

Reading Ahead 2018-19 Evaluation Report



The Reading Agency

**READING
AHEAD**



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

**THE
READING
AGENCY**

Contents

1. Foreword.....	3
2. Executive Summary.....	4
3. About Reading Ahead	6
4. Reach	6
5. Evaluation Method	7
6. Profile of participants	9
7. Impact on participants.....	12
7.1 Attitude to reading	13
7.2 Reading behaviour	14
7.3 Confidence about reading.....	15
7.4 Shared enjoyment of reading	16
7.5 Understanding of how to find reading materials.....	18
7.6 Intellectual outcomes	20
8. Impact on organisations	22
8.1 Public libraries.....	22
8.2 Learning providers	24
8.3 Prisons.....	25
8.4 Workplaces	26
9. Programme implementation	27
10. Conclusion.....	28

1. Foreword

One in three adults in the UK do not regularly read for pleasure. One in six adults in the UK find reading difficult. This has a huge impact from increasing poor health, pressure on the economy from loss of earnings and increased welfare spending. Reading changes lives and the Reading Ahead programme plays a key role in addressing the national adult literacy crisis in the UK through inspiring emergent readers. Once you start to enjoy reading you want to continue. And as you read on, you learn new words and ways of using them, enter new worlds of imagination and information and become a reader.

Our annual Reading Ahead programme is designed to engage people in reading for pleasure, often for the first time, which in turns helps them to improve their language and literacy skills. A simple tool, it invites them to pick six reads of their choice (not just books but shorter texts such as poems, magazine and newspaper articles and website) and record, rate and review them in a reading diary in order to get a certificate.

This report shows that Reading Ahead continues to reach and benefit an extremely wide range of participants across age groups, backgrounds and occupations. Over 240 organisations took part this year, and more than 70 organisations gained awards, reflecting the hard work taking place across the country and the shared determination to create a society of readers.

It has been great to see a growing number of partnerships involved in the programme with sectors joining together to share resources and knowledge. This has been particularly evident through the increasing use of Reading Ahead to support ESOL learners with 67% of learning providers and 37% of libraries partnering with ESOL tutors to run Reading Ahead over the past year. We have begun to evaluate our work as a language learning tool more specifically through our evaluation of Reading Ahead as part of an ESOL curriculum in prisons, generously funded by The Bell Foundation. That evaluation report can be found by following [this link](#).

We're pleased to report that 30,048 young people and adults were reached through Reading Ahead in 2018/19: 12,865 through learning providers, 9,180 in prisons, 6,570 through public libraries and their partners and 1,104 in workplaces with the support of trade unions. Our evaluation findings illustrate the diverse and positive impact that reading has and your work on Reading Ahead has resulted in participants saying they enjoy reading more; feel more confident about reading and feel that their reading skills have improved.

As ever our thanks go to staff in public libraries, learning organisations, prisons and workplaces who make it possible for such a range of people to take part in Reading Ahead. Now about to start its 12th year, this simple but powerful incentive scheme has retained its power to engage and to spur people on to prove to themselves that they can be a reader and actually enjoy it.

The Reading Agency

2. Executive Summary

- Reading Ahead aims to encourage those who find reading difficult to explore reading for pleasure and improve their skills at the same time.
- This report is based on the Reading Agency's surveys of participants and organisations involved in Reading Ahead in 2018-19. Participants completing the 'after' survey tend to be those who are already drawn to reading rather than those self-reporting low literacy and language skills. All the surveys can be found on the [Reading Ahead page of our Resources database](#).
- The most noteworthy impact on the 125 people who completed an 'after' survey is as follows:
 - a. Increased enjoyment of reading: 82% of respondents say they enjoy reading more due to taking part in Reading Ahead.
 - b. Increased reading confidence: 77% of respondents say they feel more confident about reading because of taking part in Reading Ahead.
 - c. People reading more: 77% report reading more often because of taking part in Reading Ahead
 - d. Improved reading skills: 76% of respondents feel that their reading skills have improved as a result of taking part in Reading Ahead.

'I hadn't picked up a book since I was 14 years old. Now when I'm out I buy books and read in my spare time.' –Participant who completed Reading Ahead

- Organisations running Reading Ahead echo the improvements identified by participants:
 - 91% think the programme has increased their participants' confidence in reading;
 - 87% report an increase in enjoyment;
 - 85% felt participants were reading more;
 - 84% felt it improved their literacy skills;
 - 76% said it helped them to talk more about reading;
 - 81% felt that it had enhanced their reading skills in particular;
 - 79% said it inspired them to use libraries more often.

'From first meeting the participants, to how they were at our celebration event showed a huge development in many of them. They were much more confident, talked about what they had read and reading with enthusiasm.' –Organisation running Reading Ahead

- The gender distribution among participants overall and by sector is a slightly more even split than in previous years. Overall, about half (49%) are female and half (51%) male. The split varies across the sectors; whereas 95% of participants in prisons are male, this drops to 45% in colleges and other learning organisations, 33% in workplaces and 32% in public libraries with female participants in the majority in these sectors.
- Reading Ahead continues to reach a wide range of age groups. Young people between 16 and 24 predominate in learning organisations (43%) whereas slightly older age groups (20-24) are in the majority in workplaces (38%) and slightly older still (25-44) in the majority in public libraries (35%) and prisons (46%).
- Use of Reading Ahead by people from minority ethnic backgrounds increases every year across all sectors. This is particularly the case in learning organisations and public libraries where only 30% and 39% respectively are White British compared to 77% in workplaces. The remainder includes people from a mix of backgrounds, many of whom will be fluent in English but others who are learning English as a second or additional language and who benefit from reading texts in English as part of Reading Ahead.
- Organisations are using an ever-increasing variety of reading materials in addition to books to deliver Reading Ahead, demonstrating the value of a broad definition of reading in order to engage people in the programme. Magazines are now used by 82% of organisations across all sectors (up from 64%), newspapers by 66% (up from 53%) and audio books by 40% (up from 31%).
- Almost nine in ten organisations (87%) anticipate running Reading Ahead again in 2019-20.

‘This work is vital – it changes and empowers lives.’ –Organisation running Reading Ahead

3. About Reading Ahead

One in three adults in the UK do not regularly read for pleasure. One in six adults in the UK find reading difficult. The effects of this have a huge impact on people’s lives, including increasing poor health, pressure on the economy from loss of earnings and increased welfare spending.¹ Reading changes lives and the Reading Ahead programme plays a key role in addressing the national adult literacy crisis in the UK through inspiring emergent readers.

Reading Ahead aims to encourage those who find reading difficult to explore reading for pleasure and improve their skills at the same time. Participants choose six reads (short texts such as poems, magazine and newspaper articles and website count as well as books) and record, review and rate them in a small reading diary. Those completing their six reads receive a certificate and the opportunity to enter prize draws at local and national level. Prisoners who complete Reading Ahead also receive a pocket dictionary or a writing or spelling guide thanks to the generosity of the charity Give a Book.

Delivered by The Reading Agency through public libraries, adult and community learning, FE and sixth form colleges, prisons and workplace across the UK, Reading Ahead has challenged participants to start their reading journeys and build their identity as readers since 2008.²

4. Reach

In 2018-19, **30,048 participants** were reached through Reading Ahead through the support of **241 delivery organisations**.

A total of 14,448 participants completed Reading Ahead by reading and reviewing at least six books each, indicating that at least 86,688 books were read this year.

Reading Ahead 2018-19	Organisations taking part	Total starters	Total completers	Completion rate
Prisons	90	9,180	5,040	55%
Public libraries	50	6,435	3,015	47%
Learning providers	61	13,329	5,737	43%
Workplaces	40	1,104	656	59%
Total	241	30,048	14,448	48%

¹ [Reading Facts](#), The Reading Agency, 2019

² The programme was known as the Six Book Challenge until 2015, when it was renamed to ‘Reading Ahead’ to emphasise the fact that participants can read print and digital text as well as books to take part.

5. Evaluation Method

Each year, Reading Ahead evaluates the outcomes and impact of the programme for both participants and delivery organisations. Since 2017, the evaluation questions have been set in line with The Reading Agency’s [Reading Outcomes Framework Toolkit](#).

Data were generated to determine whether Reading Ahead had achieved its intended outcomes:

- Reading engagement outcomes:
 - Attitude to reading;
 - Reading behaviour;
 - Confidence about reading;
 - Shared enjoyment of reading;
 - Understanding how to find reading materials.
- Intellectual outcomes:
 - Language and literacy.

Additional data, as follows, on the programme context were generated to understand answers in context:

- The programme context:
 - Beneficiary demographics;
 - How Reading Ahead was delivered;
 - Organisations’ perspective of the delivery process.

Figure 1 Reading Outcomes Framework



Source: <http://readingoutcomes.readingagency.org.uk/>

The programme and the evaluation survey questionnaires were administered between September 2018 and August 2019. All questionnaires are available to download from the Reading Ahead page of our resources database.

All 241 organisations delivering Reading Ahead were invited to complete an online or paper survey that asked for their perspective or experience to determine how successful it was in the areas noted above. The table below shows that approximately 54% of participating organisations responded to the survey, an increase of 16 percentage points over 2017-18. Looking at organisation type, the rate and frequency was highest among prisons and learning providers and lowest among workplaces.

	Approximate number of organisations taking part	Number of organisations providing data (n)	Response rate
Public libraries (with adult and community learning)	50	21	42%
Workplaces	40	5	13%
Learning providers	61	40	66%
Prisons	90	63	70%
Total	241	129	54%

The following table shows the participant response to our surveys from different sectors. Organisations were asked to encourage their participants to complete a survey after finishing Reading Ahead to measure perceptions of change due to taking part in the programme. Questionnaires were available to complete online or in hard copy. As it is not possible to know how many questionnaires were distributed or how many individual participants were invited to complete one; as such, the response numbers are provided rather than a rate of response.

A total of 125 participants completed an 'after' survey. The highest number of responses came from those participating through learning providers (mainly further education colleges) followed by those taking part through prisons and public libraries.

	Respondents to participant 'after' survey
Learning providers	65
Prisons	25
Public libraries	24
Workplaces	3
Did not indicate	8
Total	125

As in previous years, very few responses were received from those participating in workplaces. This unequal distribution of responses must be kept in mind whilst considering the results that follow. It is also important to note that whilst some results in this report are

presented as percentages in order to summarise, the low number of responses means that only broad statements about trends can be made.

6. Profile of participants

Participating organisations were asked to collect and report demographic data on participants including gender, age and ethnic background.

Gender

Overall, 49% of participants identified as female and 51% as male. However, in all sectors apart from prisons, more of the participants identified as female than male and in prisons almost all participants identified as male. Overall, 17 participants identified as trans. This gender distribution is in line with previous years by overall and by sector.

	Female	Male	Trans
Public libraries	67%	32%	0%*
Workplaces	67%	33%	0%
Learning providers	55%	45%	0%*
Prisons	5%	95%	0%*
All sectors	49%	51%	0%*

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: ‘*’ indicates a percentage greater than 0 and less than 0.5.

Age

Reading Ahead continues to reach a wide range of age groups. Young people between 16 and 24 predominate in learning providers (43%); whereas participants aged 25-44 are in the majority in public libraries (35%) and prisons (46%). Workplace participation is fairly evenly split across the 20-64 age ranges, reflecting the diversity of industries that this sector engages.

While this age distribution is broadly in line with previous years, some sector-specific changes were identified in 2018-19: There was a 4 percentage point increase in 16-19-year-olds and 6 percentage point increase in 25-44-year-olds taking part in prisons as compared with 2017-18. Learning providers saw participation among 16-19-year-olds fall by 7 percentage points, but grow by 3 percentage points among those aged 25-44 and 45-64.

	16-19 years	20-24 years	25-44 years	45-64 years	65-74 years	75+ years	All participants
Public libraries	24%	6%	35%	28%	5%	2%	100%
Workplaces	2%	38%	26%	33%	1%	0%	100%
Learning providers	43%	18%	28%	10%	0%*	0%*	100%**
Prisons	6%	12%	46%	27%	7%	2%	100%**
All sectors	19%	19%	34%	25%	4%	1%	100%**

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: '*' indicates a percentage greater than 0 and less than 0.5.

NB: '**' indicates that figures do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Ethnicity

Use of Reading Ahead by people from minority ethnic backgrounds is consistently high. This is particularly the case in learning providers and public libraries where only 30% and 39% respectively are White British compared to 77% in workplaces. The remainder includes people from a mix of backgrounds, many of whom will be fluent in English but others who are learning English as a second or additional language and who benefit from reading texts in English as part of Reading Ahead.

	White British	Other white	Asian/ British Asian	Black/ Black British	Chinese	Mixed/ dual heritage	Other ethnic group	All participants
Public libraries	39%	17%	21%	11%	1%	2%	9%	100%
Workplaces	77%	5%	15%	1%	1%	1%	1%	100%*
Learning providers	30%	18%	16%	15%	2%	5%	15%	100%*
Prisons	57%	11%	8%	13%	1%	6%	4%	100%
All sectors	51%	13%	15%	10%	1%	4%	7%	100%*

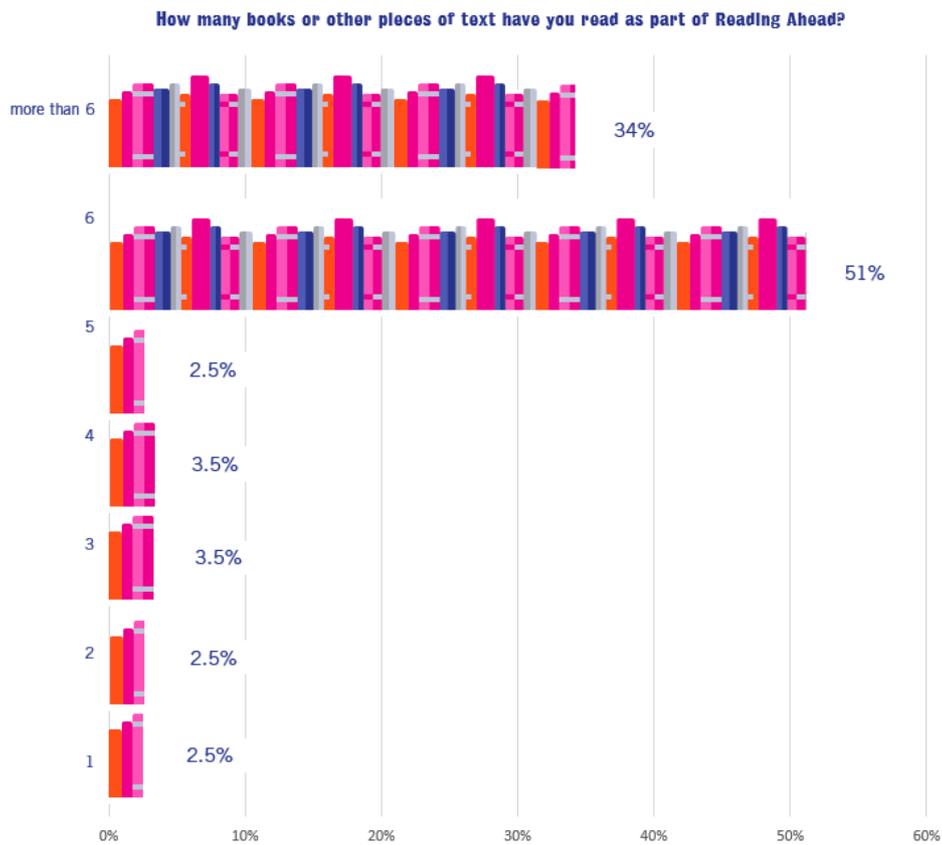
Source: Survey of organisations

NB: '*' indicates that figures do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Reading behavior as part of Reading Ahead

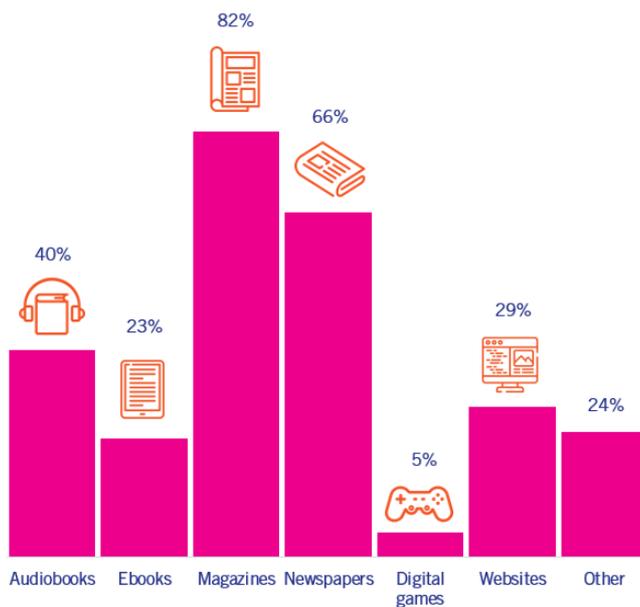
Participants responding to the survey tended to read 6 or more texts (85%). This is much higher than the average completion rate (48%), which may be explained in part by the likelihood of organisations encouraging only completers to fill in the survey rather than all those who took part in Reading Ahead.

It is interesting to note, however, that 34% of respondents reported reading more than six books or other pieces of text, indicating that Reading Ahead's challenge 'goal' of six reads fulfills its aim of marking the start of participants' reading journeys. It is important to caveat this with the possibility of self-selection bias leading more enthusiastic participants to complete the survey, thus further accounting for the higher number of texts read.



Participants chose a range of reading materials, including audiobooks, ebooks, games, and websites, with magazines and newspapers the most common format choices outside of books. Responses to the option of 'other' were primarily poems and poetry collections.

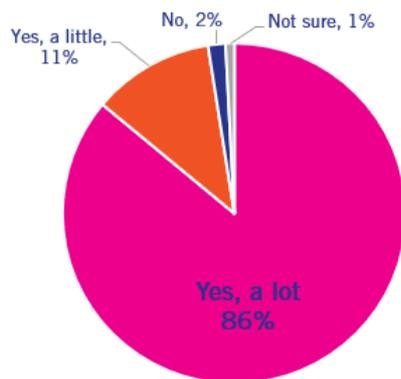
Reading materials used as part of Reading Ahead (other than books)



7. Impact on participants

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience of Reading Ahead, with 97% indicating that they enjoyed taking part in the programme.

Have you enjoyed taking part in Reading Ahead?



As noted in the methodology section, this evaluation also explores the impact of taking part in Reading Ahead on participants' reading journey. The results that follow present the perceived change recorded by participants and organisations that has occurred among participants in the following areas due to participating in Reading Ahead. While the data available and other potentially influencing factors that cannot be controlled for prevent us from being able to confidently say that these changes are due to Reading Ahead, they represent participant and organisational *perceptions* of change due to taking part in the programme.

- Attitude to reading;
- Reading behaviour;
- Confidence about reading;
- Shared enjoyment;
- Understanding how to find reading materials;
- Intellectual outcomes.

Our evaluation findings illustrate the diverse and positive impact that Reading Ahead has on participants: 82% of participants say they enjoy reading more; 77% feel more confident about reading and 76% feel that their reading skills have improved.

7.1 Attitude to reading

There was largely a positive response from participants and organisations as to whether reading enjoyment had increased because of taking part in Reading Ahead.

Participants' perspective

The table below shows that the majority (82%) of responding participants agree that they enjoy reading more due to taking part in Reading Ahead.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I enjoy reading...

	A lot more	A little more	About the same	A little less	A lot more	All responses
Responses	62%	20%	14%	3%	0%	118
	82%					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question

Participant remarked on the ways that participation in Reading Ahead sparked or increased their enjoyment of reading:

‘Taking part has re-acquainted me with reading, a pastime I had overlooked for a while. I am pleased to have rediscovered books.’

‘Because of the situation I am currently in reading ahead, it has helped me through the oncoming days and helped the days go quite quickly.’

‘Helped me pass my cell time more enjoyably.’

Organisations' perspective

Organisations echoed participant views, as 87% of responding organisations reported witnessing an increase in enjoyment of reading among participants.

Organisations witnessing increased enjoyment of reading among participants

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	All responses
After	42%	45%	12%	0%	0%	99
	87%					

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Organisations frequently commented on the connection between enjoyment of reading and wider benefits this offers, such as literacy and positive wellbeing:

‘Having the lads read takes their mind off the current situation with a lot of the time spent locked up as it gives them something to do other than TV (which they do get sick of). Making it a challenge to read something different opened up a

communication to talk about books and the different sorts. I was amazed at how the lads took this on board and got so much pleasure from the books they read.'

'From the comments in the diaries the scheme has a big impact on a large proportion of the participants, with a lot of them commenting on how the scheme had helped with their literacy; that they now enjoyed reading again, or for the first time.'

7.2 Reading behaviour

On the whole, responding participants' reported frequency of reading for pleasure is maintained throughout their involvement in Reading Ahead. However, they predict they will read more after taking part – a finding endorsed by the organisations working with them.

Participants' perspective

The table below shows around three-quarters of responding participants report reading for pleasure more often due to taking part in Reading Ahead.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I read for pleasure...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	53%	24%	20%	3%	0.9%	117
	77%					

Source: Participant survey

Responding participants reported the difference Reading Ahead has made to how frequently they read:

'It has encouraged me to start reading again and whilst reading I could be anywhere the book takes me and for that time I'm not in prison.'

'Reading Ahead gave me the chance to disconnect from the technological world and cherish the written words in a paper instead. It is highly engaging as you get rewarded for each book read, making the reader interested to read more and more. As a student, reading is part of my life, but through Reading Ahead, I made reading as my target: read at least 100 pages per day. Yes! And I did it!'

'It has encouraged me to want to read more books in the future.'

'It encouraged us to read more and spend more time with myself.'

Organisations' perspective

As shown in the table below, 85% of organisations involved in Reading Ahead that responded to the survey reported that they think individuals participating in the programme read more after taking part.

Organisations thinking participants read more after Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	All responses
After	36%	49%	15%	0%	0%	100
	85%					

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Organisations noted an increase in reading frequency for all Reading Ahead participants—including those taking part as staff members:

‘Our foundation learners love the Reading Ahead challenge and it motivates them a lot to read more.’

‘Reading Ahead has given the guys incentive to read more and got them talking about books and offering recommendations to each other.’

‘Our staff member put a £1 by every time she read a book as part of the scheme. She now has £23!’

7.3 Confidence about reading

Participants and organisations alike reported an increase in confidence since participating in Reading Ahead.

Participants’ perspective

Individual participants reported feeling more confident in reading after taking part. When asked, three-quarters (77%) of those completing the participant survey said they felt more confident with around half of those saying they felt a lot more confident. Less than a quarter (22%) reported no change.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I feel confident about reading...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
After	48%	29%	22%	1%	1%	115
	77%					

Source: Participant survey

Responding participants mentioned the change Reading Ahead has made to their confidence in reading, and particularly the impact that increased reading confidence has on developing other skills, for example:

‘Reading a book help me to learn a new words and give me more confidence to talk and write short stories.’

‘Makes me much more confident about reading and teach me some new words.’

‘Overall, the difference taking part in Reading Ahead that has made to me is that it has verbally and non verbally improved communication and interaction skills and developed confidence levels.’

Organisations’ perspective

As shown in the table below, nine out of ten organisations involved in Reading Ahead that responded to the survey (91%) reported that they had witnessed an increase in confidence among individuals participating in the programme.

Organisations reporting participants’ confidence has increased after Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	All responses
After	45%	46%	9%	0%	0%	98
	91%					

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Organisations remarked in particular on the relationship between staff confidence in reading and participant reading confidence, and the ways Reading Ahead encourages increased confidence amongst both groups:

‘We all enjoy delivering the reading scheme to our learners, and seeing their confidence and learning abilities grow whilst gaining the pleasure of reading.’

‘Part of whole organisational drive to increase reading for pleasure. We set up a small library in our staff room to encourage staff to borrow/swap books including leaving reviews on bookmarks if they wished. The more confident our staff are with reading then it helps them with our students, which in turn gives them more confidence.’

7.4 Shared enjoyment of reading

As a result of taking part in Reading Ahead, participants involved share their enjoyment of reading with others by talking about books and reading and reading with children.

Participants’ perspective

As shown in the table below, about two-thirds of respondents reported talking about books and reading more often due to taking part in Reading Ahead.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I talk about books and reading...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	40%	25%	28%	3%	5%	110
	65%					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question. Numbers don’t add up to 100%.

Participants commented on the ways they shared reading with others, for example:
 ‘It gives me the option to discuss materials with others as recommend books.’

‘I enjoy sharing my stories with my friends.’

As indicated in the table below, about an equal proportion of respondent reported that they are either reading more frequently with children (42%) or about the same as before (44%) due to taking part in Reading Ahead.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I read with children...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	27%	15%	44%	4%	11%	108
	42%					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question. Numbers don't add up to 100%.

Responding participants commented on reading with children more:

‘Taking part in this as made me want to read more book and I am willing to try and read a book to my niece at night.’

‘It has encouraged me to read more for pleasure. It has also lead to me spending more time reading with my children, which can only be a benefit to their literacy learning!!’

‘Enjoying to read with my daughter stories and helping to her homework and to understand every word has writting to the book stories [*sic*].’

Organisations’ perspective

Three-quarters (76%) of responding organisations think participants talk about books and reading more now since completing Reading Ahead. One organisation commented further on this aspect by noting that, as a result of their increased discussions around reading as part of the scheme, ‘people feel more engaged and less socially isolated as a result’.

Organisations indicating participants talk more about books and reading after Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	All responses
After	35%	41%	23%	0%	0%	99
	76%					

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Organisations frequently noted an increase in participants talking about books and reading, for example, by giving book recommendations or talking about books they enjoyed with other participants and staff members:

‘Several men have never been asked for their opinion about a book, they now approach us to discuss their thoughts on what they are reading. Reading Ahead encourages men to have positive discussion with staff as well as improve their reading.’

‘The lads would talk about this challenge amongst themselves when in the library and recommend books to each other. They would ask the staff for recommendations too, so this was taken seriously by many.’

Spotlight on... *Creating connected communities within prison settings*

A common theme across the qualitative feedback from prisons is the capacity of Reading Ahead to encourage and foster positive connections between staff and prisoners through discussions about books and reading. These connections help staff members support prisoners more effectively, promote increased wellbeing amongst the prisoners themselves, and reinforce the wider outcomes of the programme. A selection of responses aligned to this theme are presented below:

‘Reading Ahead provides an opportunity to connect with offenders. This has led to us being able to support them more effectively. The scheme has led to men becoming involved in helping to produce articles for our library newsletter which in turn has increased personal confidence.’

‘Running the Reading Ahead allows the library staff to get to know the men better, building a better rapport with them.’

‘It provides us with the chance to verbally engage with lads that may otherwise just visit and sit in the corner.’

7.5 Understanding of how to find reading materials

Responding participants report both using the library and purchasing books more as a result of participating in Reading Ahead.

Participants’ perspective

Slightly under half (45%) of participants report that their book buying habits have increased, with a similar percentage (41%) noting that their habits have not changed.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I buy books...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	22%	23%	41%	7%	7%	107
	45%					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question.

In addition, one respondent reported a move back to buying paper books:

‘I hadn’t picked up a book since I was 14 years old. Now when I’m out I buy books and read in my spare time.’

Book borrowing habits have increased overall. About two-thirds of participants say they borrow books from the library more often because of taking part in Reading Ahead.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I borrow books from the library...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	46%	21%	26%	3%	4%	113
	67%					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question.

Responding participants commented on their increased use of the library:

‘It has made me go to the library more. I am more confident about picking up a book.’

‘I like learning to go to the library using my Libraries card. I borrow books to sit in the library reading a book.’

Organisations’ perspective

Organisations also think participants are using the library more often since Reading Ahead – 79%, remaining in line with results from 2017-18.

Organisations thinking participants use the library more often since Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	All responses
After	34%	45%	21%	0%	0%	98
	79%					

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Some organisations commented on the ways Reading Ahead promoted use of the library for pleasure and leisure in addition to use for work or information, while others noted that the programme in some cases encouraged family library use:

‘Reading Ahead has encouraged learners to use the library not just for their college work, but for their own interest.’

‘We have seen that people are now regular library users, and they have brought their children in to join the library.’

7.6 Intellectual outcomes

Overall, literacy skills, reading ability and participants’ attitude to reading have all increased.

Participants’ perspective

As shown in the table below, responding participants report increased reading skills, with over three-quarters (77%) saying they feel they have better reading skills as a result of taking part in Reading Ahead. As with perceived enjoyment of reading, this relatively high figure for reading skills may be due to more confident readers and English language learners completing questionnaires, where reading skills could have increased alongside activity that may not be directly tied to the scheme.

Because of taking part in Reading Ahead, I feel I have good reading skills...

	A lot more	A bit more	About the same	A bit less	A lot less	All responses
Responses	52%	25%	19%	2%	3%	114
	<i>77%</i>					

Source: Participant survey

NB: Not all responding participants answered every question. Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Respondents commented on their improved reading ability; this was particularly the case for participants who identified themselves as non-native English speakers:

‘Finally, I started read in English and I really enjoy it!’

‘First I improved my pronunciation, learn new words and also I learn that how I can do normal conversation to other people and which easy word to understand others who do not understand my language. I am not afraid to talk anybody who wants to talk me in English.’

‘I can now read some books written in English, plus newspapers and magazines. Before coming into prison I only read Urdu.’

Organisations’ perspective

Responding organisations noticed a positive change in participants’ literacy skills. 84% reported that they have improved since Reading Ahead which is in line with previous years.

Organisations thinking participants' literacy skills have improved since Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	All responses
After	32%	52%	16%	0%	0%	96
	84%					

Source: Survey of organisations. NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

When asked about any improvements among specific literacy skills of participants, more organisations (81%) agreed that reading skills had improved than any other. This was followed by reported improvements in communication skills (70%) and vocabulary skills (59%). Written skills were harder for organisations to judge; 51% of organisations said they had improved and 48% said they were unsure.

One organisation specifically noted the difficulty of assessing change in writing ability, shedding some light on this aspect: 'Writing ability is difficult to gauge as sometimes the men only write a very short comment in their diary. However these same men are more often more than happy to discuss at length and in great detail the book they have just read.'

Organisations thinking particular literacy skills of participants have improved since Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree	All responses
Communication (speaking, listening, discussing)	28%	42%	28%	1%	0%	95
Reading (word recognition and comprehension)	34%	47%	18%	1%	0%	97
Writing (composition, spelling and grammar)	20%	31%	48%	1%	0%	94
Vocabulary (spoken or written)	22%	37%	39%	1%	0%	94

Source: Survey of organisations. NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

In addition, over two-thirds (68%) of organisations think that participants' attitude to learning overall has improved, holding steady with 2017-18.

Organisations thinking participants' attitude to learning has improved since Reading Ahead

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	All responses
After	24%	44%	32%	0%	0%	96
	68%					

Source: Survey of organisations. NB: Not all organisations answered every question.

Responding organisations noted specific benefits of the programme on wider attitudes to and motivation for learning:

‘The Reading Ahead challenge will have improved all these skills, as reading naturally enhances them. But with the extra motivation and encouragement from the challenge, many participants will have read more than usual and therefore their skills would be further enhanced.’

‘From the end quotes in the diaries it would appear that keeping a diary of what they have read is incentive enough for some participants; quite a few saw this as a hugely enjoyable task rather than a challenge.’

8. Impact on organisations

Overall the response of organisations delivering Reading Ahead shows the experience to be positive; organisations want to run the programme again. The table below shows that overall this was the case for 87% of organisations and is a commonly held view in each sector participating.

Organisations anticipating running Reading Ahead again

	Anticipate running Reading Ahead again	All responding organisations
Public libraries	12	18
Workplaces	3	4
Learning providers	23	26
Prisons	49	52
All sectors	87	100
All sectors %	87%	100%

The experience of each sector is presented in more detail below.

8.1 Public libraries

Reading Ahead has increased public library membership this year; 18% of individuals participating through a public library joined it to take part, dropping off from a high in 2017-18 (30%) but on par with levels in previous years, including 2016-17 (19%).³ Fifteen out of the 20 responding public library services reported at least one new member, increasing to more than 78 new members in one case.

Public libraries commented that their experience helped them to deliver universal and core offers more effectively:

‘The Reading Ahead programme hugely helps with obtaining new joiners who then become active borrowers. This is one of the main KPIs. It enhances our partnership with adult colleges and adult education organisations.’

³ Two libraries reported recruiting over 200 new members each in 2017-18, likely skewing the results higher than those typically reported.

‘We use Reading Ahead to help us target our work with hard to reach groups. It strengthens our inclusion offer. We have noticed that with funding cuts to adult learning there are people who have very few options when it comes to improving skills – Reading Ahead helps fill this gap.’

‘Transfer of knowledge about suitable reading material to customers and issues of books. Link to ESOL classes, tutors and other organisations to promote library services. Increase in membership.’

Reading Ahead is embedded within the overall action/delivery plan for just under nine in ten (89%) responding public library services, down slightly from 100% in 2017-18. To deliver the programme the libraries reported working with a range of partners. Adult education organisations were the most commonly reported (14), followed by ESOL providers (7), groups with disabilities (5), FE Colleges (4) and schools (3).

Partners public libraries worked with to deliver Reading Ahead

Partners	Respondents
Adult education	14
ESOL providers	7
Groups with disabilities	5
FE college	4
Schools	3
Sixth form college	2
Mental health groups	2
Workplaces	2
Children’s centres	1
Sports clubs	1
Housing groups	1
WEA	1
Family learning	0
Other	4

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: More than one response possible. Total number of responding public library services = 18.

Some libraries described the value of Reading Ahead in developing partnerships:

‘This is a great partnership between the library service and local WEA, adult education and ESOL providers in particular.’

‘I really enjoy bringing the Reading Ahead programme to new learners at our Adult Community College and ESOL groups, I feel they really benefit from it and enjoy receiving a certificate for their efforts. We try to make this a special event at their classrooms.’

‘It has strengthened ties with our local college, the tutors in ESOL and childcare classes were eager for their students to gain an appreciation of what the library service does and how it can help them.’

Many public library services have linked their delivery of Reading Ahead to other Reading Agency programmes. Programmes cited include Quick Reads (cited by 14 out of 15), Reading Well Mood Boosting Books (2 out of 15), Reading Well Books on Prescription (2 out of 15), World Book Night (2 out of 15) and Summer Reading Challenge (1 out of 15).

8.2 Learning providers

Almost all learning providers (21 out of 25) reported that Reading Ahead has strengthened their libraries' offer to learners and 40% said it had done so a lot. One learning provider elaborated on the impact they had experienced across the organisation:

'It has helped us forge stronger links with the ESOL students and tutors. More students have been using the learning resources centre for more things, as well as borrowing more books than previous years. It has helped up promote the literacy agenda to both students and staff. There has been a buzz about reading. All the participants found it worthwhile and enjoyable. 1 foundation student did the challenge twice.'

When asked, over half of all responding providers (16 out of 26) said that they include Reading Ahead in their action/delivery plans. Providers reported how Reading Ahead has been embedded into their organisation's offer and course delivery:

'Discussing the books in a small, supportive group gave [Level 1 readers] confidence and enabled them to discuss new subjects such as plot and character, as well as picking out some of the subjects we cover in FS English Language such as apostrophes, the use of capital letters, speech marks, adjectives, etc.'

'Tours of the library and Reading Ahead promotion was delivered during our induction period so every student was made aware of the challenge during the first two weeks of their college course.'

Providers work with a small number of partners to deliver Reading Ahead in their college or school. The most commonly cited were the college library, ESOL tutors and functional skills tutors.

Partners learning providers worked with to deliver Reading Ahead

Partners	Respondents
College library	20
ESOL tutors	20
Functional skills tutors	16
Supported learning tutors	10
GCSE tutors	7
Public library	5
Family learning tutors	0
Other	2

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: More than one response possible. Total number of responding learning providers = 27.

Some providers link Reading Ahead with other Reading Agency programmes, commonly Quick Reads (21 of 25 responding providers). Sixteen link delivery of Reading Ahead with World Book Night, eight said Reading Well Books on Prescription, seven said Reading Well Mood Boosting Books and one said the Summer Reading Challenge.

Providers reported that linking Quick Reads to the scheme was of particular benefit to their delivery of Reading Ahead:

‘The Quick Read books were used by a couple of the learners and were absolutely wonderful. One of them had never read a book of that length before and managed to finish about 10 in the space of the year.’

‘As most of our participants were ESOL students, they used the quick reads and books aimed at reluctant readers.’

8.3 Prisons

Forty-seven out of 51 prisons reported that Reading Ahead has strengthened their prison library’s offer to offenders and 24 said it had done so a lot:

‘Reading Ahead always has a positive impact on prisoners. Many prisoners are “repeat” customers and have taken part before. We are regularly asked about it and it has a very strong presence within the prison library.’

‘Reading Ahead is invaluable to prisoners and we have received feedback to this effect. As a library service, it has helped us to support prisoners to develop their reading and foster a love of reading.’

‘It has been a perfect promotional tool for encouraging people to read and once they have completed the challenge, they have stated how much they enjoyed it and made them comfortable in their reading ability.’

Thirty of those prisons responding now include Reading Ahead in their action/delivery plans. A number reported how widely embedded the programme is across the prison, for example:

‘Reading Ahead provides a great way for the whole prison to get involved in an event and try and achieve a shared goal. It also provides a unique opportunity to engage in conversations away from the normal prison routine.’

‘Launch Events: The whole prison acknowledge that the project exists and help run it. Visit to literacy classes: without this tutors would not be interested. Author visits: Very important, it promotes the project and motivate prisoners to read.’

‘ESOL class visits proved once again to be a surprisingly effective way of promoting this, simply because we have a number of very engaging and effective teachers working with these prisoners, and the prisoners in turn seem more than usually motivated.’

Reading Ahead is enabling prisons to establish more partnerships within their prison; 34 out of 53 prisons report this. As shown in the table below, prisons are predominantly working with their libraries (45), education tutors (38) and the wings (14) to deliver Reading Ahead.

Partners prisons worked with to deliver Reading Ahead

Partners	Respondents
Prison library	45
Education tutors	38
Wings	14
Healthcare	8
Family visits	6
Workshops	5
Resettlement	5
Mental health	4
Other	9

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: More than one response possible. Total number of responding prisons = 53.

In addition, one prison commented on the potential broader impact of the partnerships and connections forged through Reading Ahead:

‘It has helped to promote reading and books in general for the Library and has been introduced as part of our induction programme too. It includes members of the Library and helps us to interact with more of the prison community. I believe it shows that commitment the Library has in helping in the Reduction of Re-Offending and shows active contribution. It has been brilliant to promote and the whole team has thoroughly enjoyed it.’

Prisons link delivery of Reading Ahead with other Reading Agency programmes, as well as with other reading initiatives delivered by charities also working to support reading and literacy in prisons. Of 47 prisons that responded to this question, Quick Reads is linked by 32 and World Book Night by 21. Summer Reading Challenge (7), Reading Well Books on Prescription (6) and Reading Well Mood Boosting Books (4) were also linked by prisons. External reading initiatives included Turning Pages (linked by 27) and Prison Reading Groups (linked by 21).

8.4 Workplaces

The six workplaces that to the survey included trade unions, NHS branches, a police union branch, and an insurance company. These represent a sixth of all workplaces delivering Reading Ahead.

Among the four workplaces that responded to the question, three said it improved their learning offer to staff. Half the workplaces said Reading Ahead is embedded in their delivery/action plans. This embedding of the programme within the organisation’s calendar is reflected in comments, for example:

‘We have run it for the past 4 years and it is so positive for everyone taking part.’

‘Part of our year and staff enjoy taking part alongside our students.’

Workplaces worked with a small number of partners to deliver Reading Ahead. As can be seen in the table below this includes unions, public libraries and workplace learning centres.

Partners workplaces worked with to deliver Reading Ahead

Partners	Respondents
Trade union	3
Public library	3
Workplace learning centre	1
HR department	1
Local learning provider, e.g. college, WEA	0
Other	1

Source: Survey of organisations

NB: More than one response possible. Total number of responding workplaces = 4.

Participating companies also remarked that their involvement in the programme achieved added benefits, for example:

‘If are staff are reading more it is increasing their confidence which then helps with any CPD [continuing professional development] they may do and they then pass on their confidence and pleasure of reading to our student and their families.’

9. Programme implementation

Organisations were asked about the activities they ran to deliver Reading Ahead and information about the volunteers the programme relied upon at the local level.

Responding organisations carried out a range of activities as part of Reading Ahead as shown in the table below. Of all activities, celebration events were the most common followed by tours of the library and launch events. Reading group sessions proved consistently popular across organisations as well.

Activities run by organisations as part of Reading Ahead

	Outreach visits to recruit	Launch events	Visits to literacy classes	Tours of the library	Author events	Reading group sessions	Celebration events	Activities with sports clubs	Other	Total number of activities
Public libraries	56%	25%	50%	81%	31%	38%	75%	13%	13%	424
Workplaces Learning providers	25%	50%	0%	0%	50%	25%	75%	0%	25%	22
Prisons	36%	48%	36%	56%	32%	40%	64%	16%	16%	613
All sectors	56%	44%	47%	50%	44%	58%	50%	N/A	19%	995
										2,054

Source: Survey of organisations

Organisations were asked if volunteers helped to deliver Reading Ahead. Twelve prisons, five learning providers and three public libraries said they had. Workplaces involved were not asked about volunteers. Volunteers held a range of roles from coordinating the programme, promotion, running reading sessions with participants and supporting them to fill in their diaries and provided activities or entertainment at launch and awards ceremonies. Some organisations elaborated on the role or support provided by volunteers:

‘All our reading group sessions were delivered with the help of volunteers – they normally volunteer for this particular role which has an all-year-round, on-going commitment. We just incorporate R.A. into our existing reading group sessions program each year – works really well.’

‘A beauty student volunteered at the awards ceremony, doing face painting for the students’ children.’

While activities and events were commonly run by prisons as part of Reading Ahead, several responding organisations remarked on the significance of the Reading Ahead materials themselves, with some noting the potential for additional impact of completion certificates in particular:

‘They all LOVED receiving a certificate, with one participant claiming that his wad of certificates gained whilst in prison, including his one for Reading Ahead, helped prove his exemplary behaviour whilst in prison and lessened his sentence (hard to evidence I know!).’

‘Classes came to the library as part of their timetable and we promoted it well. ESOL joined in. The dictionary was a huge incentive. For the lower level readers getting a certificate was the best thing about it.’

10. Conclusion

Continuing the trend, Reading Ahead 2018-19 has proved to be a success for the participants and organisations who responded to our surveys. All outcomes have been achieved to varying degrees.

Individual participants are reading more frequently and enjoying reading more because of taking part in the programme. They are also reaping the benefits of an increased confidence in reading or in other aspects of their life such as improved literacy skills, vocabulary and attitude to learning generally, and exposure to a greater range of reading material. We are continuing to investigate ways to increase the response from the full range of participants in next year’s Reading Ahead programme.

The benefits of Reading Ahead for organisations are such that more than half have embedded the programme into their action/delivery plans. They not only reported benefits to participants but to their organisations too. The majority said that their library or learning offer had been strengthened by Reading Ahead and responding public library services consistently gain new members as part of the programme.

It is perhaps no surprise therefore that an almost nine in ten organisations anticipate running Reading Ahead again on the back of their involvement so far. As one organisation summed up:

‘It contributes a clear and beneficial framework to develop our users’ reading, literacy and confidence skills in an interesting and inclusive way that I think would be difficult to achieve on our own. For the participants it appears to be as much a confidence boost as a literacy one. It has opened up new possibilities, worlds, ideas for those taking part. [...] It is this domino effect that reading can initiate that is the real value of the Reading Ahead scheme.’