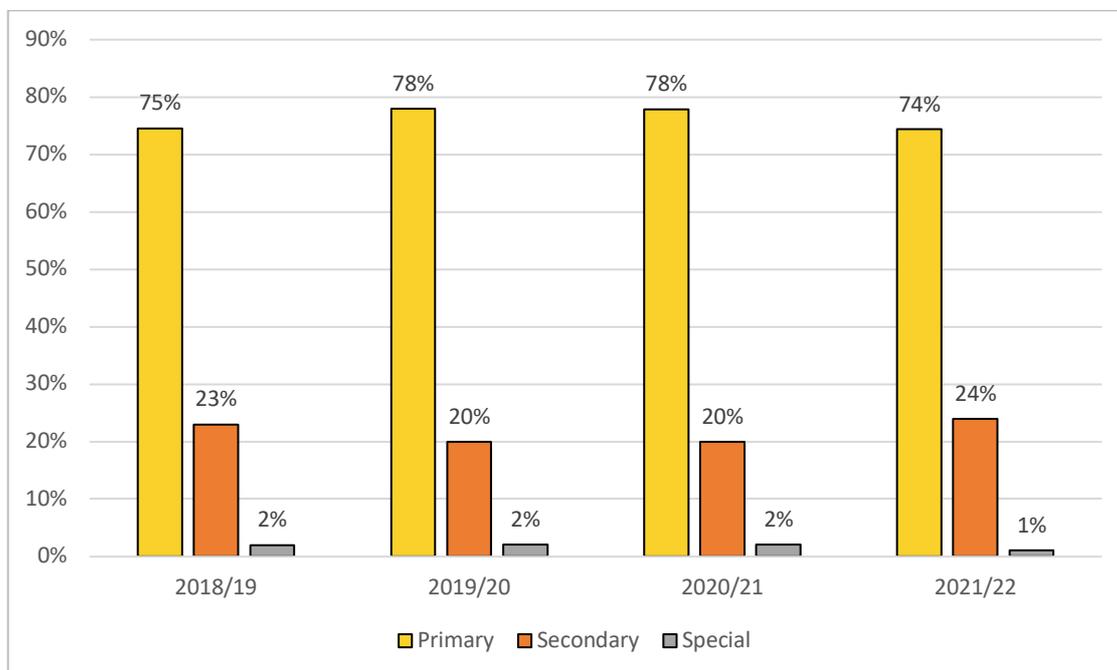
2.15. Figure 6 shows that the number of registered schools was highest in 2016-17 (1,558). That number fell to 995 in 2017-18 but then increased in 2018-19 to 1,049 with the inclusion of secondary schools for the first time. It decreased in 2019-20 (746) and again, in 2020-21 (600) and 2021-22 (546) – the last two years being those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 6: Number of registrations per year (schools)



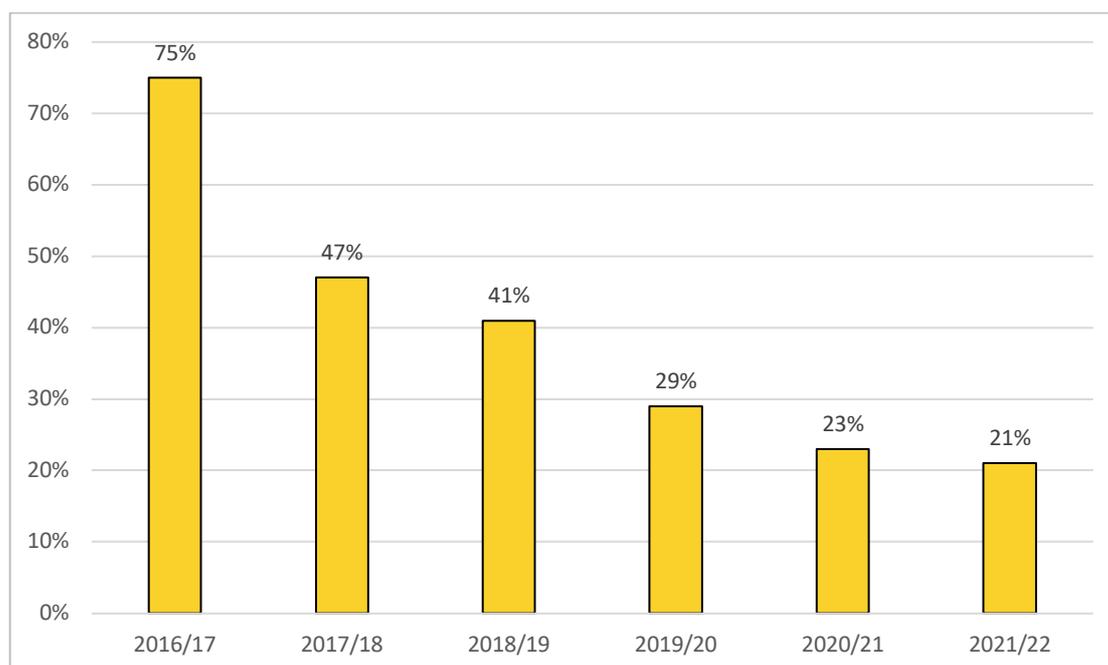
2.16. As illustrated in Figure 7, primary schools accounted for the highest proportion of registered schools throughout the programme. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, FMRC was only open to primary schools and, after the programme was extended to include secondary schools in 2018-19, primary schools represented around three-quarters of registrations in each year.

Figure 7: Breakdown of registrations by type of school



2.17. In the first year of FMRC (2016-17), the number of schools registered represented 75% of all primary schools in Scotland (Figure 8). This decreased to 47% in 2017-18 and 41% in 2018-19, when secondary schools were included. The proportion continued to decrease, from 29% in 2019-29 to 23% in 2020-21 and 21% in 2021-22.

Figure 8: Number of schools registered as percentage of all eligible schools in Scotland



2.18. The proportion of registrations from each local authority remained relatively stable over the six years. There were some notable variations, however:

- Glasgow accounted for 8% of registrations overall, but this figure was 12% in 2019-20 and 6% in 2020-21;
- South Lanarkshire also accounted for 8% on average across all six years but 11% in 2020-21;
- Highland represented 6% overall but this figure was 3% in 2019-20 and 2020-21, and
- Fife represented 5% overall but 2% in 2019-20.

Reasons for not participating

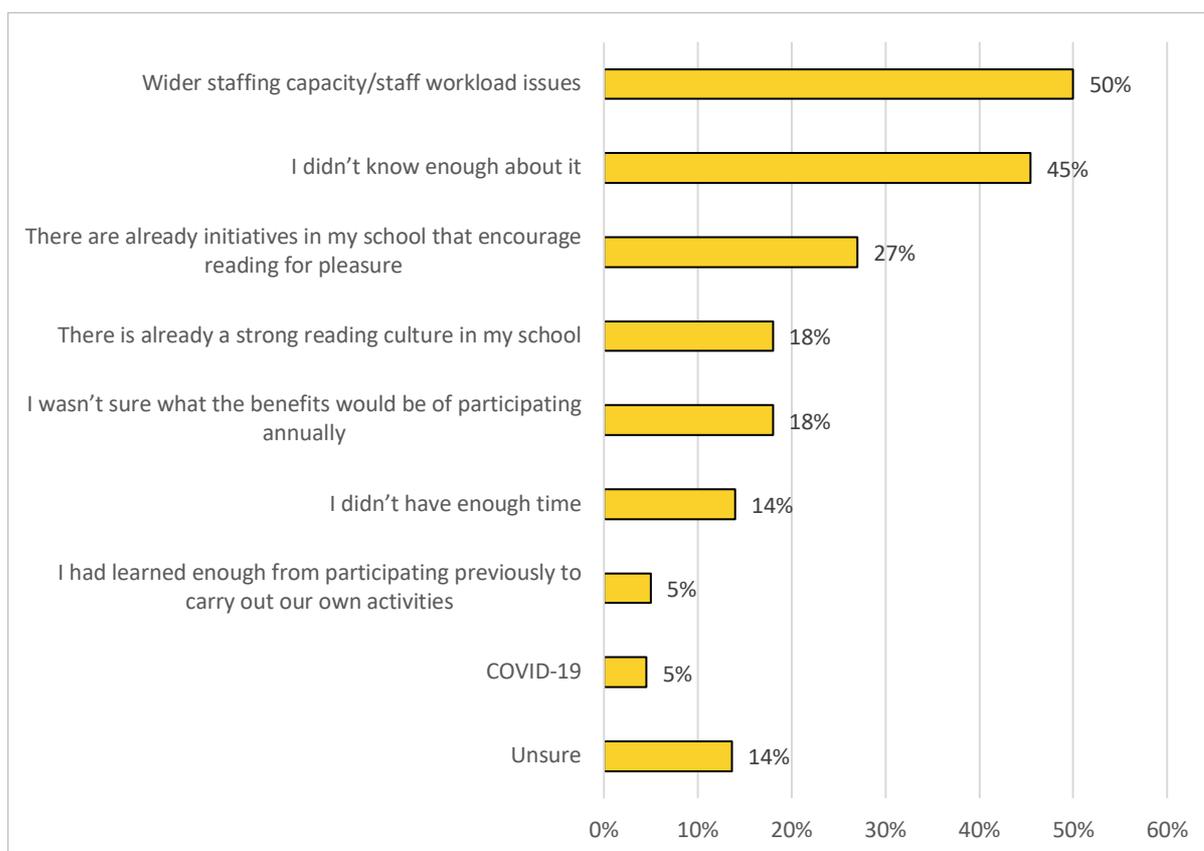
2.19. For each year from 2017/18-2021/22, at least one survey respondent said they had undertaken FMRC activities, but had not formally registered their school's participation with Scottish Book Trust. In most cases, this was because they had missed the deadline for registering.

2.20. Of the 22 respondents to the online survey who reported that they missed at least one year of the programme:

- half said this was because they were facing workload and capacity issues at the time which prevented them from taking part, and
- more than two fifths (9) said a lack of awareness of the programme was the reason for not taking part (Fig.9).

2.21. A few were unsure of the reason as they were not working at the school at the time and the range of reasons for non-participation is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Reasons for schools choosing not to participate in FMRC in some years (n=22)



- 2.22. These results align with experiences shared in interviews, and observations from Advisory Group members and Scottish Book Trust staff who recognise the many choices and demands faced by schools. As one interviewee explained, '*we did reading last year – we're doing sport this year*', which highlights that something as fundamental as reading could have a lower priority from one year to the next, and not necessarily given the focus required for a change in culture.



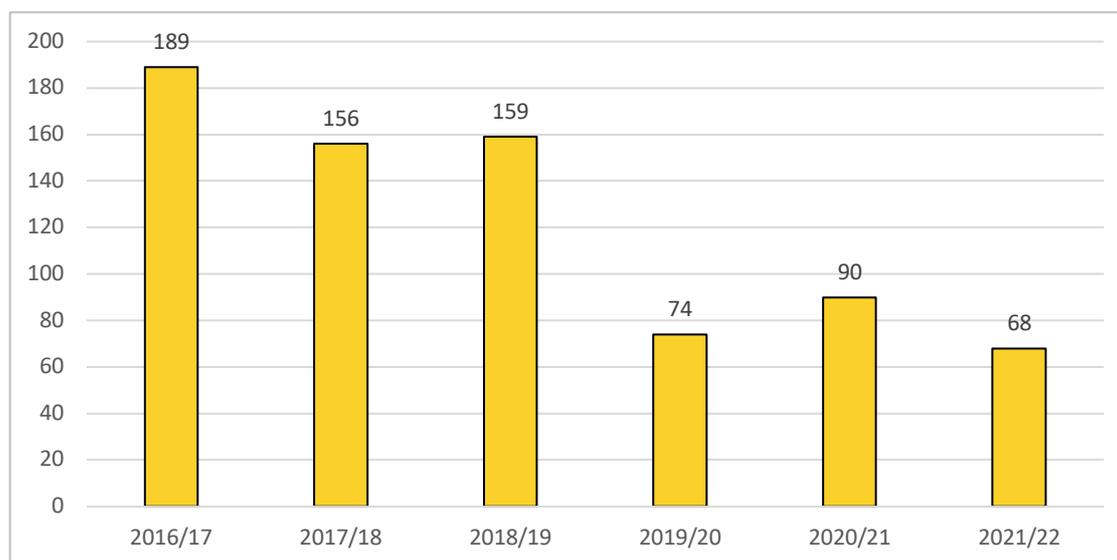
Schools have multiple priorities every single year.

SBT staff member

Participation in challenges

- 2.23. An average of 123 schools per year submitted an entry to the Reading Challenge over the six years of the programme. Figure 10 shows that this ranged from a peak of 189 in 2016-17 to a low of 68 in 2021-22.

Figure 10: Number of schools submitting a challenge entry



- 2.24.** The number of schools making submissions decreased over the life of the programme with a clear drop in 2019/20, the first year of the pandemic. In the three years between 2016-2018 there were a total of 501 schools making submissions, and in the second three-year period this reduced to 232.
- 2.25.** Examples of drops in submissions in particular categories suggest that the first year of the pandemic had a particular impact on participation in FMRC:
- School Reading the Most Books had a high point of 65 submissions in 2016/17 (Year 1) but only one submission in 2019/20 (Year 4);
 - Pupils Reading Journey went from a high of 387 submissions in 2017/18 to 28 in 2019/20, and
 - There was also a big drop in submissions for the School-Community Partnership category in 2019/20.
- 2.26.** While there were FMRC registrations from every local authority area, some areas had particularly low levels of submissions. The only submissions from Orkney Islands came from two schools in 2018/19, with three individual submissions from schools in Shetland Islands. Schools in East Lothian and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar made five submissions over the life of the programme, with none from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in the last three years.
- 2.27.** In areas where there was a greater involvement in submissions there is a clear reduction over time, with for example Glasgow reducing from fifteen in 2016/17 to four in the final year, and Highland from ten submissions to two in the same period. South Lanarkshire is an example of a local authority area which has had a steady history of submissions throughout the programme.
- 2.28.** Schools from each of the 32 Scottish local authority areas were represented in the submissions at some point over the programme, and schools from 26 of these were

successful in winning or being highly commended in one of the categories. In terms of winners and commendations, six local authority areas were never represented, and eight local authority areas were represented only once over the six years².

- 2.29. Therefore, the majority of winners and commendations came from around a third of local authority areas. Those areas represented most often by the awardees were Angus, Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian and schools from these four areas account for over a third of awards.

Accessibility

- 2.30. Any school in Scotland could take part in FMRC, with resources and support available to enable them to participate.
- 2.31. Evaluation participants highlighted many features of FMRC that made it an accessible, inclusive programme. This included that it was open to any school, had a flexible structure, and could be adapted to the individual needs of schools, classes and pupils.



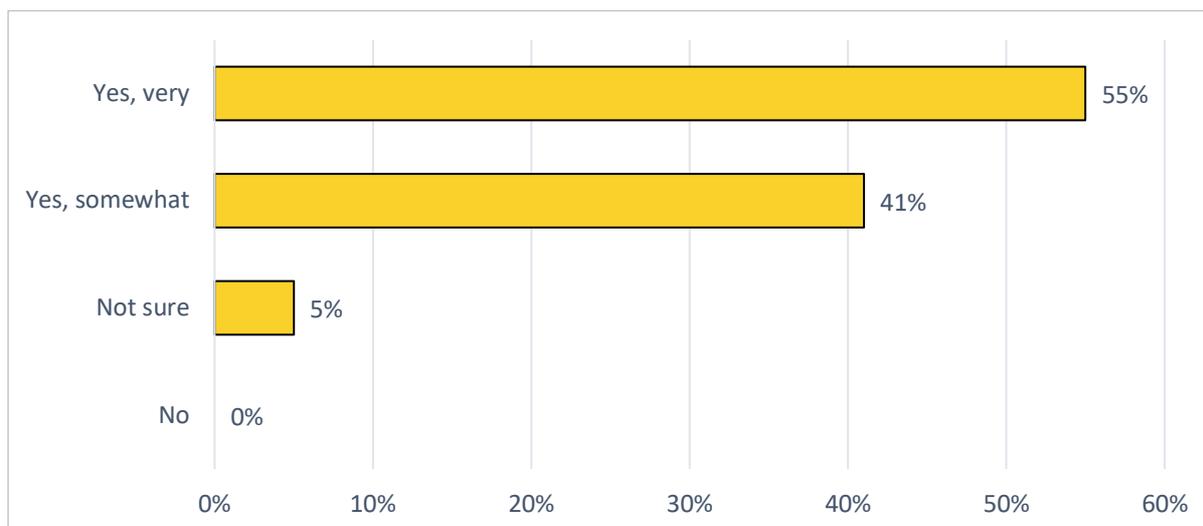
The fact that schools anywhere could take part so it wouldn't matter if you were in a wee island off Shetland or a big conurbation like Glasgow or Edinburgh you could still take part – there was a real equity about it... I think the passports, the children liked having something that's like a library card and for children in more remote geographic locations to actually get to meet authors. That's a big deal.

Advisory Group member

- 2.32. Nearly all survey respondents (42 out of 44, 96%) felt that the programme had been flexible enough to suit the needs of their school (Figure 11). They commented that being able to choose from a broad variety of activities and resources allowed a great degree of adaptability when engaging with FMRC. Others highlighted the freedom to engage in ways that best suited their pupils, without any pressure from the process to undertake set activities.

² Argyll and Bute, East Renfrewshire, Orkney Islands, Scottish Borders, Shetland Islands, West Dunbartonshire (never represented by awardees)
Aberdeenshire, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dundee, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde, Renfrewshire, Western Isles, (represented once by awardees)

Figure 11: Participants' perception about whether the Reading Challenge had been flexible enough to suit their school's needs (n=44)

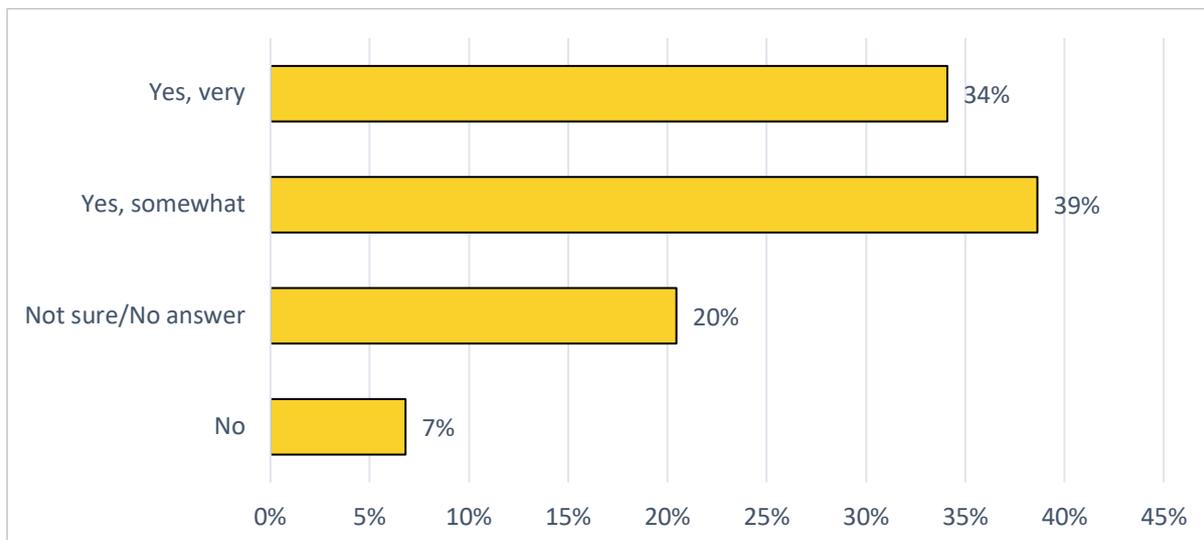


- 2.33. Approximately three quarters of respondents (32 out of 44, 73%) agreed that the programme has been accessible to all pupils in their school (Figure 12). Some felt that the programme activities could be easily tailored based on different reading and writing abilities. One reflected that the programme helped to create a culture around literacy that is free from assessment and testing and is purely focused on enjoyment.

“ *Whether a pupil is an avid reader or not, giving a focus to reading for pleasure has been an opportunity for everyone to engage in the activity without the pressure to write formal critical essays. Concentrating on enjoyment liberates young people from their fear of judgment and this has been constructive in creating positive experiences of reading.* **Teacher, Secondary School**

“ *It allowed those who don't read to use different mediums like blogs, or magazines.* **Librarian, Secondary School**

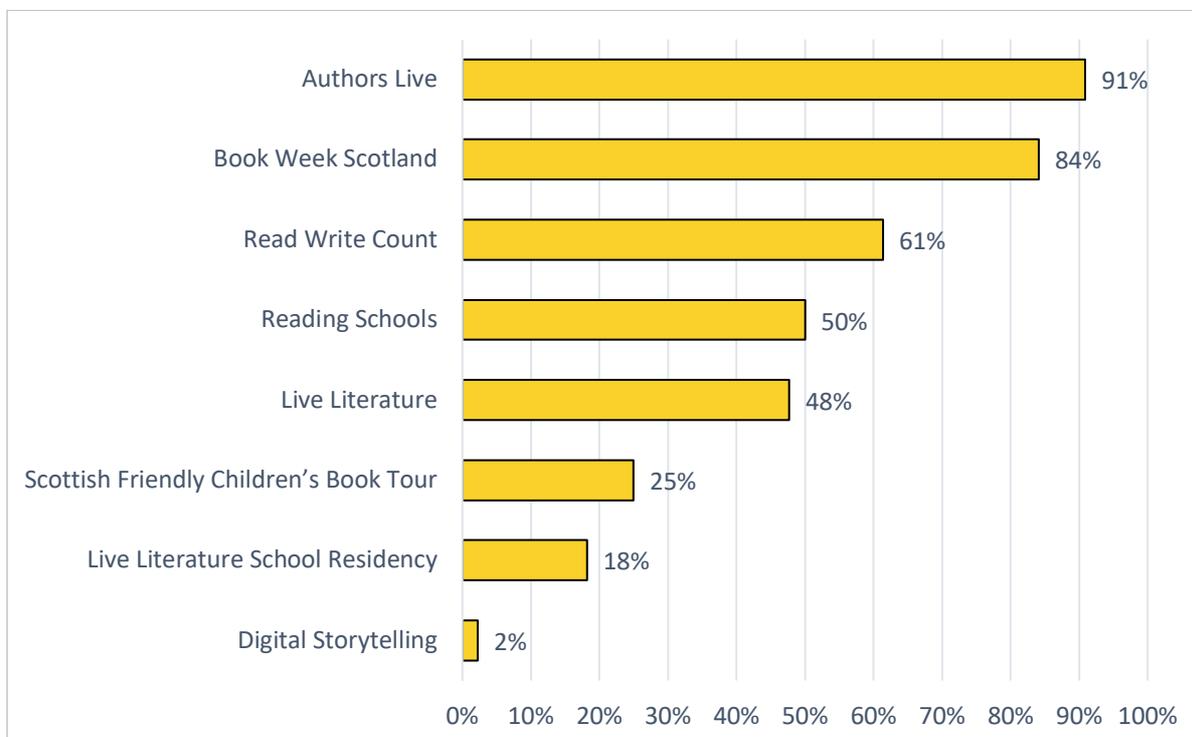
Figure 12: Participants' perception about whether the Reading Challenge had been accessible to all pupils in their school (n=44)



Engagement with other Scottish Book Trust programmes

2.34. Respondents shared which other Scottish Book Trust programmes their school had engaged with (Figure 13). Nearly all (40 out of 44, 91%) had taken part in the Authors Live initiative and half had engaged with the new Reading Schools programme.

Figure 13: Participants' schools' engagement with SBT programmes³ in addition to FMRC (n=44)



³ Read, Write Count is only applicable to Primary Schools (P2 and P3)

- 2.35. The majority of respondents (36 out of 44, 84%) agreed that their school's engagement with other Scottish Book Trust programmes complemented their participation in the First Minister's Reading Challenge. They felt that many of SBT's programmes share a broad, overarching focus on promoting a reading culture within schools, which mean that activities often overlap or link in with one another. These views were also endorsed by FMRC Advisory Group members and Scottish Book Trust staff.



Authors Live has been tremendously popular with the children. They really enjoyed it. That came through doing Reading Challenge and when we were on lockdown it was a way to give children different experiences and also when we came back to school but couldn't have visitors. Teacher, Primary School



I think it sat well with the Live Literature programme and the work through Bookbug and the early years programmes...it was nice FMRC picked up where that left off, so there was that constant opportunity for children to engage with books from a very young age.
Advisory Group Member

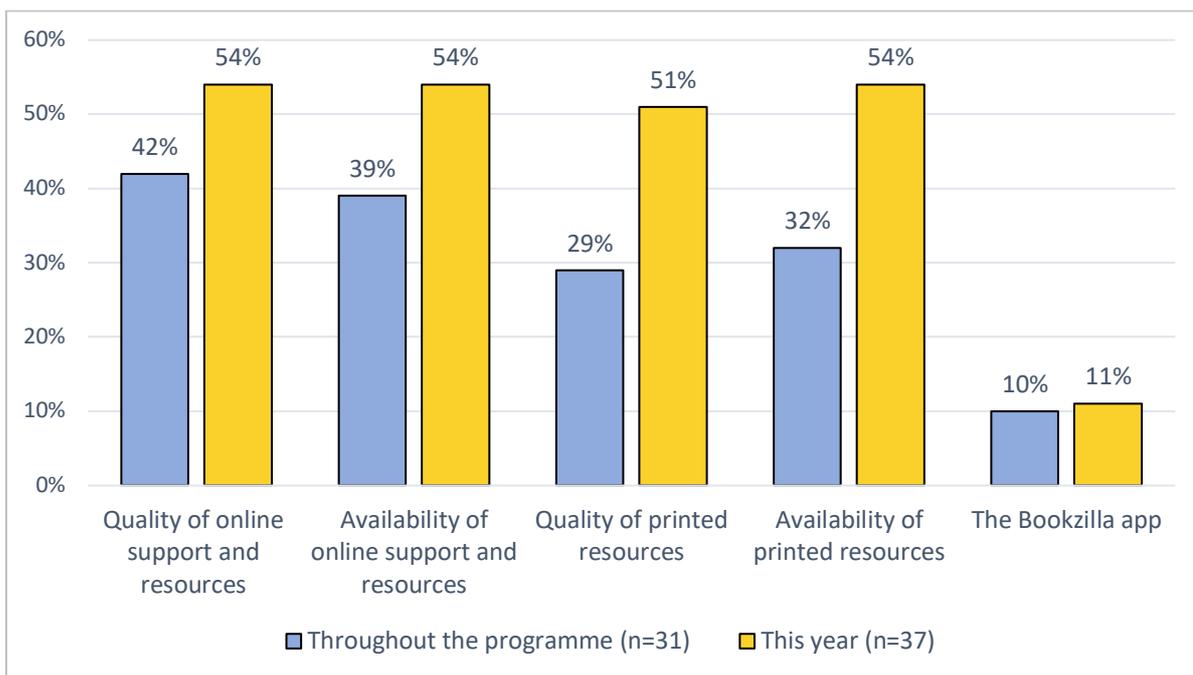


There are some really good examples of P5, P6, P7s working with nursery pupils through FMRC and building those links to our Bookbug programme.
SBT Staff Member

Support, resources and training

- 2.36. Survey respondents were positive about the quality and availability of support during the programme. Of those who had been involved for more than one year, 42% agreed that the quality and availability of resources had improved (32% reported no change and the remainder were unsure – no one felt the resources had become worse).
- 2.37. For online resources, printed resources and the Bookzilla app, a higher proportion of respondents described each as 'very good' this year (2021/22), compared to previous years of the programme (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Participants describing FMRC resources as ‘very good’



2.38. Specific resources were highlighted as being particularly useful (Figure 15); including reading passports, the escape room activity, reading dares, quizzes, charts and posters.

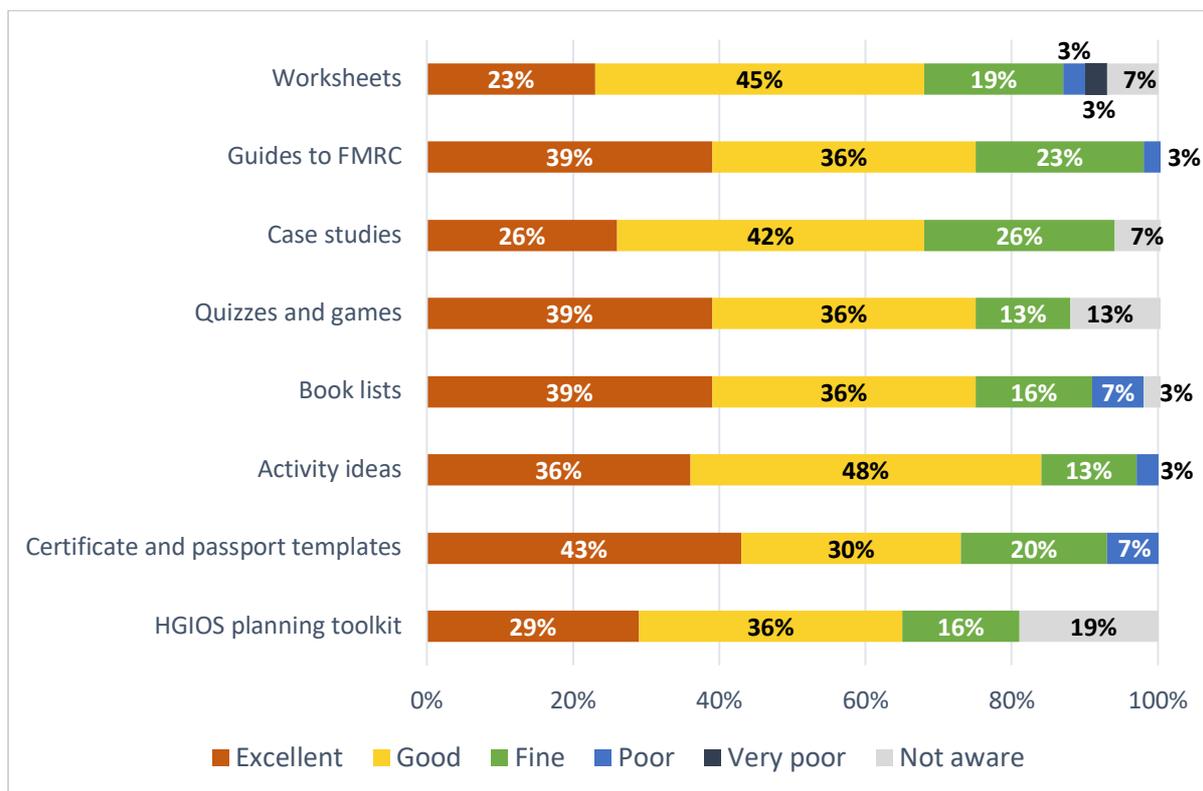


The laminated poster that's been up on the wall since it arrived and has been well used. We've filled it, wiped it clean, filled it, wiped it clean, filled it wiped it clean every year.
Teacher, Primary School

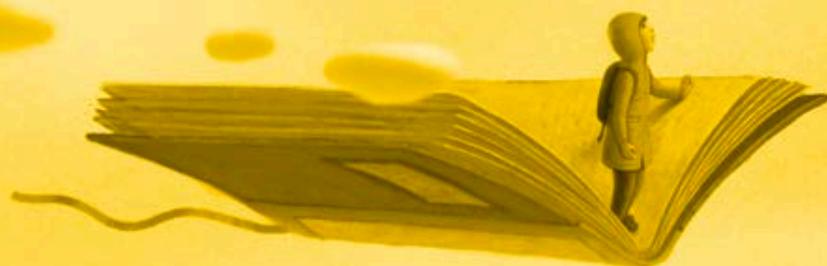


Things that come from Scottish Book Trust are always quite polished and well produced.
Librarian, Secondary School

Figure 15: FMRC participants' rating of different FMRC resources (n=31)



2.39. The majority of respondents (36 out of 44, 84%) confirmed they will continue to use resources from the programme after it ends.



Impact of FMRC

- 3.1. This chapter covers FMRC's impact on pupils and school staff, specific groups of pupils, the impact of different interventions and perceptions of success. Results for 2021/22 are also presented separately in Appendix 4.
- 3.2. Many different types of positive impacts were identified. However, as noted earlier, these results are based on a relatively small sample (44) of schools compared to evaluation results of previous years.

Impact on pupils and school staff

- 3.3. School staff were positive about the impacts of FMRC on themselves and on pupils. The vast majority (87%) reported that FMRC helped pupils read more widely, while almost all (94%) said that pupils read for pleasure more (Figure 16).
- 3.4. Stakeholders explained that these impacts were achieved through the structure, approaches, resources and focus that FMRC provided:



It's given a bit of a structure to how we've targeted that reading for enjoyment side of things. Because we've had the posters to record, the children have just loved seeing the posters fill up. Teacher, Primary School



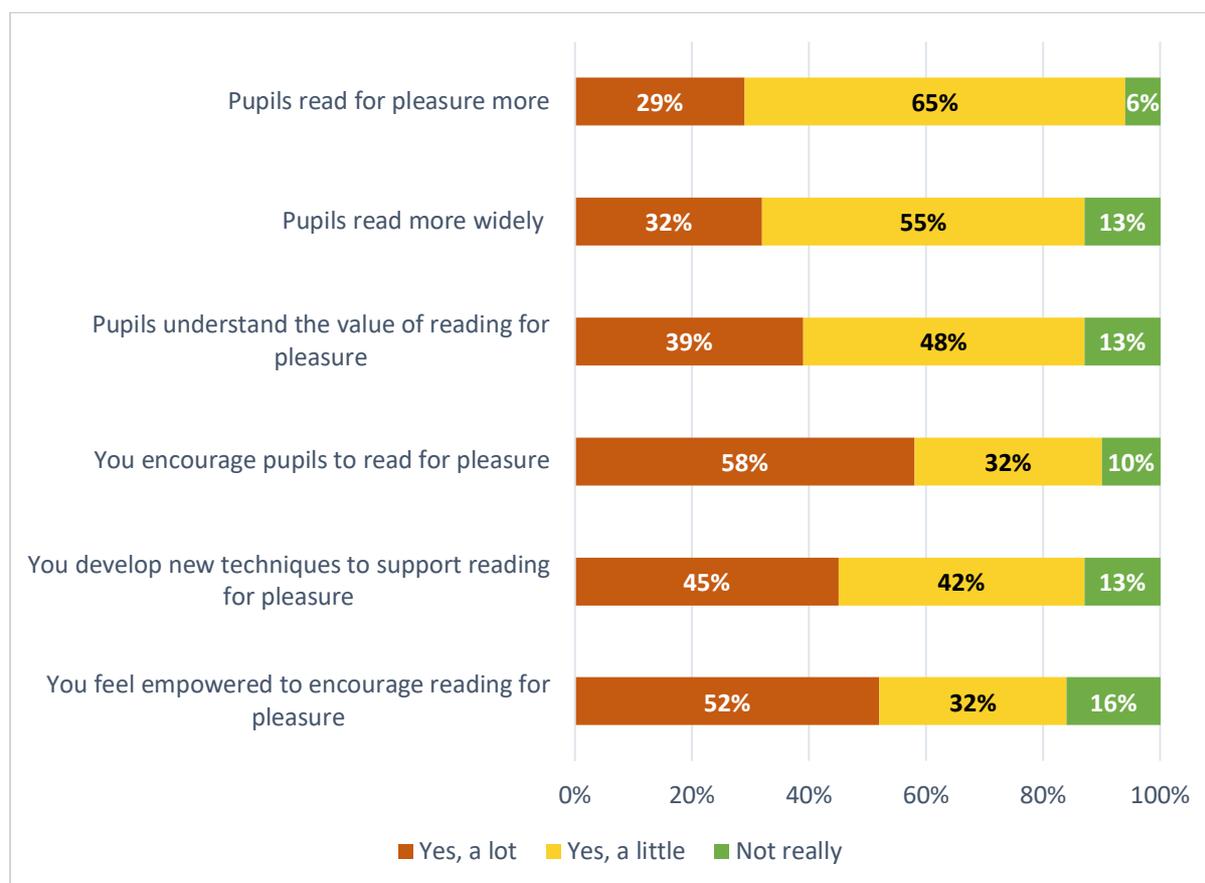
Since establishing that as an approach to encouraging the practice of reading for pleasure. There's been much more of kind of willingness to immerse themselves in reading.
Teacher, Secondary School

- 3.5. More than four fifths of respondents felt empowered to encourage reading for pleasure, had directly encouraged pupils to read for pleasure or had developed new techniques to support this as a result of FMRC.



The emphasis being placed on personal reading has been a motivation with the idea that there is a space devoted within our priorities, to place that importance on it. I think it helps to explain to parents why we are engaging in personal reading, or why we are encouraging pupils to spend a certain amount of time doing personal reading – it's given a bit of a headline in terms of public understanding.
Teacher, Secondary School

Figure 16: Participants' views on how FMRC has helped (n=31)

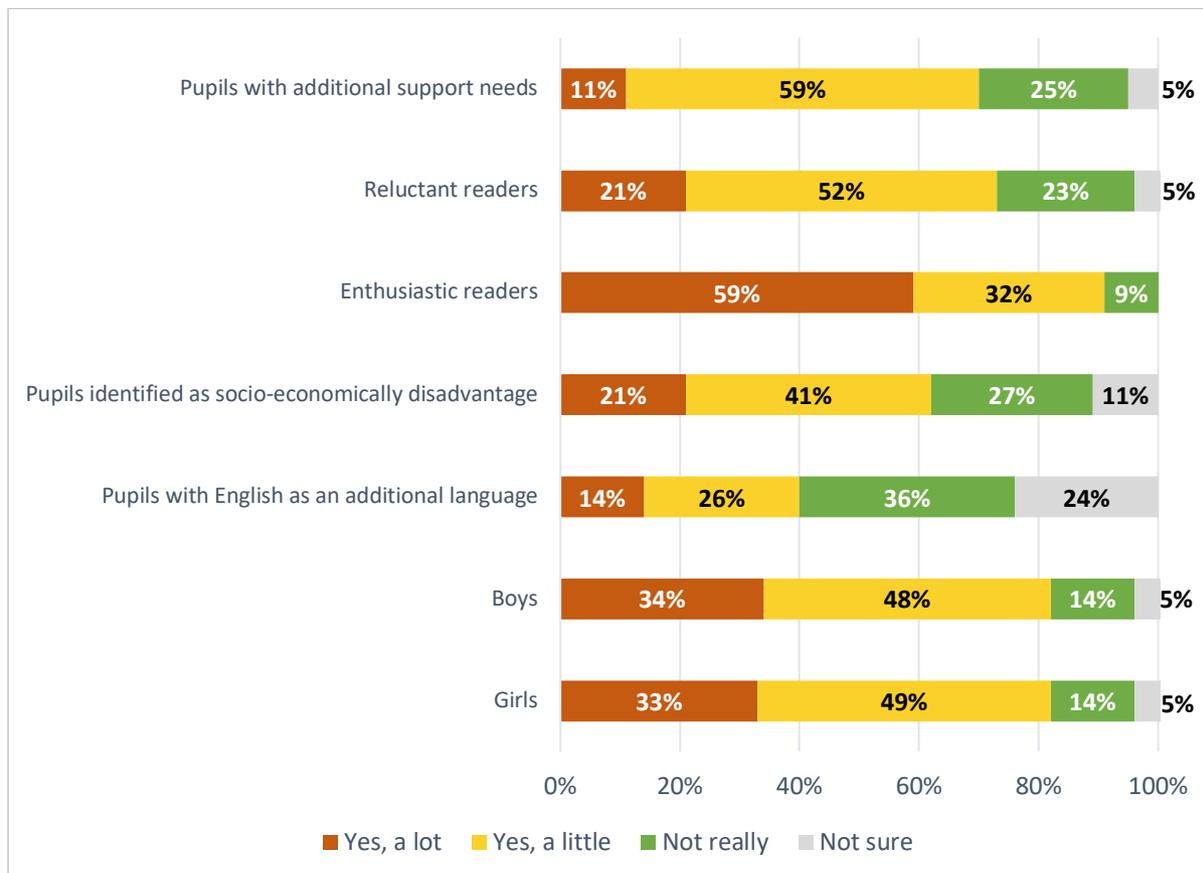


Impact for specific groups of pupils

3.6. The impact of FMRC on the level of reading for pleasure for specific groups of pupils was extracted from the survey data (Figure 17). This table demonstrates that:

- Boys and girls were impacted to the same degree with 82% (36) showing a change of a little or a lot;
- The highest level of impact was on enthusiastic readers (91%, 40);
- Just under three quarters of respondents said that pupils with additional support needs and reluctant readers were positively affected;
- There was a positive impact seen by over half of respondents for their pupils identified as socio-economically disadvantaged (62%, 27), and
- The lowest level of impact experienced was for pupils with English as an additional language (40%, 17).

Figure 17: Participants' perception of the scale of change in the level of reading for pleasure on specific groups, because of FMRC (n=44)



Impact of different interventions

- 3.7. Staff had different views on which activities were most effective in developing reading for pleasure. Suggestions included Authors Live, using storytelling as a basis for wider learning, regular reading time and short interactive activities like creating 'bookshop style' book reviews to go on books.

“ They very much loved seeing the author. When they see the person that wrote the book, and they hear more about their background they get really motivated to either want to read more in the series, or even start to write their own little book. **Teacher, Primary School** ”

“ Everyone Reading in Class time because it gets those unenthusiastic readers involved as well. It just creates a window, 15 minutes a day, when we open a book or a magazine or something and read. **Teacher, Primary School** ”

“ We've brought back the art of storytelling of being read to across the school. For example, we used a story to teach Victorians. My class were hooked. From that book we learned about Victorian entertainment, crime and punishment, Queen Victoria and her kind of lifestyle or morals – taking a good book and turning it into much more. **Teacher, Primary School** ”

- 3.8. A few respondents stated that there was no single effective technique but that different things worked for different young people. FMRC was praised for its non-prescriptive approach which enabled staff to work in the best way to engage way with young people.



I think it's holistic. I don't think it's any one thing that's most contributory to it. I think it's the fact that we have different activities going on, so that we're coming at reading in different ways for them, so that the kids who maybe don't access it, or find it difficult to access in one place, can maybe find another way into it.

Teacher, Primary School

Perceptions of success

- 3.9. FMRC was seen as being successful in the context of their school by 86% (38) of those surveyed (7% were unsure and 7% said it had not been successful).
- 3.10. An increase in reading for pleasure and an improved reading culture was reported by 97% (29) of respondents (60% definitely, 37% a little), with 18% (5) attributing this fully to FMRC and 71% (20) partially.
- 3.11. Staff and Advisory Group members all believed FMRC to be either moderately or highly successful. Those who felt it most successful stressed the high levels of engagement, shared examples of schools where transformational change to reading culture had taken place and described the strategic approach to influence local authority and schools.



It has had an impact on probably thousands of schools and thousands of pupils in those schools.

SBT staff member



The take up from schools particularly, and then for other organisations, was just fantastic. It was almost as if they had been waiting for something like this to come along.

Advisory Group member



The impact you see in the submissions through FMRC, whether it's an individual's story, the work of the class, or the whole school...You might not reach every single school...but the key thing is that year on year we see hundreds of great submissions, great practice happening in schools and reading for pleasure and building a reading culture being promoted far more highly than it was at the beginning of the programme.

SBT staff member



One of the things that underpin FMRC's success is that they [SBT] work quite hard at local authority level to influence that and they also work quite hard at school level, to influence what schools are actually doing.

Advisory Group member

- 3.12. The development of Reading Schools was viewed as another aspect of FMRC's success. Reading Schools has embedded learning from FMRC and will also enable all schools to have their reading-related work recognised equally.



Reading Schools has come out of it... all these schools that have been doing this fantastic stuff – we can celebrate all of them they can get an

accreditation for everything. FMRC is more of a competition format where we can only celebrate a handful of schools with prizes each year.

SBT staff member

- 3.13. Those who believed FMRC to have been moderately successful identified shortfalls in the programme's reach and a gap in evidence on the full impact of FMRC on attainment.



There's people who do it every year and you can see the successes that they've had and a journey they've been on and how they're just doing more and more. That's great but there have always been particular areas in Scotland where we struggle to get participation.

SBT staff member



I don't know how much it actually improved literacy and attainment for children. Maybe we don't know the longitudinal information. I've not heard any evidence that suggests that children's reading ages were sustained as a result of taking part in the Reading Challenge.

Advisory Group member

- 3.14. There was some caution from some school staff about attributing improvements in attainment to FMRC although some reflected that any improvement in reading levels had a positive ripple effect for young people. The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown was identified by some as having disrupted pupil attainment and set back work on literacy.

- 3.15. However, as the example below shows, there are staff who firmly believe that FMRC has led to attainment improvements and who can see the impact of a different approach to literacy making an impact across the curriculum.



If a child cannot read, or is a reluctant reader they can't achieve...because you need to read to access the rest of the curriculum. We're now using literacy in maths, using stories to teach maths concepts because the power of a story. I struggled to teach a particular group about decimals, fractions and percentages...And we read a story about a big party for the king and he had to break the cake into hundreds of pieces. So many children who had struggled to understand – you've seen the light bulb come on for them, because it was shown to them in a different way – shared in a story that they could visualise. So I definitely feel that being part of First Minister's Reading Challenge has boosted our attainment across the curriculum.

With P1 we're getting them just engaged in reading, it's more about them listening to a story, but then the ability to retell a story has got a huge impact on talking and listening. It has a huge impact on confidence building and memory, so even just them listening to our story and then retelling it or acting out their own words has a massive impact on other areas – it's working memory, it's processing.

It's being able to stand up in front of a group of people. And then as you move up the school it's more about using that story to open up other avenues.

I definitely feel that our focus on literacy and reading and stories has impacted the rest of our curriculum.

Teacher, Primary School

3 Words

In interviews, school staff were asked to share three words that summed up FMRC. The words they chose were:

- books
- rewarding
- challenging
- wide ranging
- inspiring
- exciting
- engaging
- inclusive
- brilliant
- supportive
- enthusiasm
- knowledge
- interest
- positive
- competitive
- motivating
- pleasure

On their choice of the word 'phenomenal', one explained:

“It has really solidified to me that it is the core of what I am meant to be doing. And it's one thing to sort of know it on paper and another thing to start seeing it in action. But between the First Minister's Reading Challenge and then Reading Schools, I've seen how a programme like that with the flexibility built in can change the culture of a school and can engage kids who before were just not engaging with the library or books and now they are. That's a phenomenal thing.”

One school staff member chose 'progress', explaining:

“Because we've made so much progress and we just want to keep going. We just feel we're at the beginning of our reading journey. So we just want to keep going and take it forward from here.”

Scottish Book Trust staff and Advisory Group members also shared three words that summed up how they felt about FMRC:

- culture
- change
- celebration
- effective
- flexible
- well-designed
- inspirational

On using the word 'hook' one explained that FMRC is:

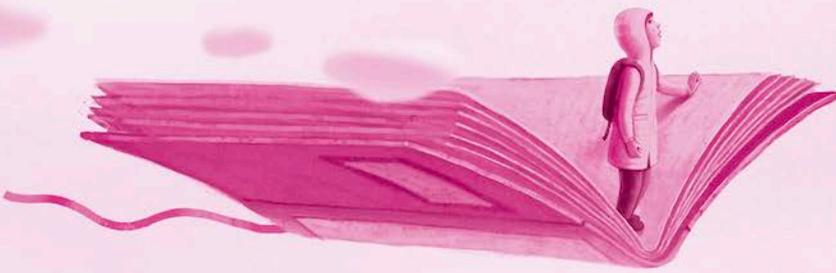
“A way in for our schools - some kind of structure if you're wanting to create a reading for pleasure culture.”

One described FMRC as 'open-ended', noting:

“Schools can submit at the end of the year, whatever reading journey they've done, whatever format they'd like.”

Another opted for the word 'fun':

“When we're doing the resources that's always at the forefront of our minds - we want it to be fun and engaging and easy for schools to take part. That's something I see when the submissions come in at the end of the year - it is those fun activities, reading treasure hunts and things that they're doing that I always feel is off the back of the Reading Challenge.”



Next steps - Reading Schools

- 4.1. Development of the Reading Schools programme began in 2019, following a workshop with representatives from key stakeholders. Primary and secondary school teachers and senior management teams, as well as local authority, school and public library and academic representatives took part in the development workshop. Following two years of pilots, the programme was launched in June 2022.
- 4.2. The aim of Reading Schools was to create a framework to support schools to build, develop and sustain a reading culture, with opportunities to be accredited to bronze, silver or gold standard in developing reading for pleasure.
- 4.3. Reading Schools built on learning from interim evaluations of FMRC. It removed the competitive element of individual awards, but retained:
- a non-prescriptive approach;
 - an emphasis on recognising that varied methods can establish a reading culture within schools, and
 - help to develop wider community links.
- 4.4. The programme links to the 'How Good is Our School' framework, which is a key aspect of the Scottish approach to education improvement through self-evaluation.



FMRC paved the way for Reading Schools.

Advisory Group Member

- 4.5. In this FMRC programme evaluation, there was a high level of awareness of Reading Schools among those surveyed and interviewed. Half of the survey respondents were already engaged with Reading Schools or intended to do so.



We are not in the pilot area project, but I have my plan all downloaded and I have already looked at everything that we're already doing. So when it goes live on the 14th of June, I will be starting that application process.

Teacher, Primary School

- 4.6. Some reflected on ways that FMRC had prepared them for Reading Schools and commented on the non-prescriptive approach which was appealing in FMRC.



I found it really useful because we'd already done FMRC. I felt like we were already in a national framework, so it felt like a very useful stepping stone to then go on to Reading Schools accreditation.

Librarian, Secondary School

- 4.7. One suggested that a whole school award, might be an easier programme to gain wider involvement of staff for.



There should be more engagement from staff and as a result, more engagement throughout the school. It'll be less patchy and more uniform throughout the school. It feels like the next step. It really does feel like that and the structure of it helps all of us to see what we need to do so it's a really good programme for schools to follow.

Secondary School Librarian

- 4.8. Different stakeholders suggested that Reading Schools was another helpful framework for schools to use, which FMRC had equipped them for. The positive profile of FMRC and the fact that it had been well-received places Reading Schools in a good position to ensure good uptake from schools.



I think it's quite timely, to let things move on to Reading Schools and to recognise the step on that journey that it played.

Advisory Group member

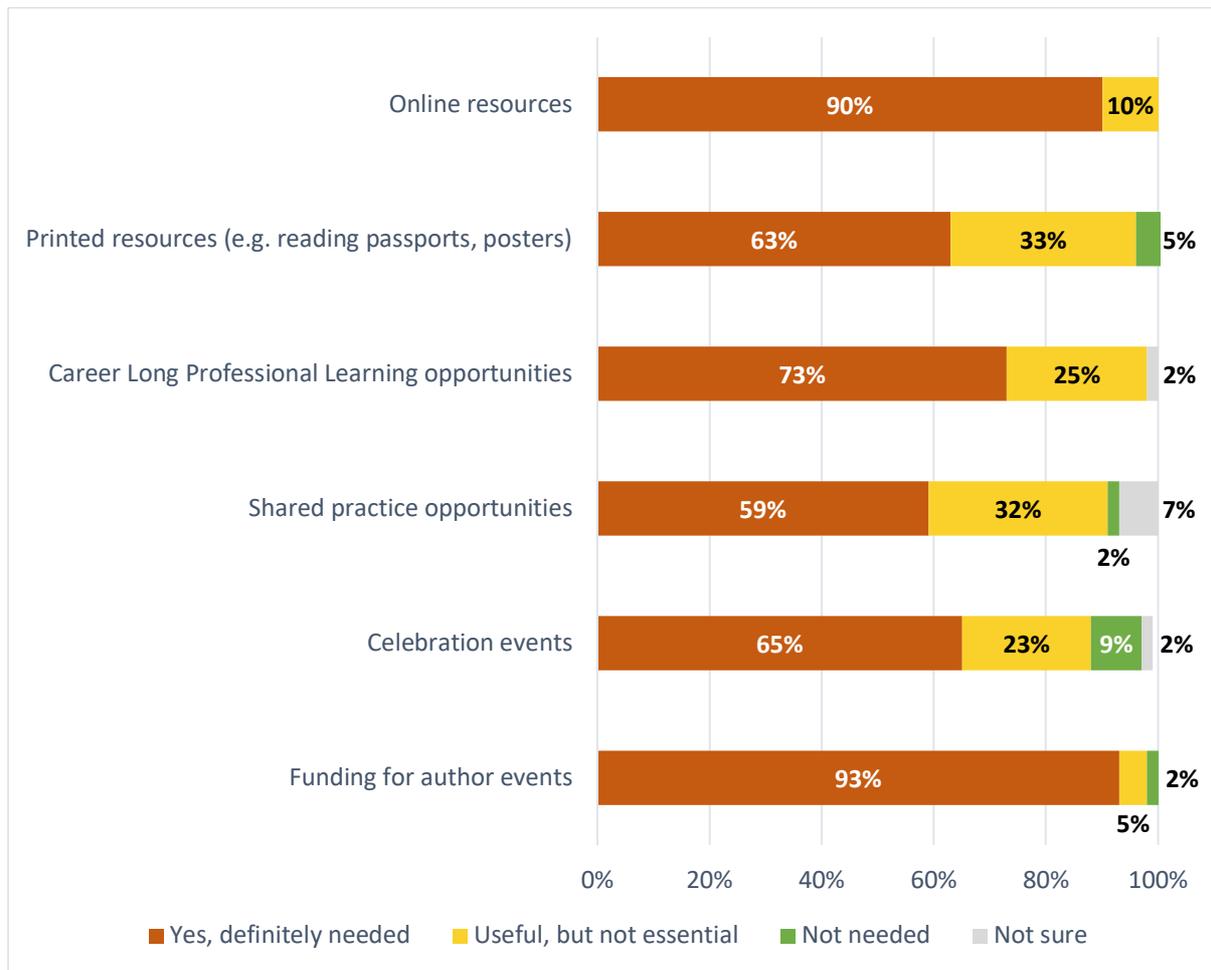


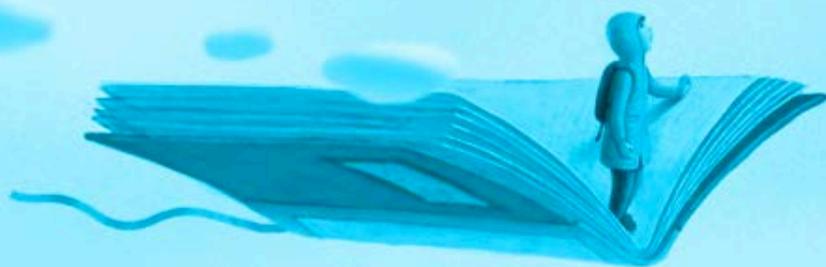
When we were asked to then become one of the pilot authorities for Reading Schools, I was quite taken aback by the number of our secondary schools who signed up. I think we've got ten secondary schools here and eight signed up. When you actually look at how these schools are now doing in terms of their accreditation and so on, I think a lot of it comes back to FMRC... I was really quite impressed with how quickly school librarians and Learning Resource Coordinators could see all those links.

Advisory Group member

- 4.9. Survey respondents confirmed which aspects of FMRC they felt should be retained or replicated in future Scottish Book Trust initiatives (Figure 18). The most popular elements were funding for author events and online resources, which at least 90% of respondents felt were essential to retain.
- 4.10. Evaluation participants expressed overall enthusiasm about Reading Schools. It was acknowledged that the branding and profile of Reading Schools would differ from FMRC, and some advantages and disadvantages were identified. Developing a strong profile for the new programme was seen as important, so that it stands out in a landscape containing other accreditation and award schemes for schools to work towards. Retaining the accessibility of FMRC and encouraging participation widely, including from those who had previously found the competitive element of FMRC especially motivating, were also seen as important.

Figure 18: Participants' perception of FMRC aspects to retain in future initiatives (n=44)





Conclusions

- 5.1. Scottish Book Trust took the vision of developing a reading culture in schools, and created and resourced a national programme which gained significant school involvement. Latterly this took place during a challenging period which included school lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. FMRC supported schools to embed reading in their daily life, to celebrate a love of reading and for schools around Scotland to develop and share examples of good practice.
- 5.2. A large number of schools in Scotland took part in the First Minister's Reading Challenge at some point during the programme, with a particularly high level of interest right at the start.
- 5.3. Sustaining that interest has been a challenge for the programme. While the numbers achieved in Year 1 were not repeated, and have decreased over time, a good level of engagement from schools remains.
- 5.4. FMRC is seen as a flexible and accessible programme and school staff value the support from Scottish Book Trust resources, and the opportunity to link FMRC with other SBT initiatives.
- 5.5. Schools which engaged fully with the concept offer strong examples of how reading culture can be developed in schools and how reading for pleasure can be stimulated. There is evidence of transformative change in working practice, shifts in staff attitudes and increases in young people's enthusiasm for reading. However, with participation levels reducing over time, it can be assumed that a decreasing number of schools have experienced sustained culture change towards the end of the life of the programme.
- 5.6. Learning from FMRC has informed the development of a follow-up programme which offers a way of sustaining a focus on reading for pleasure in the future. Reading Schools, FMRC's successor, is now in place and offers all schools the opportunity to gain accreditation for their efforts in developing reading for pleasure. This ensures the continuation of an accessible framework to support reading for pleasure in schools, with an awards scheme which every school can achieve. Many of the resources and forms of support which have been at the heart of FMRC are seen by schools as being valuable to continue, for their work in the development of reading culture.

Case studies



Bankton Primary School

Ready for Reading

Bankton Primary School in West Lothian was one of the first schools to participate in the First Minister's Reading Challenge. FMRC aligned with the school's aspirations and provided a framework to build on. This case study explores their motivation for participating in FMRC, what it involved, its impact and its legacy.

“ We just really wanted to make reading as easy, accessible and inviting as possible for the children so that they were inspired to take part.”



Origins

“ The biggest thing for us was to increase engagement in reading across the school. We had been doing a lot of work prior to this on vocabulary. Developing a reading culture, and increasing reading directly links to the children's vocabulary and their attainment and enjoyment of learning in school – so it was a great opportunity to combine both things and to look at how we can inspire children and further their reading.”

FMRC was a chance to consider how pupils engaged with books and reading and ways to improve access. It shifted priorities within the school and prompted investment

“ It gave us a chance to re-evaluate all of our reading spaces within the school and the opportunities for children to read in school. Since being involved in the Reading Challenge, we've really shifted our priorities and invested heavily in creating little spaces in every classroom and in shared spaces around the

school for children to read in, and making sure that there is a wide range of literature available that's current and harnesses the children's interests – it's all about increasing access. That is really really important because children might not always have that access at home.”

“ We also set up our Reading Patrons project around the same time linking in with an author and illustrator who came regularly to the school to meet with parents and children. Again, this was to

inspire the children to see reading as not something they sit and do aloud to the teacher, but something that has many different purposes.

Engaging children with authors and illustrators has been really effective. We've done it through visits in schools through the Scottish Book Trust, Authors Live events, and readalongs and drawalongs. It inspires the children and brings the books to life.”

A focus on accessibility to reading became part of the culture. Ongoing efforts to invest and improve are based on the strong link between reading and levels of attainment

“ It's something that we constantly refresh in the school. We're heavily invested in it and it is really important to us. We try and gift books to the children throughout the year as much as we can, trying to find ways to keep it fresh and interesting for the children. Although we've established these

Bankton Primary School



reading spaces, we're constantly revamping them so that they're new and enticing for the children."

“ Raising the attainment for children has to be at the forefront of what we do to make sure we are getting it right for our young people in school. I think it's getting the balance between the instructional side of reading, and learning to decode text and to read and also developing that side of reading for enjoyment or reading for many different purposes which the children benefit from.”

Submissions to the Reading Challenge encouraged a whole school approach

“ Every year we try and raise the profile through the Reading Challenge in different ways. Sometimes it's through individual pupils' work or it might be through the whole school approach. It's nice to be able to submit something every year and to celebrate it within the school as well because we share the

submissions across the school so the children can see what other classes have been up to.”

The variety of activities and approaches provide positive ways for all children to participate

“ I think it offers different children the chance to get different things out of it. Some children like the competitive nature of seeing who can read the most books, and some children like the creative nature of being able to describe how it's impacted on them or to look more deeply at a certain book. I think it's just been nice that it's been quite an open platform to display your own little journeys – that makes it quite accessible to all learners, because it can be submitted in a range of formats which is great.”

FMRC enabled the school to make significant improvements to its reading culture

“ The teachers have always been really, really keen to

develop reading in the classroom and I think FMRC has given permission and space to explore it and develop it as best they can. Reading is not an add-on part of the curriculum. It should be all-encompassing in everything that we do – we try and make sure that we link it across multidisciplinary learning and all aspects of the school.”

“ It's actually one of the most joyous parts of our job, when we sit and talk to children about what they're reading and what they're enjoying and where they've come as a reader. And you get those little magic moments of their faces lighting up, telling you about the stories they've been reading and what they want to read next. And I think that's definitely been supported through all of this work.” ■

Cowie Primary School

A Transformational Journey for Schools and Pupils

Cowie Primary School near Stirling began exploring reading for pleasure with one year group. Involvement in FMRC gave them the framework, resources and encouragement to implement developments which have transformed the school's approach to reading.

“It has been transformational from where we were to where we are now. Reading is part of a whole school journey now. We love reading.”



It began with a drama workshop supported by funding from Scottish Book Trust, involving an author and picture books.

“2018 was probably the year when we really started to focus on our reading journey. I was looking for ways to try and like increase the P7s' confidence with reading and also to use them as role models for the rest of the school as well.”

“Prior to this, we were quite hesitant readers, we didn't enjoy reading out loud and after that session... wow they were so hooked, I think they could see the love of the books themselves because they've taken part in the drama side of it as well. That was really where it all started. We explored a bit more about what we could do – at that point the Reading Challenge was something that we hadn't considered.”

The First Minister's Reading Challenge inspired a storytelling workshop with P7s

“This led to them starting their own club with the early years classes – three lunchtimes a week –

picking a story, doing a book reading and preparing crafts as well.”

Experiences at the FMRC Awards Ceremony motivated staff and pupils

“We were really inspired to see other schools and the showcases that were put on that day. The pupils felt a real buzz and had a very positive attitude after seeing the success of other schools. And obviously this was a class who were then leaving school to high school, but we knew this was going to be a driving force with that first class to start the school thinking.”

“We took the club to the next level, and started to have

it more often. And then for Book Week we started to have paired reading shared between all the classes in the school... we were determined we could do this from looking at the showcases thinking 'That could be us'.”

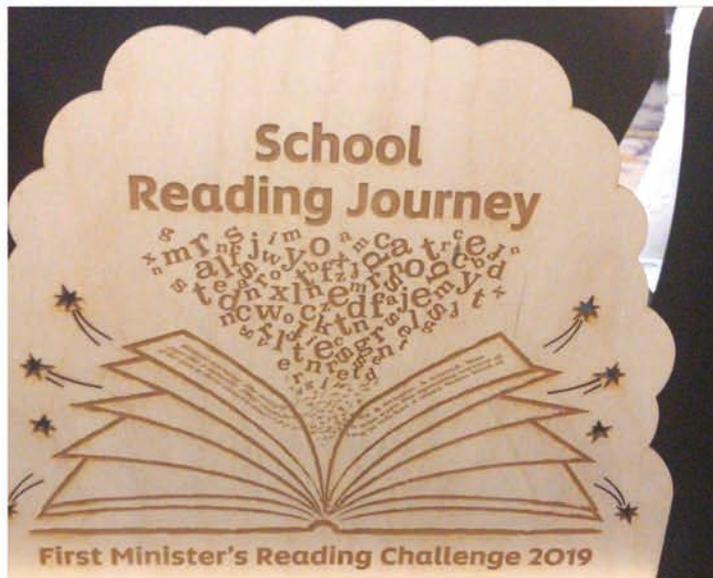
Public recognition encouraged Cowie Primary School to do even more

“The second year we actually did win the School Reading Journey award for the First Minister's Reading Challenge. For us at Cowie Primary School to get that recognition – to show we're working very hard to try and push our reading journey and develop our journey – for us, that was a really big deal. We were really proud of ourselves.”

Taking opportunities to extend the reach of the reading culture

“We had parents coming in doing storytelling workshops, we had literacy evenings, a pyjama evening where we read bedtime stories to try and model to our families the love and enjoyment that you can have from a story.”

Cowie Primary School



We looked at our partnerships with other schools and with the local library and got highly commended for our Partnership Award, which was last year. I've been mentoring another teacher in the other local primary school in our village, to develop the reading journey within their school. And we started off our reading in the community project, my class meeting up with hers (class from another school) every other week to share a story, make some crafts, and just have fun with reading."

“ During COVID with my own class, I started a virtual Book Bletchers. All the children joining Google Classroom, and we would talk about stories throughout the week and then on the Friday we would have a bletcher about it. That was really successful with my class, but other teachers said let's do our book share virtually, like we did before with our reading in the community, so we did that with a third school joining us.”

Continuing the development of the school's reading journey

“ We're all now so much focused on reading and the reading journey and building

on it. Without FMRC we would have definitely tried to develop our reading, but FMRC really helped support us to have something to aim towards, and after achieving that first year we then looked further to see how we could build on it.”

“ I just try to challenge myself as well to think, how can we make what we're doing even better? And I think each year that's our challenge now – think what we've achieved, but we have to make that sustainable – to keep it going and continually think about different ways to keep the excitement around books alive.”

Cowie Primary School has achieved their gold standard in Reading Schools

“ It's amazing to have the award but it's also about sustaining that at the same level. We've been able to keep that going from FMRC.”

Work to encourage reading for pleasure has strong impacts for individual young people

“ One of the moments for me was taking four Primary 7 pupils on the train to Glasgow for the First Minister's Reading

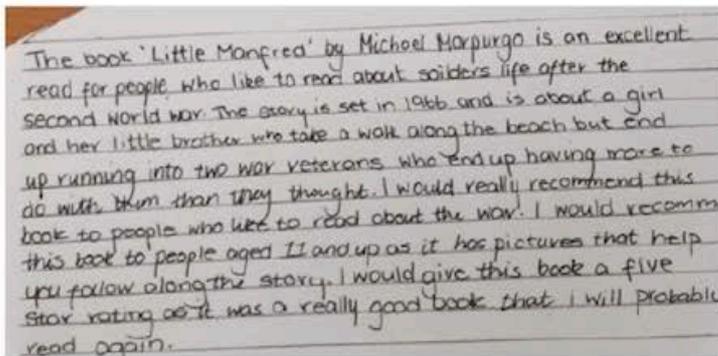
Challenge awards. We were lucky enough to meet Ross MacKenzie who writes The Nowhere Emporium books. I had bought each of the four learners one of his books. One of the girls at the beginning of the year in her reading questionnaire put that she didn't enjoy reading out loud, didn't enjoy books, and didn't have books at home. On the journey back on the train to Stirling, she took out that book from Ross MacKenzie and said “Can I read you a story?” and she started to read to us on the train on the way home. I was thinking for this wee girl who at the beginning would have put in that questionnaire that she didn't like reading, didn't enjoy reading, didn't have books, and she's actually sitting reading aloud with other people in the train carriage... I think that will always be one of my moments regardless of winning any award.” ■

Auchenharvie Academy

Reinforcing a Reading Culture

Auchenharvie Academy has a strong focus on literacy, and used FMRC to create a reading culture and promote reading for enjoyment. This case study presents FMRC in the context of a secondary school and the range of cross-curricular activities established to support pupils to enjoy books and become confident readers.

“ I think [the reading culture in the school] had fallen off a little bit before... but I think it's thriving now, I would say it's more embedded into the day to day of the school.”



Auchenharvie Academy has taken part in FMRC every year since 2018-19

“ The First Minister's Reading Challenge came about at a time when [the School Librarian and the Faculty Head for English and Literacy] had started at the school... we were just relaunching everything and trying to build a culture of reading within the school and have staff be visible readers, and different things that can link into that.”

“ We knew we had to do something”, was the reaction when staff read about the National Literacy Trust research in 2017 that found 1 in 8 disadvantaged children do not own a book.¹ The first step was to increase access to books. Three free libraries were created in the school: one in reception, one in the staff room and one in the family room. Books in the libraries have been donated by a local charity, parents, teachers and pupils.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and staff across the school help to promote reading for pleasure

“ Our SLT have always been supportive of reading

for pleasure but this has been strengthened through our involvement with FMRC. I would say the biggest change in terms of staffing is non-English teachers celebrating their love of reading. This has been great to see... This includes support staff such as office staff, teaching assistants as well as teaching staff and SLT.”

“ All Auchenharvie staff help to promote a love of reading... Not only does it allow pupils to see that many of the staff in school enjoy reading but it gives everyone fresh ideas of what books to read and opens up discussions around reading for fun.”

Activities include a staff book group, signs on classroom and office doors (as well as notes in email signatures that display what staff are reading), and annual 'book bags' where staff receive a free second hand book

Pupil leadership has been developed through a Reading Ambassador programme

“ We now have 20 Reading Ambassadors who help to create displays around what they are currently reading, provide support for reading events, curate the book order for the library and suggest other book-ish activities to get their classmates reading.”

Auchenharvie Academy



Other activities have taken place to promote reading for pleasure, including:

- Regular in-class reading time in English, including 'Reading Cafes' where pupils are encouraged to "courie in" and read in front of a virtual fireplace with hot chocolate and biscuits.
- Reading for pleasure activities in other classes, sometimes linked to occasions such as Halloween.
- Challenges to encourage pupils to read more or different types of books.
- Keep The Heid and Read – a project to promote reading for wellbeing including 'drop everything and read for seven minutes'.
- Book reviews by pupils.
- Pupil and community book groups.
- World Book Day events.
- Reading Boost – a scheme where classroom assistants and senior pupils support S2 pupils with reading.
- An escape room activity focused on reading for pleasure.
- Library visits to raise awareness of the resources and activities available there.

There has been a positive impact on reading for pleasure among pupils

“ We have seen an increase in pupils reading for pleasure. A recent survey we carried out suggested 50% of pupils are reading more than before their engagement with FMRC. Pupils are more engaged in books and are discussing them more openly.”

“ Through using Accelerate Reader to monitor, track and support pupils, we can see that reading scores are improving in our school.”

An ongoing commitment to embedding reading for pleasure across the curriculum

“ This is an area we are still working on. We are looking to create a 'reading list' for each subject area but Covid has interrupted these plans.”

FMRC helped to focus and accelerate the school's literacy activities

“ I think it's given us a little bit more structure and a little bit of a push, because 'oh we've got to get that submission in and we need to think about what we're

going to do'... it's pushed us to document what we're already doing... I think things would have happened anyway, but wouldn't have happened at the same pace, I suppose. They've accelerated development.”

Staff have been inspired to use FMRC resources and be more creative

“ I go through the resources at the end of the term and see what is there that I'd like to use, bits and pieces that I think would be useful... there's no point in reinventing the wheel, it sort of pushes you to be a bit more creative in a lot of ways.” ■

1. <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/1-8-disadvantaged-children-uk-dont-own-single-book/>

Goodlyburn Primary School

Gaelic Stories Across the Curriculum

Goodlyburn Primary School in Perth has nursery provision and 12 primary classes including two multi-composite Gaelic Medium Education classes (P1-P3 and P4-P7). Pupils in P1-P3 come without experience of Gaelic but, using a full immersion approach, everything is taught in Gaelic. This case study demonstrates how a primary school used FMRC to support children and families to share a learning journey and build a love of Gaelic stories together in the earliest years of education.

“ It has a massive impact and I would say there’s a definite reading culture across our Gaelic classes and a love of books.”



Picture books were an opening to learning a new language

“ With a lot of picture books you can get a lot of language across. Children reading in P1 don’t learn to read because they don’t have enough Gaelic language to do so and not enough exposure to Gaelic. But sharing stories offers pictorial representation and they can acquire a lot of language through the visual element of the story.”

“ When I was first involved in the Reading Challenge it was predominantly with P1-3 (a multi-composite class). I did a picture book story every day and based a lot of other work on that. So if we were doing a pirate story, then I would do something on floating and sinking, and things on making

pirate faces and talking about facial features or walking the plank for PE. In English, pupils would have the language anyway but for the Gaelic class that learning experience is how you acquire the language – so it was using the stories to make a language-rich environment.”

“ On the back of that we would always fill in the Reading Passports – we were able to get Gaelic copies of these. Sometimes it was drawing pictures of the main character, or stopping a story and saying what do you think is going to happen next, or something that had a link to another curricular area.”

Goodlyburn Primary School



Stories were a starting point in sessions to connect with the community

“ We had Bookbug sessions once a month and opened those out to the community. So our pupils attended the sessions but we invited families in, to try and create a Gaelic community around the school. We also had monthly transition sessions, from September right through to June for pupils who would be joining our Gaelic classes, because they didn't have any background in Gaelic. Parents would come to those sessions and we would always do a story and link with a craft activity and some singing. But it always started with a story and went from there.”

The school accessed other support to bolster their Gaelic education

“ We got funding for an author visit – it was important that it

was a Gaelic author that we got. We have used a lot of the Scottish Book Trust resources – things like Authors Live (the pupils wanted to ask a question – I put the question on Twitter and it was answered – they were so excited!). I found the Scottish Book Trust to be absolutely brilliant, the resources and the contact I had with them as well. It's been very positive.”

Reading has become part of the everyday life at Goodlyburn, and the children are enthusiastic about it

“ We did use books and stories before, but I think that focus – the everyday thing – and the pupils knew that it was part of daily routine and they like that. A lot of pupils probably aren't always read to now at home – even the older ones just love being read to.”

“ I would give them a taste of different authors and buy in

the books for the school, so there was an excitement I think around books. I had children who weren't overly engaged in reading saying 'When are we reading in class?', 'When are we doing the next bit?' and if I stopped reading and they would say, 'You can't stop there!'"

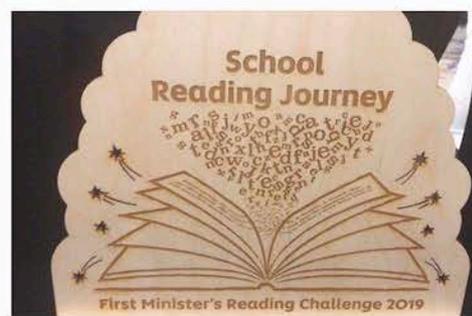
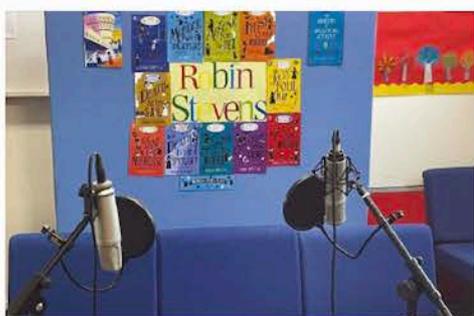
“ It's a culture we've created that we've now carried on.” ■

Holy Cross High School

Innovative Promotion of Reading for Pleasure

Holy Cross High School in Hamilton has taken part in the First Minister's Reading Challenge for several years. Staff at the school are committed to promoting a culture of reading for pleasure in a number of different ways. This case study provides examples of innovative ways of establishing a culture of reading for pleasure.

“ We've been trying to bring it to life... involving them in innovative projects and things that liven their attitudes towards personal reading and reading for pleasure.”



Teachers lead by example and talk to pupils about the books they are reading. This fosters discussion about different types of literature

“ We have been really invested in the Reading Challenge. We've done a lot of extra projects as part of the Reading Challenge that have substantiated the work that we would be doing ordinarily. We've really ramped it up this year and tried to be as innovative as possible, coming up with ways that we can engage the pupils.”

“ I think one of the things about that phrase, 'reading for pleasure', is if it becomes a chore to encourage people to read for pleasure, you're not doing it right. Through our own enjoyment of and our own engagement with reading, we should be modelling that. We are able to have an impact on how the kids feel about reading. So for example, on my board just now, I've got every book that I've read so far this year, and so the kids will ask me about the books that I'm reading. I've had some great conversations with pupils over the past few years when I've been doing that. They see the volume of books growing, and they'll ask me sometimes,

'why have you read more of this and not that?' and so it becomes almost like a negotiation about what I'm going to read next. They see that I haven't read as much non-fiction lately, so I'll read more non-fiction. I'm always attempting to model the kinds of reading behaviours that I would like to see from them. I have noticed a definite shift in the reading culture within my class as a result.”

During English classes, time is set aside each week for personal reading and pupils are encouraged to discuss books they have read. As a result, teachers have seen an increase in the level of reading and

improvements in pupils' ability to express themselves and articulate their opinions about what they've been reading

“ I think the habits have been really successfully embedded through that regular routine and it's easily been documented by the remarkable numbers of books that some of the pupils have been digesting. I think the difference is really notable for some pupils simply in creating a healthy routine. There's been much more willingness to immerse themselves in reading.”

“ I think it's life-changing, honestly. Encouraging the opportunities to not only

Holy Cross High School

select your own texts, but also the encouragement to talk about them. I think that's the biggest thing – how much more comfortable pupils are to actually speak about their own engagement with books they've selected themselves."

Peter Kelly, an English teacher at Holy Cross drew inspiration from the First Minister's Reading Challenge and started exploring more creative and innovative ways to encourage young people to read more in their free time. With support from the school librarian and the Principal Teacher of Literacy, he launched The Reading Café, a podcast presented by 6th year pupils aimed at promoting reading for pleasure among young people

“ I came up with an idea about creating a podcast where the pupils would be engaging in book club-style discussions. And I'd record and edit them, because, coming from a music production background, I've got skills that I was able to bring to the table and I was able to put that together.”

“ New, innovative ways to encourage reading are essential, especially after everything that's been happening for the past few years. That's one of the things that we've really been wanting to encourage through the podcast. We're asking them [listeners] to respond to questions based around their own engagement with books, for example, characters that they see themselves in, a character whose diary they would like to read, imagining reinterpretations of books, like what would make an effective graphic novel. Trying to encourage them to think outside of the final version of stories that appear in books, to encourage them to think beyond that and create their own voice within a book.”

“ I wanted to make the activity of personal reading less of an isolated one, where people can connect and have a common ground. So from that point of view, it's benefited the mental health of pupils as well. I found that some of the books that they've been reading have actually opened up conversations about their own personal trials.”

The podcast has seen great success, drawing attention from other schools, authors, the media and the Scottish Parliament

“ The Reading Café was recognised in Parliament a couple of days ago. A motion was launched to recognise the success of the podcast as a way of engaging young people in reading. It's been in Teaching Scotland Magazine as well.”

“ One of the things that has been most successful about it is that we're having other schools contact us, asking how we do it and asking for support with trying to do similar things. I think schools tend to learn from each other's practice – that's always been the way and it's a healthy thing.”

“ Robin Stevens, whose Most Unladylike books are really popular with lots of our pupils, she's going to be our first guest author interview, which we will be recording next month. And we've already got other authors lined up for next year. So even though the Reading Challenge has come to an end, we're trying to do more and more innovative things, to not only raise the profile, but also to indelibly stamp the importance of reading and the pleasure of reading.”

Peter reflected on the importance of the First Minister's Reading Challenge and its significant impact on Holy Cross High School

“ The Reading Challenge has been invaluable in creating a context for the importance of personal reading as part of the development of literacy skills. Pupils have greatly benefited from having the opportunity to find joy in reading rather than simply using books as a stimulus for assessment.”

“ This year's participation in the Reading Challenge has been a phenomenal success. In almost twenty years of teaching at my school, I can honestly say I have never seen a more active reading culture. There is a genuine, palpable enthusiasm for books amongst pupils, partly as a consequence of lockdown as many young people found themselves engaging independently with literature for the first time. We are all very excited about the year ahead as we continue to build on the many positives of the 2021/2022 session.” ■

You can listen to the Reading Café podcast here: <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Podcast/B08K5Y8H5P>

The Teaching Scotland Magazine article about The Reading Café is available here: <https://readymag.com/gtscotland/TeachingScotlandIssue92/11/>

The parliamentary motion in support of The Reading Café podcast is available to view here: <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/votes-and-motions/S6M-04214>

Appendix 1 – FMRC Programme Objectives

- Supporting schools to build reading cultures
- Supporting the involvement of families, libraries and communities
- Securing buy-in and support from teachers and other practitioners, such as library staff and family / community learning contacts
- Supporting attainment
- Supporting closing the attainment gap
- The programme being sustainable

In addition, the secondary, library and community strands had specific objectives:

Secondary schools

- Pupils read for pleasure more frequently and/or more widely
- Senior management recognise the impact of reading for pleasure
- Reading for pleasure is embedded across the curriculum
- Pupil voice / leadership is developed through the programme

Public libraries

- Family use of public libraries increases
- Children and young people read for pleasure more frequently and/or more widely
- Provides a platform for public libraries to showcase their work around reading for pleasure with children and young people

Community groups

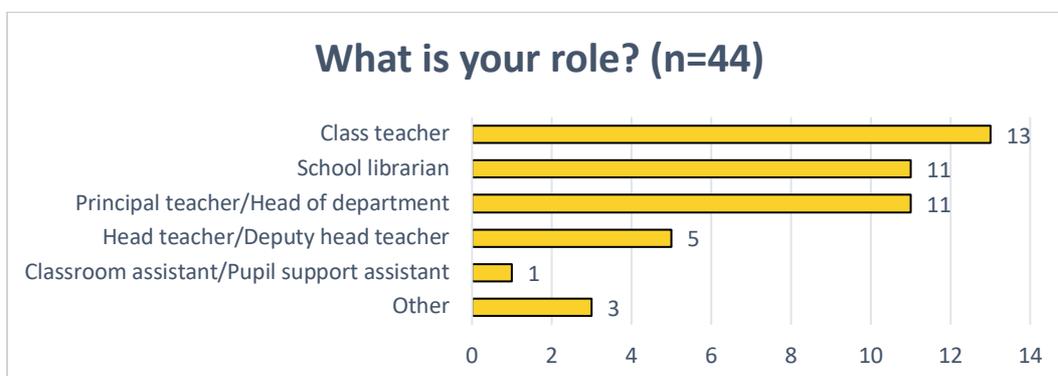
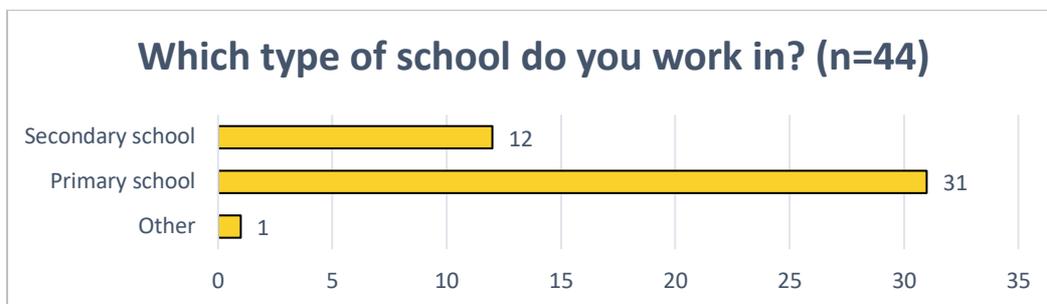
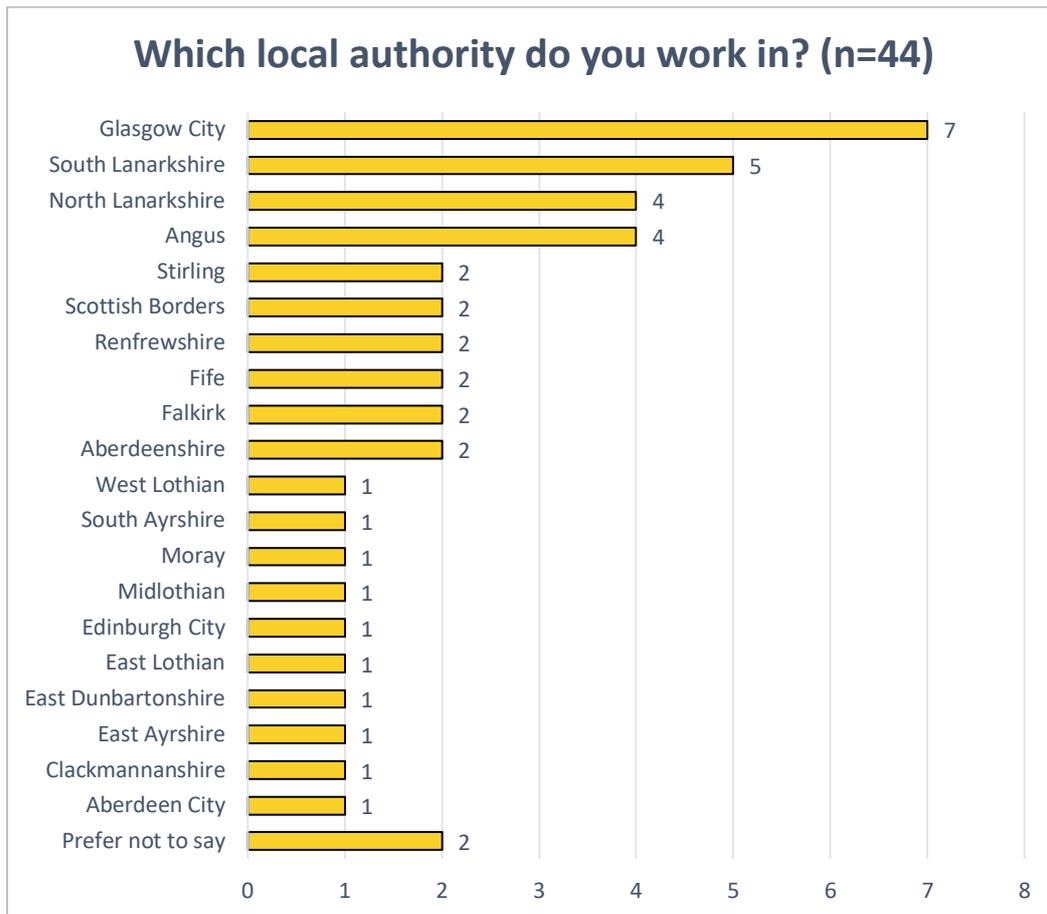
- Reading cultures in wider communities are developed (through effective use of reading role models)
- Reading for pleasure is given a high status outwith the school environment

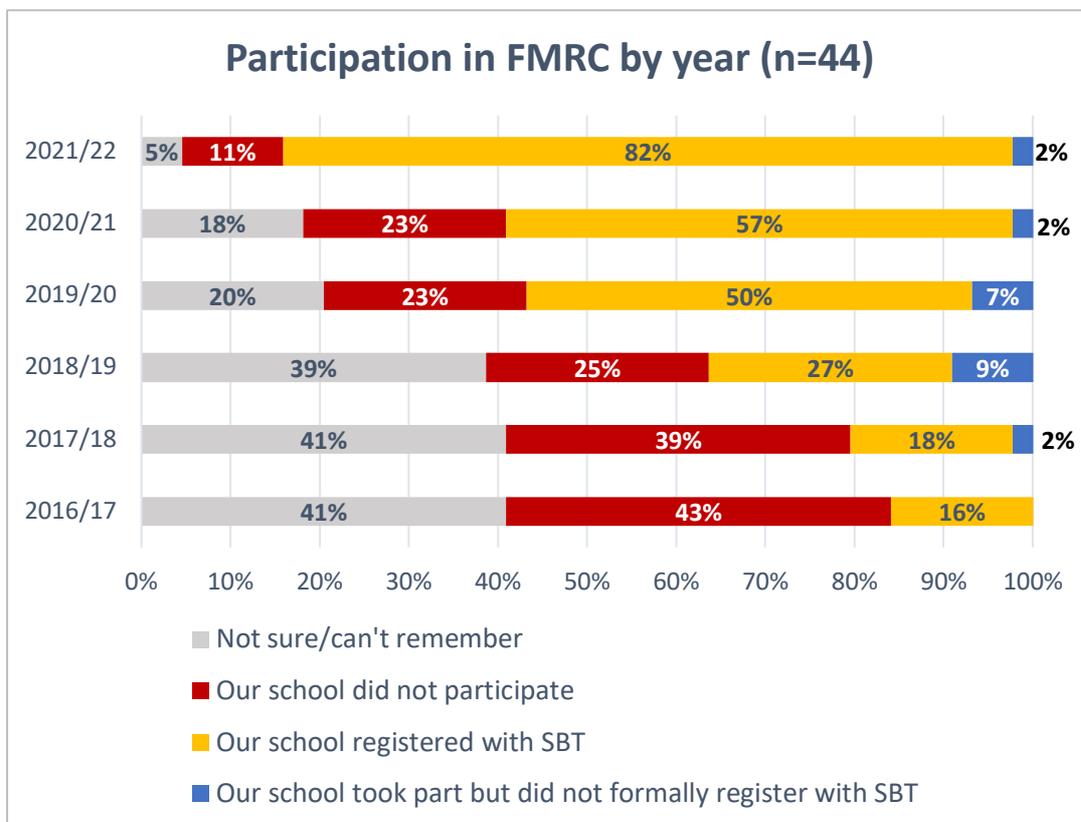
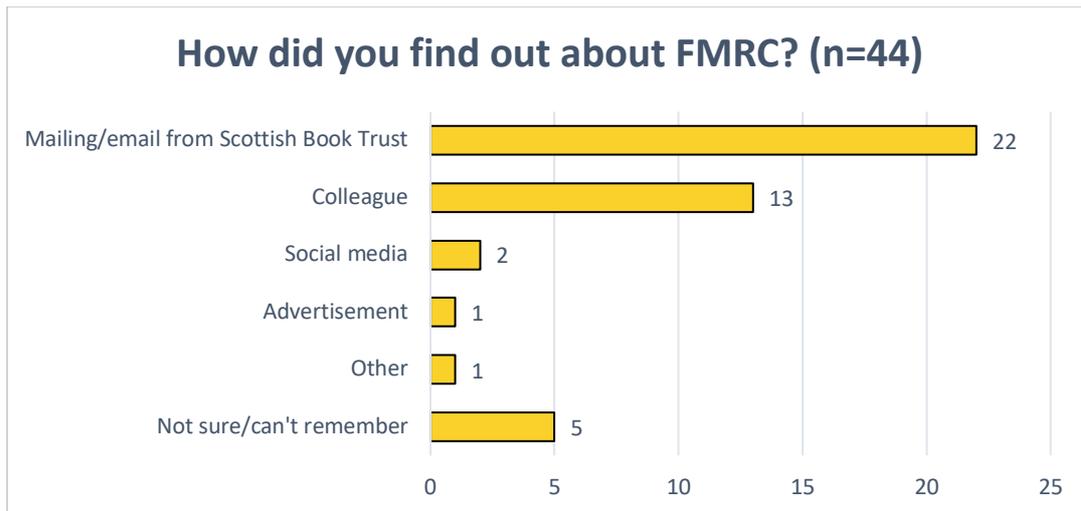
Appendix 2 – Reading Schools

Scottish Book Trust marketing information for Reading Schools highlights that the programme offers:

- An accreditation for your school, with the option of advancing to Silver and Gold status
- An improvement framework mapped to 'How Good is Our School'
- Professional development opportunities for staff
- A way to champion pupil voice
- Opportunities for collaboration within and between schools
- Pathways to engage families and the wider community
- Resources, training and support from Scottish Book Trust

Appendix 3 – Profile of survey respondents





Appendix 4 – 2021/22 Results

Evaluations of FMRC have taken place on an annual basis. Whilst the majority of this evaluation has focused on the programme as a whole, the results for 2021/22 give some indication of the evolution of the programme, as well as showing current benefits and challenges experienced by schools.

Participation information

In 2021/22, the sixth and final year of the First Minister’s Reading Challenge, school participation involved:

- 546 schools (21% of schools in Scotland) registered for FMRC.
- 406 primary schools, 132 secondary schools and eight special schools registered
- Registrations represented schools from all 32 Scottish local authority areas, with Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian having the highest number
- 68 primary and secondary schools from 25 different local authority areas submitted a challenge

Participation rates for 2021/22 were slightly lower than the previous year (546 down from 588), and were the lowest of the six years of the FMRC.

In the FMRC programme evaluation’s online survey, 84% of respondents (37 of 44) had registered for FMRC during 2021/22 and provided feedback on the impact of the Reading Challenge and on their experience of resources and support, specific to 2021/22.

Impact of the Reading Challenge in 2021/22

The majority of respondents felt that the Reading Challenge had helped them to some extent, to feel empowered to encourage reading for pleasure (33, 89%), to develop new techniques to support this (30, 81%) and to encourage reading for pleasure (34, 91%). Over three quarters said that FMRC had helped enthuse pupils impacted by lockdown.

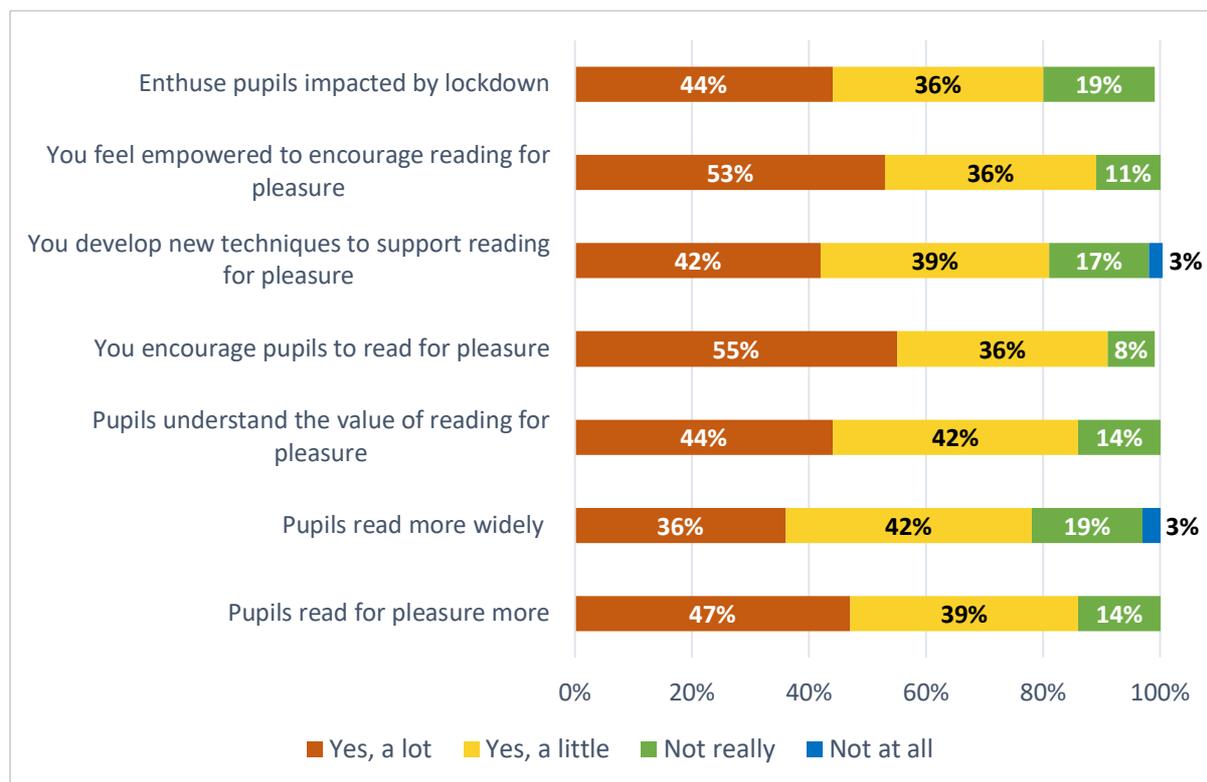
FMRC also had an impact on pupils themselves, as respondents said that to some degree pupils read more widely (29, 78%), understood the value of reading for pleasure and read for pleasure more (32, 86%) as shown in the figure below (Fig.1).



We have started Everyone Reading in Class in P6/7 and this has been very positively received by all pupils. Pupils have been recommending books to each other and sharing books too. Our whole school has worked incredibly hard to build and sustain a culture of reading for pleasure throughout all stages. We have relaunched our school library and developed all of our class reading areas. There is lots of fantastic book chat going on and children are keen to visit the library.

Teacher, Primary School

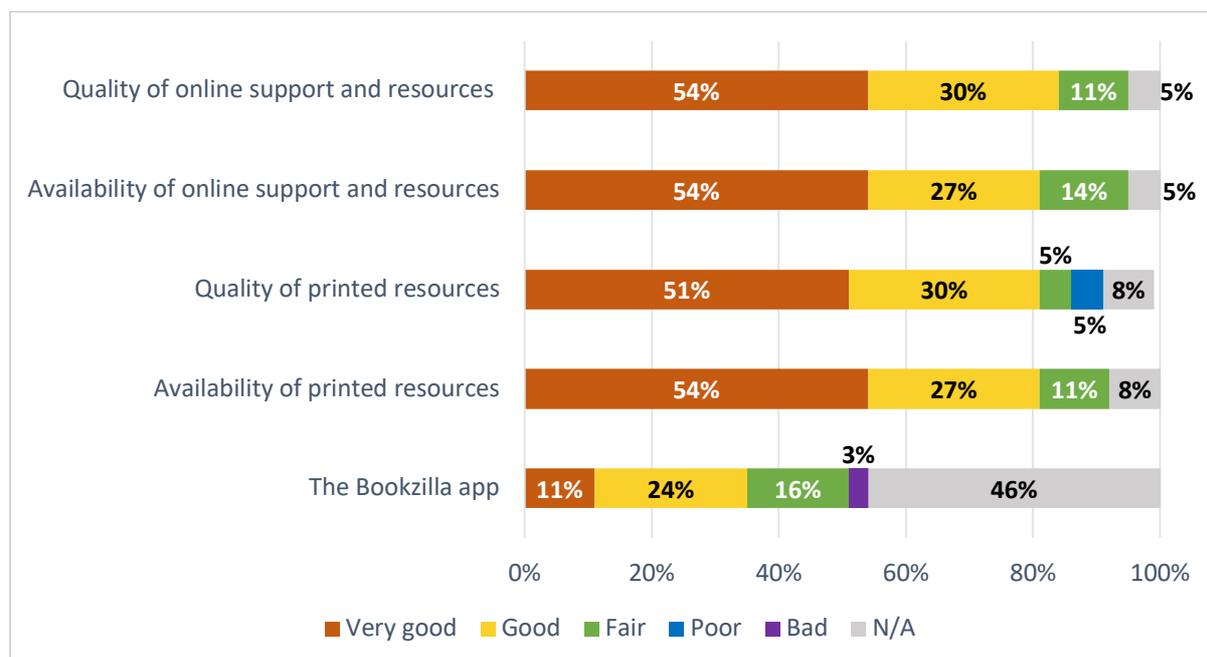
Figure 1: Participants' views on how FMRC has helped (2021/22) (n=37)



Experience of support and resources

The online support and resources offered by Scottish Book Trust had been experienced positively, with the quality and availability rated as very good or good by over 80% of respondents. The availability and quality of printed resources were also rated highly (Fig.2).

Figure 2: FMRC participants' rating of different FMRC resources (2021/22) (n=37)



During 2021/22, Scottish Book Trust offered CLPL (Career Long Professional Learning) sessions and half of the survey respondents (19 out of 37, 51%) had attended these. CLPL sessions were found to be very relevant (83%, 15) and of high quality (78%, 14) by the majority of participants. No participants rated them as low quality or not relevant.



It's so wonderful to hear from others that love reading and see how others promote a love of books. It's been so good to connect and learn and leave buzzing with the joy of book.

Teacher, Primary School



They have made me think how to make reading more engaging as a school and to support teachers within their classroom.

Teacher, Primary School



I got fresh ideas for future plans especially with family learning.

Librarian, Secondary School



It's given me the motivation to tackle bigger challenges, as it reassured me that a member of SBT staff would be there to help me if needed. It also cleared up a few queries that were holding me back too.

Librarian, Secondary School

Barriers to participation

There were some challenges for schools in participating in FMRC during 2021/22 with the lingering effects and restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic being highlighted.



Restrictions on numbers in classes, bubbles and parents being allowed into schools. Having visitors to the school was a challenge. Even though we followed all Covid guidelines it was still a bit strange.

Teacher, Primary School



Time constraints with busy curriculum and catching up post lockdown.

Teacher, Primary School

A programme attracting previous and new participants

In 2021/22, there were examples of FMRC being used a tool for annual development whilst still attracting new participants, each of whom attributed benefits to FMRC.



This year has been our most successful with more children wanting to share their reading journey and challenge themselves to read more often.

Teacher, Primary School



This has been new to the school and children have been encouraged to read more. Some children are even reading during intervals.

Teacher, Primary School