

# Evaluation of the Reading Ahead ESOL pilot (Year Three 2018-19)

Report for The Reading Agency



Evaluation Services

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November 2019

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction (Section 1)

In 2016 The Bell Foundation provided three years of grant funding to The Reading Agency to support a reading pilot with prisoners who have ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) needs. The pilot was built on The Reading Agency's established Reading Ahead delivery model which seeks to improve people's reading confidence and reading skills (particularly among those who find reading difficult) through the encouragement of reading for pleasure. Reading Ahead invites participants to choose six reads and record, review and rate them in a diary to get a certificate. It is delivered through public libraries, learning providers and workplaces as well as prisons.

The three-year pilot sought to test the Reading Ahead approach among ESOL prisoners and aimed to reach 900 prisoners over three years working with 18 institutions. The pilot also included an ESOL-friendly leaflet to promote the prison library; two ESOL-friendly reading lists to support Reading Ahead; and a range of creative activities designed to encourage prisoners to engage with reading and writing in different ways.

This is the third and final annual evaluation report for the pilot. This year, the evaluation included interviews with seven staff from five participating prisons, interviews with the pilot delivery team, and analysis of 92 participant surveys. As the final evaluation outputs for the pilot, this report also draws on evidence from evaluation findings in previous years.

### Delivery lessons (Section 2)

Pilot delivery in Year Three focused on encouraging staff to integrate the use of Reading Ahead into ESOL curriculum delivery, to use the creative tools developed during the project, and to establish sustainable partnerships between ESOL tutors and prison library staff.

The Reading Agency expanded the number of institutions it worked with to 18 in 2018/19 – the pilot's original target – and over the three years it has worked with 21 institutions in total.

Project data shows that 301 prisoners took part in the pilot in the last year, with 182 completing at least six books (the scheme's target for participants). This represents around a doubling of participant volumes between years two and three. The number of participants registered ('starts') across both years totals 483, so while the year-on-year increase has been impressive, the pilot is some way off its initial expectation of reaching 900 prisoners as it comes to an end. The challenges of engaging prisons and prisoners has been a long-running issue with which the pilot has had to grapple, and the volume figures need to be seen in this light.

As part of its determination to leave a legacy post-pilot, The Reading Agency has developed some materials that tutors, libraries and prison institutions could continue to use themselves. These include reading lists; guidance and creative ideas for tutors on engaging ESOL prisoners with reading for pleasure; a booklet of prisoners' creative work and a creative writing pack for tutors to enable them to carry out similar creative writing projects with ESOL prisoners; and an ESOL-friendly leaflet to promote the prison library.

### Prison staff interviews (Section 3)

Prison staff identified a range of factors that were important to the successful delivery of the pilot:

- Providing incentives to prisoners to encourage their engagement
- Having support from the library to ensure that prisoners had access to suitable reading materials with encouragement and guidance from library staff
- ESOL tutors willing to engage with the library, including introducing learners to the library
- Guidance and support from The Reading Agency on how to deliver the pilot and for signposting
- Learners who are engaged, motivated and willing to make a commitment to reading
- Protecting dedicated reading time within classes, and especially at the very beginning of the class

Interviewees noted the following challenges which faced them in delivering the scheme:

- High prisoner turnover interrupting learning, especially among Foreign National Prisoners
- Staff shortages and changes to education/library contracts
- Availability of suitable books in libraries
- Prison policy towards ESOL education

Similar success factors and challenges were mentioned in previous years, and are broadly corroborated by the pilot's project management team.

Prison staff noted a range of outcomes for pilot participants including:

- Greater confidence in the use of English
- Improved confidence more generally, with prisoners better able to engage with prison life and processes
- Language improvements, such as reading ability and vocabulary
- Better mental wellbeing, with reading for pleasure providing prisoners with some escape from the realities of prison life

### Participant survey (Section 4)

The participant survey drew 92 responses from 3 participating male prisons. This represents a response rate of 51% of all completions (at least six books read) during the year. Respondents spoke 24 different languages – the largest groups being Albanian and Polish – and 65% were aged between 25 and 44.

Survey respondents rated their enjoyment of the scheme very positively:

Statement	Response		Sum of positive responses
	A lot	A little	
Liked the choice of books on offer	51%	37%	88%
Enjoyed taking part in Reading Ahead	47%	48%	95%

Respondents reported a range of positive English language and literacy outcomes:

Statement	Response		Sum of positive responses
	A lot more	A bit more	
I enjoy reading	26%	43%	69%
I feel confident about reading in English	31%	34%	65%
I read...	21%	43%	64%
I use the library...	30%	32%	62%
I feel confident speaking English	27%	32%	59%
I feel confident writing English	22%	31%	53%
I talk about books...	24%	30%	54%

Nearly two thirds of respondents said that the pilot had helped them with non-language specific outcomes:

Statement	Response		Sum of positive responses
	A lot	A little	
Allowed me to access prison services more easily	20%	43%	63%
Helped me gain skills that might help me get a job	27%	38%	65%
Feel more prepared for life after prison	26%	37%	63%

## Conclusions (Section 5)

The pilot has convincingly shown that it can be an effective means of improving a range of outcomes for ESOL prisoners. The participant survey has consistently demonstrated how participants feel that they have benefitted, from improving their reading and wider language confidence, to enhancing their ability to access prison services, to gain skills, and to make them feel more prepared for life after prison. The Year Three survey has provided greater statistical confidence in the results given its higher response rate, and has shown an increase in positive responses in some outcome areas. The views of prison staff and the project's management corroborate the survey's findings.

Delivering a project such as this within a prison institution represents a significant challenge. In many cases, the pilot has not been in a position to resolve those challenges and has simply had to do its best to find ways to work around what are systemic barriers. The role of the pilot's project manager has been very important in helping individual prison staff find solutions to some of these challenges that have enabled the pilot to go ahead.

The pilot has proven that Reading Ahead can be adapted to be an effective reading intervention for ESOL learners. Based on the evaluation evidence, the key aspects of the model that make it a success are:

- Strong, effective relationships between tutors and prison libraries
- Tutors regularly dedicating time in lessons for reading and subsequent discussion
- Education teams (managers and tutors) making a commitment to encouraging reading for pleasure, which strikes a balance between language for enjoyment and examination performance
- Libraries ensuring that suitable reading materials are available for ESOL learners
- Incentivising ESOL prisoners to take part and complete the challenge

The evaluation has noted several times over the last three years that take-up of the pilot has been heavily dependent on individual prison staff pushing it forward, and that this has often required

considerable encouragement from the project management to start and sustain activity despite the evidence of positive impact on prisoners. The Reading Agency recognises that this is a potential risk for the continuation of the ESOL-specific scheme once the pilot ends. However, the pilot is, in essence, an adaptation of the Reading Ahead scheme which is well-embedded in many prisons across the country. The Reading Agency is therefore considering ways in which the ESOL scheme might be promoted alongside the ‘mainstream’ Reading Ahead, and is discussion with other stakeholders about how best to communicate the evidence and lessons from the pilot to the prison sector.

## Introduction

### Background

In 2016 The Bell Foundation provided three years of grant funding to The Reading Agency to support a reading pilot with prisoners who have ESOL needs. The pilot was built on The Reading Agency's established Reading Ahead delivery model which has been running since 2008 (and 2015 under the brand 'Reading Ahead'):

- Reading Ahead seeks to improve people's reading confidence and reading skills (particularly among those who find reading difficult) through the encouragement of reading for pleasure
- Participants choose six reads (a broad definition that goes beyond just 'books' to include short texts such as poems, articles and leaflets); they record, review and rate them in a diary; and completion is rewarded with a certificate and a pocket dictionary provided by the charity Give a Book
- Reading Ahead is delivered through a range of institutions: public libraries, learning providers, prisons and young offender institutions (YOIs), and workplaces.

The three-year pilot sought to test this approach to improving reading confidence and skills specifically among ESOL prisoners. The Reading Agency was aware that some ESOL prisoners would already be using Reading Ahead based on anecdotal reports and demographic data. For example, only 57% of prison participants in 2018-19 classified themselves as White British. It should be made clear that demographic data in this case is being used as a proxy indicator and that categories like 'Other White', 'Other ethnic group', 'Chinese', etc. do not equate to 'English language learners'. The impact and appropriateness of Reading Ahead for English language learners had not been substantially investigated, however, and this pilot developed from a desire to explore this in depth.

The pilot used the same broad approach as Reading Ahead but has included the following additional elements:

- An ESOL-friendly leaflet to promote the prison library
- Two ESOL-friendly reading lists to support Reading Ahead
- A range of creative activities designed to encourage prisoners to engage with reading and writing in different ways

The pilot aimed to reach 900 prisoners over three years working with 18 institutions.

This report represents an independent evaluation by Cloud Chamber of the third year of the pilot's delivery. We conducted a similar exercise at the end of the first and second years.

For the purposes of transparency, it should be noted that Cloud Chamber also evaluated The Bell Foundation's Language for Change Programme, from which this pilot (and the evaluation) was funded.

### Evaluation questions

The key questions for this evaluation are as follows:

- Is Reading Ahead an effective means of improving the reading confidence and skills of ESOL prisoners?
- What are the best methods for engaging ESOL learners and institutions in Reading Ahead?

- How might Reading Ahead (or a version of it) be improved to maximise reading outcomes for ESOL prisoners?

### Work completed for this report

During the first year's evaluation, we developed an Evaluation Plan to provide the evidence required to complete this report using The Reading Agency's Reading Outcomes Framework Toolkit ([www.readingoutcomesframework.org.uk](http://www.readingoutcomesframework.org.uk)).

The Evaluation Plan prioritises measurement of the following programme outcomes:

- Reading engagement outcomes
  - Reading behaviour
  - Identifying as a reader
  - Confidence about reading
  - Access to the reading environment (newly added)
- Social outcomes
  - Social and cultural participation
- Other outcomes
- Economic impact
  - Gained skills to improve chances of getting a job
- Societal impact
  - Increased access to education

This year, we have completed the following activities:

- Telephone interviews with seven staff from five prisons (Nottingham, Thameside, Chelmsford, Pentonville and Moorland):
- Interviews with The Reading Agency delivery team
- Analysis of participant surveys (n=92)

In the Appendix to this report, we have included a verbatim case study written by the project manager and submitted to The Bell Foundation in April 2019. It provides useful reflections from the perspective of a single institution (HMP Pentonville).

The views in this report are those of the evaluators only.

## Delivery lessons

This section considers the main lessons learned from delivering the pilot, drawing primarily on interviews with the project manager and The Reading Agency.

### Activity with institutions

In the past year, delivery of the pilot has remained broadly unchanged. This has included support from The Reading Agency's project manager in the form of visits, telephone calls and emails with ESOL tutors and prison library staff in the institutions involved. The focus has been on encouraging staff to integrate the use of Reading Ahead into ESOL curriculum delivery, to use the creative tools developed during the project, and to establish sustainable partnerships between ESOL tutors and prison library staff.

The biggest difference this year was The Reading Agency's decision to broaden the reach of the pilot by working with a greater number of institutions. As the table below shows, the pilot worked with 18 institutions in 2018/19 – the pilot's original target – and over the three years it has worked with 21 institutions in total. This represents around 17% of the total number of institutions in England (around 122 depending on year and precise definition). The mix of institutions engaged in Year Three was deliberately designed to include some from previous years, as well as some that were entirely new to the pilot.

#### Institutions involved in the Reading Ahead pilot

Name	Institution type (male unless otherwise specified)	Delivery year		
		1	2	3
Downview	Female	✓	✓	✓
Maidstone	C, Foreign nationals	✓	✓	✓
Moorland	C	✓	✓	✓
Wandsworth	B, C	✓	✓	✓
Brinsford	YOI	✓		
Bristol	B	✓		
Birmingham	B, C		✓	✓
Chelmsford	B		✓	✓
Guy's Marsh	C		✓	✓
Styal	Female		✓	
Lewes	B			✓
Isle of Wight	B			✓
Nottingham	B			✓
Huntercombe	Foreign nationals			✓
Risley	C			✓
Norwich	B, C			✓
Thameside	B			✓
Pentonville	B, C			✓
Winchester	B			✓
Gartree	B			✓
Manchester	A			✓
<b>Totals</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>

Note: institution type is based on open-source information at time of writing; these are often subject to change. Prison categories range from A (high-security) to D (open). Many prisons hold a mixture of prisoners.

## Delivery volumes

Project data shows that 301 prisoners took part in the scheme in the past year, with 182 completing. The figures for Year Two were 182 and 97 respectively. We do not have comparative figures for the first year of the pilot. This represents around a doubling of volumes between years two and three. The number of participants registered ('starts') across both years total 483 and completions 279, compared to the pilot's original objective of reaching 900 prisoners over three years. So, while the year-on-year increase has been impressive, the pilot is some way off initial expectations. As we have reported in previous years, and is echoed in this report, the challenges of engaging prisons and prisoners has been a long-running issue with which the pilot has had to grapple, and the volume figures need to be seen in this light.

A breakdown of participant volumes by institution (see table below) also helps to demonstrate the engagement challenge a little more clearly. Two institutions which have been part of the pilot for the longest (Wandsworth and Moorland) between them accounted for 63% of starts and 66% of completions in Year Three. The exception this year has been Pentonville which, in its first year, has engaged 50 participants. The Reading Agency reports that Wandsworth and Pentonville are among those prisons who also have high participant volumes for the 'standard' Reading Ahead scheme.

It should be noted that the absence of participant figures may not mean that there were no pilot participants in a given institution. It may, for example, reflect the challenges of gathering the data from institutions, which has been another ongoing issue. Participant figures may therefore underestimate the total number of prisoners who took part in the pilot.

### Reading Ahead pilot volumes 2018/19

Institution	Participating years	Starts	Completions	%
Wandsworth	1, 2, 3	150	98	65%
Pentonville	3	50	34	68%
Moorland	1, 2, 3	40	22	55%
IOW	3	20	8	40%
Chelmsford	2, 3	18	12	67%
Manchester	3	6*	6	100%
Nottingham	3	6	2	33%
Lewes	3	6	0	0%
Downview	1,2, 3	5	0	0%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>301</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>60%</b>

\*assumed: start figure not provided

Only those institutions providing data have been included

## Reflections from the project management team

As mentioned already, the project team focused this year on expanding the number of institutions engaged in the pilot. There have been some challenges with rolling out the pilot due to changes in prison education contracts during the year. In some prisons, these caused some hold-ups to the start of the pilot. More generally, there was a sense from some prisons that it could be a challenge to justify time spent on 'non-essential' learning interventions such as Reading Ahead, aside from a focus on the curriculum, although decisions seemed to vary depending on individual tutor outlook.

Looking back over the entirety of the pilot, the project management team had the following observations about the circumstances in which the pilot worked best:

- Committed ESOL teachers who were confident about adopting new and different ways of learning, and who were comfortable working with students with very limited language skills as well as more advanced learners
- Classes where ESOL students are divided according to their ability, thereby allowing discussion to flow at a pace and complexity that matches student communication and comprehension
- Good library support to ensure a supply of appropriate books for ESOL students; book choices made in consultation with ESOL students and tutors

The following factors were identified where the pilot had worked less well:

- A negative, rigid interpretation of ESOL and language education
- Systemic pressure to maintain a strict adherence to the curriculum and exam preparation
- Changes in education providers
- A reluctance in libraries to buy books on behalf of tutors; and more generally a lack of good communication between libraries and education teams

### **Legacy materials**

As part of its determination to leave a legacy post-pilot, The Reading Agency has developed some materials that tutors, libraries and prison institutions could continue to use themselves. These include:

- Two lists of book recommendations for librarians and ESOL tutors
- Guidance and creative ideas for tutors on engaging ESOL prisoners with reading for pleasure
- A booklet of prisoners' creative work and a creative writing pack for tutors to enable them to carry out similar creative writing projects with ESOL prisoners
- An ESOL-friendly leaflet to promote the prison library

The materials are available on The Reading Agency's website<sup>1</sup>.

In our interviews with prison staff, the most recent reading list was commented on positively (see next section), but the other materials were not mentioned. We understand that ESOL tutors at Manchester and Isle of Wight prisons have used the creative reading exercises with classes, but we did not speak to any staff from these institutions. The Reading Agency is also developing a 'top tips' leaflet for ESOL tutors and prison library staff based on lessons learnt and case studies from the project.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=ahead>

## Prison staff interviews

This section draws together the views of prison staff whom we interviewed as part of the evaluation. We spoke to 7 people from 5 of the participating prisons: 2 librarians and 5 tutors from institutions from all 3 waves). As interview numbers have been limited, and this is the final evaluation report, we have sought to draw out consistent findings from across all three years of delivery.

### Need

The need for specific support for prisoners with limited English language skills in the prison environment has been a central theme throughout the three years of the project. Prison staff have noted the additional challenges facing these prisoners on a day-to-day basis in terms of understanding the regime and dealing with the paperwork involved in prison life. This was also mentioned in the Year Three interviews.

### Success factors

In Year Three, the following were identified as key success factors for the successful delivery of the pilot. There is no hierarchy to these factors:

- **Incentives:** tutors noted how important incentives were to prisoners in order to get them engaged to an activity. Overall, the dictionary was viewed as the most important incentive – one tutor described it as *“invaluable”* – but other incentives, such as the cotton bag with Reading Ahead branding, were also appreciated: *“the dictionary, all the other little things that are offered: they come in handy [and have] always been greatly appreciated”* (librarian)
- **A supportive library:** this was mentioned several times by tutors, for whom library support was important to ensure that prisoners had access to suitable reading materials with encouragement and guidance from library staff. *“The library staff have always been supportive”* (tutor)
- **Tutor engagement with the library:** equally important as a supportive library was the presence of tutors who were willing to engage with the library. There were some good practice examples of tutors using some teaching time to take their ESOL students to the library to introduce them to the range of reading materials on offer. One librarian noted what a difference this made to learners from one particular class, who then had the confidence to visit the library themselves and request specific books: *“no one else is asking [for books] apart from [named tutor’s] students”*. A tutor said: *“What we try to do is to take [ESOL learners] to the library every other week during lesson time...[We] show around the library, offer them to borrow books in English. It’s an additional incentive to have more books.”*
- **Support from The Reading Agency:** guidance from occasional visits to prisons by the project manager were welcomed by staff, when they could get advice on how to deliver the pilot and for signposting to suitable reading materials. The reading list developed by the project was particularly viewed positively: *“[the project manager] gave us lots of helpful advice”* (librarian); *“the reading list has helped, we’re looking forward to using with new arrivals”* (tutor)
- **Engaged and motivated learners:** tutors noted that students could be highly variable in terms of their individual commitment to the pilot (and education more generally). Incentives helped, as could the support of tutors, librarians and other prisoners.
- **Dedicated reading time in classes:** while delivery of the pilot in classes has varied between institutions, there was a common thread this year around the value of having dedicated reading

time within classes, and especially at the very beginning of the class. This was thought to be a good way of starting a class, enabling students to settle down and being informally discussing their books in English ahead of the more formalised elements of the lesson. *“When I first tried to do the pilot it was in the middle of the lesson, now it’s incorporated as a starter activity [and] seems to work better” (tutor)*

These success factors were also commonly mentioned in previous years.

## Challenges

Interviewees noted the following challenges which faced them in delivering the scheme:

- **High prisoner turnover:** this was especially the case in remand prisons, and for Foreign National Prisoners awaiting deportation. As one tutor put it: *“The main barriers to completion are prisoner release and/or transfer before book is finished”*
- **Staff shortages:** increasingly an issue within some institutions, which could impact on teaching delivery and prisoner access to classes and the library.
- **Availability of suitable books:** while the reading list helped to identify suitable books, availability in libraries varied. Reading materials for pre-entry level ESOL were particularly scarce.
- **Prison policy:** one institution noted that ESOL was being removed from the education curriculum, with the effect that it would end the Reading Ahead pilot. ESOL students would attend English classes with other prisoners with low levels of English. This was a consequence of the prison being put in charge of its own education funding and deciding that ESOL was not a priority.
- **Lesson focus:** one tutor said that the pilot could be put on a back burner in situations when passing exams was regarded as a high priority: *“we started and stopped [the pilot] as the priority was to get learners through the exams”*
- **Education provider changes:** while there were one or two mentions of this as a minor complication which had held up local delivery of the pilot, recent changes to prison education provider contracts were not regarded as major barriers.

Again, these challenges reflect similar points made during the previous two years of the pilot. Two that were mentioned in previous years but not raised in Year Three related to the time and effort required by tutors to deliver the pilot; and the challenges of getting participants to complete the diary. It is not clear whether the absence of these issues during our most recent interviews is due to them being less of a challenge.

## Impact

Prison staff noted a range of outcomes for pilot participants which again reflect similar comments made in previous years:

- Greater confidence in the use of English:
  - *“My students generally feel more confident when choosing reading material, and their range is increasing” (tutor)*
  - *they feel more capable of engaging in texts in English for own leisure” (tutor)*

- Improved confidence more generally, including increased ability to engage with prison life and processes:
  - *“In terms of confidence, this has grown definitely. [learners] make more attempts to try to read information around the prison – forms and notifications..... it is of practical benefit to prison life.” (tutor)*
- Language improvements:
  - *“Improved reading ability, development of spelling, vocabulary and grammar knowledge” (tutor)*
  - *“[I] see it generally, see language skills improve, know what books they are borrowing and see the books are changing in difficulty” (librarian)*
- Reading represented a constructive use of prisoners’ time, and some interviewees thought that it would be good for prisoners’ mental wellbeing, providing them with some escape from the realities of prison life

Interviewees did not feel they had the evidence to comment on the longer term impacts of the pilot, such as rehabilitation. They noted how difficult it was to establish a link between an intervention and long-term change (especially for Foreign National Prisoners who were to be deported), but that there were some immediate short-term impacts that benefited participants.

## Participant survey

In this section we analyse the outcomes of the scheme for participants, and describe their characteristics.

Surveys were received from three male prisons: Wandsworth (37), Moorland (22) and Pentonville (33). An initial analysis of the data indicated that the survey evidence was similar across all three institutions, so we have not made any comparison between them in this report. The overall response rate was good this year: 51% of all completions. This makes the results statistically significant with a confidence interval of 7.2 (8.5 for starts) at the 95% confidence level, although care should be taken with the findings as survey were only returned from 3 of 18 participating institutions.

In the Year One evaluation, we analysed the results to understand if there were any cumulative benefits of taking part in the scheme, using as our basis the number of books read by an individual. This year, as was the case in Year Two, the number of books read by those completing the survey was more uniform (see below). As an alternative focal point for analysis, we have compared the results of the surveys between years Two and Three of the pilot, as all but one of the responses across both years came from two prisons which have been part of the pilot from the start.

### Respondent details

The majority of respondents were aged 25-44 (65% this year, compared to 67% in Year Two). More than two thirds (68%) identified themselves as 'White Other' by ethnicity (62% in Year Two).

#### Age and ethnicity of respondents

Age	#	%
16-19	2	2%
20-24	16	18%
25-44	58	65%
45-64	12	13%
65-74	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100%</b>

Ethnicity	#	%
Asian or Asian British	12	14%
Black or Black British	4	5%
Chinese	1	1%
Mixed or dual heritage	3	3%
Other ethnic group	7	8%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
White other	59	68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100%</b>

Respondent ethnicity broadly reflects the 24 different languages spoken by respondents:

- 50 prisoners spoke 1 of 10 Central and Eastern European languages; Albanian (15 responses) and Polish (12) were the most common languages across the survey
- 15 prisoners spoke 1 of 6 Western European languages
- 15 prisoners spoke 1 of 8 non-European languages<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all respondents (97%) reported that they had completed at least six reads (n=89). The mean number of books read was 6.6, reflecting some individual high scorers (8 respondents had read 10 or more books); the median and mode were both 6.

<sup>2</sup> 7 respondents did not state their first language in the survey

## Enjoyment and satisfaction

Respondents recorded high levels of satisfaction with the choice of books on offer through Reading Ahead in both years, with a slight increase over time: the cumulative rate of positive satisfaction ('a lot' plus 'a little') rose from 83% in Year Two to 88% in Year Three.

Did you like the choice of books on offer?

Response	Year Two (n=41)	Year Three (n=91)
Yes, a lot	51%	51%
Yes, a little	32%	37%
No	15%	4%
Not sure	2%	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

More than 90% of respondents enjoyed taking part in Reading Ahead either a little or a lot across both years; the figures for each are very similar, with a fall in Year Three of those saying that they did not enjoy the experience (down from 10% to 1% on a larger sample size).

Did you enjoy taking part in Reading Ahead?

Response	Year Two (n=41)	Year Three (n=90)
Yes, a lot	56%	47%
Yes, a little	34%	48%
No	10%	1%
Not sure	-	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The survey offers prisoners the chance to provide verbatim comments about their experience of Reading Ahead. While very few have done this over the three years of the survey (primarily, we assume, because of their limited English), those who did comment tended to be positive – see text box below. It is interesting to note that many of these comments relate to the impact of the pilot on their general wellbeing (rather than the development of their language proficiency, for example).

***“I feel very better when reading books. Education help me live in the prison”***

***“I'm happy, like”***

***“I feel better and enjoy my time”***

***“This was nice experience”***

***“I found reading motivational and relaxing”***

***“Book is a great friend in human life”***

## Outcomes – reading

Participants in Year Three reported similar positive results in terms of their enjoyment of reading and their confidence in reading compared to Year Two.

### I enjoy reading

Response	Year Two (n=41)	Year Three (n=89)
A lot more	39%	26%
A bit more	29%	43%
About the same	27%	31%
A bit less	5%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### I feel confident about reading in English

Response	Year Two (n=41)	Year Three (n=90)
Lot more	34%	31%
A bit more	27%	34%
About the same	32%	30%
A bit less	7%	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

While a larger proportion of respondents in Year Three said they read ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ more (64% compared to 55% in Year Two), fewer reported reading ‘a lot’ more in Year Three (21% compared to 36%).

### I read more or less

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
A lot more	36%	21%
A bit more	19%	43%
About the same	43%	33%
A bit less	2%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The impact of Reading Ahead on library usage has strengthened over time. In Year Two, 48% of respondents said that they were using the library ‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’ more. This rose in Year Three to 62%.

### Using the library

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=88)
A lot more	24%	30%
A bit more	24%	32%
About the same	50%	38%
A bit less	2%	-
A lot less	-	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Outcomes – writing and speaking

The following two tables report views on respondents' confidence in speaking and writing in English. In both cases, the proportion reporting 'a lot' or 'a bit' more confidence has stayed about the same.

### Confidence in speaking English

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
A lot more	33%	27%
A bit more	26%	32%
About the same	38%	38%
A bit less	2%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### Confidence in writing English

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
A lot more	29%	22%
A bit more	21%	31%
About the same	45%	43%
A bit less	5%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

A similar result is evident in terms of respondents' likelihood to talk about books. The proportion reporting that they were 'a lot' or 'a bit' more likely to talk about books as a result of Reading Ahead in Year Three was slightly up on the previous year, from 50% to 54%.

### Talking about books

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
A lot more	24%	24%
A bit more	26%	30%
About the same	45%	38%
A bit less	5%	7%
A lot less	-	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Other outcomes

The final three tables in this section relate to additional, 'knock-on' effects of improving English: being able to access prison services, gaining skills to help get a job, and feeling more prepared for life after prison. The proportion of positive responses ('a lot' or 'a little') rose in Year Three compared to Year Two in all three aspects:

- Accessing prison services: from 50% to 63%
- Gaining skills: from 60% to 65%
- Feeling more prepared for life after prison: from 58% to 63%

## Access other prison services more easily

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
Yes, a lot	29%	20%
Yes, a little	21%	43%
Not sure	38%	22%
No	12%	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Gain skills that might help you to get a job

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
Yes, a lot	36%	27%
Yes, a little	24%	38%
Not sure	19%	24%
No	21%	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Feel more prepared for life after prison

Response	Year Two (n=42)	Year Three (n=90)
Yes, a lot	29%	26%
Yes, a little	29%	37%
Not sure	17%	24%
No	26%	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Conclusions

In this final section, we draw some broad conclusions about the pilot. As this is the final evaluation report, these draw on the evidence from all three years of delivery.

### Improving outcomes for ESOL prisoners

The pilot has convincingly shown that it can be an effective means of improving a range of outcomes for ESOL prisoners. The participant survey has consistently demonstrated how participants feel that they have benefitted, from improving their reading and wider language confidence, to enhancing their ability to access prison services, to gain skills, and to make them feel more prepared for life after prison. The Year Three survey has provided greater statistical confidence in the results given its higher response rate, and has shown an increase in positive responses in some outcome areas. The views of prison staff and the project's management corroborate the survey's findings.

### Delivering in a challenging environment

There is no doubt that delivering a project such as this within a prison institution represents a significant challenge. Those working in and with the prison estate are well-versed in those challenges, and many of these have been reflected in the feedback we have received from prison staff. In many cases, the pilot has not been in a position to resolve those challenges (such as staff shortages, regime issues, prisoner turnover) and has simply had to do its best to find ways to work around what are systemic barriers. The role of the pilot's project manager has been very important in helping individual prison staff find solutions to some of these challenges that have enabled the pilot to go ahead. The absence of such a role beyond the pilot will be a significant loss, notwithstanding The Reading Agency's production of materials that staff can access and use for themselves.

### Providing an effective model

The pilot has proven that Reading Ahead can be adapted to be an effective reading intervention for ESOL learners. Based on the evaluation evidence, the key aspects of the model that make it a success are:

- Strong, effective relationships between tutors and prison libraries
- Tutors regularly dedicating time in lessons for reading and subsequent discussion
- Education teams (managers and tutors) making a commitment to encouraging reading for pleasure, which strikes a balance between language for enjoyment and examination performance
- Libraries ensuring that suitable reading materials are available for ESOL learners
- Incentivising ESOL prisoners to take part and complete the challenge

The evaluation has noted several times over the last three years that take-up of the pilot has been heavily dependent on individual prison staff pushing it forward, and that this has often required considerable encouragement from the project management to start and sustain activity despite the evidence of positive impact on prisoners. The Reading Agency recognises that this is a potential risk for the continuation of the ESOL-specific scheme once the pilot ends. However, the pilot is, in essence, an adaptation of the Reading Ahead scheme which is well-embedded in many prisons across the country. The Reading Agency is therefore considering ways in which the ESOL scheme might be promoted alongside the 'mainstream' Reading Ahead, and is discussion with other stakeholders about how best to communicate the evidence and lessons from the pilot to the prison sector.

## Appendix: Case study from HMP Pentonville

The library at Pentonville has been successful with Reading Ahead over a number of years and has worked with the Functional Skills class to achieve this. This is the first time it has partnered with the ESOL tutors. There are two tutors and four classes. One (George) for Entry Level 2/3 and another (Nigel) for Pre-Entry/Entry 1. Each class has between four and eight students. The education provider is Novus.

In this first year of using Reading Ahead with ESOL learners, 28 participants have completed so far. Most of these are from George's higher-level classes but some (three or four) are from Nigel's lower-level classes.

### Benefits to education from running Reading Ahead

- Improvement and practise of reading and writing skills
- Engaging learners in topics that interest them
- Used as icebreaker to start lessons

Whilst George's classes have enjoyed a variety of books from the library, and also some articles, Nigel's class have had very short pieces of text, generally photocopied, to read. The library has ordered a set of the Ransom titles from the booklists but they have yet to arrive. Nigel thinks it is important to have books with high-quality photographs/short text to engage the learners in his classes. These learners:

- appreciate the Reading Ahead bag
- enjoy receiving a certificate for completing their Reading Ahead diary
- do not particularly value the dictionary given as a reward

George's class enjoy the Dark Man and Steve Sharp series from Ransom and various graphic stories. They express a preference for true life stories or non-fiction. These learners:

- show immediate interest in books
- always choose thin/short books
- appreciate the dictionary
- wish to demonstrate their learning (either by reading or showing their writing)

"Before it was very hard. I would go to an officer and it would be Yes/No. I couldn't ask for anything. Now I have been in the class and my English is good it is much easier." Rashid, ESOL learner

### The library-education partnership

In general this works well.

- Education managers are aware of Reading Ahead
- Reading Ahead completers are included in learning celebration events
- There are regular library visits for learners
- Books are provided by the library

**Barriers**

- Not always clear which students are taking part in Reading Ahead
- No easily accessible database of students' progression with Reading Ahead
- Books are not always available in the classes
- There are not always sufficient high-quality reading materials available to the classes
- High turnover of learners

**Suggestions discussed**

- Bigger posters to promote the scheme
- Bitesize texts/quotes for students to discuss
- Run Reading Ahead over a set number of weeks to enable better focus on students' progression
- More exercises aimed at Entry Level 1 students

In George's class Reading Ahead is used at the beginning of the lesson. At Pentonville learners arrive at different times so the class is slow to start. This allows students to come in and start reading straightaway, though it might make it harder for those that arrive late consistently.