

Confidence All Round

**The Impact on Emergent Adult Readers of Reading
for Pleasure through Libraries**

November 2005



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Confidence All Round: The Impact on Emergent Adult Readers of
Reading for Pleasure Through Libraries

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This report explores the individual and societal **outcomes** for emergent readers from libraries' creative reading activity in partnership with the Skills for Life sector. The fit of these outcomes is mapped against the Shared Priorities and the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum to provide **evidence** of how the approach can help libraries and the Skills for Life sector achieve their objectives.

Recommendations are made for enhancing the effectiveness of libraries' creative reading activity at both a strategic and tactical level.

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Chelmsley Wood Surestart Centre, Solihull

Lothian Road Day Centre, Middlesbrough

Mid-Essex Community College, Brentwood

North Luton Adult Education / Lea Manor Community College

Stockport Family Centre

Swadlincote Adult Learning Centre, Derbyshire

Wreake Valley Community College, Syston, Leicestershire

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1 Introduction

The national Vital Link programme is building libraries' capacity to motivate and sustain Skills for Life students and to attract more adults with low literacy levels into learning. Its main target audience is emergent readers – those adults whose literacy skills are at pre-GCSE level but who are just getting into choosing and reading books for enjoyment. Its main focus is on harnessing the energy of libraries' creative reading activity or 'reader development' and encouraging libraries to work in partnership with the Skills for Life sector.

Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign, the Vital Link is part of the Books, Reading and Learning strand of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being implemented by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

Morris Hargreaves McIntyre was appointed to explore the difference libraries' creative reading activity, utilising the Vital Link approach, makes to emergent adult readers.

The project is jointly funded by a consortium of MLA and the regional agencies for museums, libraries and archives in the East of England, East Midlands, North East and North West.

1.1 Research aims and objectives

The primary aim was to evaluate the impact of libraries' creative reading work with emergent adult readers using the Generic Learning Outcomes from the Inspiring Learning for All framework.

This report collects evidence about how libraries can make a difference for adult learners, by connecting:

- an enjoyment of reading
- improved skills
- motivation to continue reading and learning.

This evidence will be used to:

- Inform and improve future practice for the Vital Link programme and for libraries involved in this work with emergent adult readers.

- Provide an evidence base for advocacy to the education sector.
- Contribute to the development of the public library impact measures.

The final objective was to:

- develop a research methodology for ongoing use with the Vital Link programme as part of an Evaluation Toolkit to be available on line

The Evaluation Toolkit, including recommended outcome indicators, is being developed on the basis of the findings of this research and will be piloted with a small number of library authorities.

1.2 Sample

The impact of The Vital Link was explored with both emergent adult readers as the end users of the programme and with libraries and the Skills for Life sector as the partners delivering the programme.

To explore the full range of impacts that might potentially be achieved for emergent readers, we specifically evaluated examples of best practice from those library authorities most advanced with reader development with this group of learners. The final sample included nine groups across five government regions: East of England, East Midlands, North East, North West and West Midlands.

The term *learners* in this context is used to include those emergent adult readers at pre-GCSE level, spanning Entry Level 3, Level 1 and 2 of the National Standards, either actually in learning provision or involved in some kind of organised reading activity but not necessarily enrolled in a formal class.

A total of 59 emergent readers, nine members of library staff and seven Skills for Life tutors took part in the evaluation. The sample represented a range of different types of groups including adult learners in college settings and family learners in family centres.

Region Location	Location	Group type	Venue
East	Essex	Basic Skills	College
	Luton	Basic Skills	College
East Midlands	Derbyshire	Basic Skills	College
	Leicestershire	Basic Skills	College
North East	Middlesbrough	Basic Skills	Adult centre
	South Tyneside	Basic Skills	Family centre

North West	Barrow	Basic Skills	Library
	Stockport	Family Learning	Family centre
West Midlands	Solihull	Family learning	Family centre

Demographically, the sample profile was:

17% male, 83% female

7%-10% from minority ethnic backgrounds

Wide age range, from 21 years to 65 years

A detailed description of the sampling and methodology is appended.

1.3 Methodology

Emergent readers participated in group discussions in either their college or family learning centres. A key factor in the success of the programme is the rapport and level of trust established through the partnership between individual tutors and librarians and between the librarian and the group. Either the tutor or a member of library staff or both also participated in the session. Rather than this constraining the responses of the group in any way, we feel it made participants more comfortable with the process.

In-depth interviews were undertaken, either in person or by telephone, with tutors and librarians.

Copies of the focus group discussion plan and interview templates are appended.

1.4 Nature of the evidence

To ensure that the broadest range of potential outcomes could be identified the research with emergent readers was undertaken through qualitative research in the form of focus group discussions. The discussions were framed in the context of the Generic Learning Outcomes and potential societal outcomes, which might be affected or caused by reading for pleasure and participation in reader development activities through libraries' partnerships with the Skills for Life sector.

The research suggests that libraries' use of the Vital Link approach can potentially contribute to a range of significant outcomes for individuals, their families and wider society.

The research was not designed to provide hard quantitative measurement of the extent to which these outcomes were achieved across the sample. The overall sample of 59 emergent readers was intentionally diverse and while it does provide strong evidence of the range of outcomes it is possible for libraries' use of the Vital Link approach to achieve or to contribute to, it does not provide sub-samples of significant enough size to enable this to be robustly quantified at this stage, and was not designed to do so.

However the research does provide significant enough evidence of the range of outcomes to develop an evaluation methodology which will enable these outcomes to be quantified in the future, across the range of users, and this methodology is outlined.

Within the report the evidence is presented in the form of commentary on the outcomes identified by emergent readers, supported by verbatim quotes where they particularly illuminate the finding. At all points we have attempted to indicate the extent of significance of an outcome. We have also attempted to identify the factors that cause the outcome, whether this be a specific library activity, a Skills for Life activity or a combination of the two.

There are too many quotes from emergent readers illustrating the findings to include them all in the body of the report. Where there is a particularly apposite quote this has been included. To reflect the depth and power of some of the outcomes for particular individuals we have also included a number of small case-study vignettes.

A list of quotes, grouped by outcomes and identifying the source, is included in the separate Data Appendix. For inspiration and a sense of the strength of some of these outcomes for particular individuals, we urge you to read these.

Adult Learners with special needs taking part in Skills for Life classes at Middlesborough's Lothian Road Day Centre base their project work around visits to the library, developing key skills in the process.

'There was a book on the Titanic and we looked at the index to pick information out... we have been looking at alphabetical and chronological order and the library helped us with both of those.'

Skills for Life Tutor, Middlesborough

2 Executive summary

'I used to get shouted down but now I can stand up more for myself. Now I can say "I believe it is this way". I think it gives me confidence all round.' Adult learner, Essex

2.1 The Vital Link Approach

The national Vital Link programme is building libraries' capacity to motivate and sustain Skills for Life students and to attract more adults with low literacy levels into learning. Its main target audience is emergent readers – those adults whose literacy skills are at pre-GCSE level but who are just getting into choosing and reading books for enjoyment. Its main focus is on harnessing the energy of libraries' creative reading activity or 'reader development' and encouraging libraries to work in partnership with the Skills for Life sector.

Run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and the National Reading Campaign, the Vital Link is part of the Books, Reading and Learning strand of the Government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being implemented by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

Solihull Library's work with parents at Chelmsley Wood Surestart Centre motivates parents to take part in family activities in the library and encourages greater reading among both the parents and children involved.

'We have done courses [at the library] as well. They have done puppet making and I have been to most of those with the kids.'

'We are reading more now. My daughters... will go in and get four or five books at a time.'

Family learners, Solihull

Through libraries' use of the Vital Link approach, emergent adult readers participate in a range of reader development activity. This includes choosing their own books to read for pleasure from collections specially selected for their readability level and appeal,

analysing and discussing books, recommending titles and writing reviews and increasing their use of libraries.

2.2 The Research

The research sought to explore the outcomes of participation in libraries' creative reading activity for emergent readers in terms of:

- Learning outcomes, including increased skills, changed attitudes and values, behaviour and progression, using the framework of MLA's Generic Learning Outcomes
- Personal development outcomes around social inclusion, health and well-being and employability
- Family and societal outcomes arising from these

The research collected evidence about how libraries can make a difference for adult learners, by connecting:

- an enjoyment of reading
- improved skills
- motivation to continue reading and learning.

This evidence will be used to:

- Inform and improve future practice for the Vital Link programme and for libraries involved in this work with emergent adult readers.
- Provide an evidence base for advocacy to the education sector.
- Contribute to the development of the public library impact measures.

Fifty-nine emergent readers engaged in Skills for Life activities in both adult and family learning contexts participated in the research through focus group discussions. Nine members of library staff and seven Skills for Life tutors participated through in-depth interviews.

A quantitative assessment of the generic outcomes achieved has been undertaken and a range of specific outcomes identified. These will form the basis of a set of outcome measures to evidence the impact of libraries' use of the Vital Link approach to be piloted with libraries over the next year.

2.3 Key findings relating to Generic Learning Outcomes and Societal Outcomes

- More than three-quarters of participants in the focus groups identified evidence of:
 - related activity, behaviour and progression
 - enjoyment, inspiration and creativity from reading
 - an improvement in literacy skills
- More than half identified evidence of:
 - a change in their attitudes or values about reading, learning and libraries
 - a positive impact on their health or well-being
- More than a third identified evidence of:
 - an increase in knowledge and understanding
 - a greater sense of social inclusion
- Around a fifth identified a beneficial impact on employability

2.4 Specific Outcomes

Findings from the focus groups highlighted the following specific outcomes for emergent readers as particularly prevalent.

Enjoyment of reading

Participants report that they are either reading for pleasure for the first time or reading more frequently. Most are reading a wider range of books and all are participating in reader development activity.

Emergent readers describe their immersion in books as providing enjoyment, stress-release and escape from daily life. They also value the inspiration and support for leisure and learning activities it provides.

Most emergent readers intend to continue reading for pleasure.

Use of libraries

Those emergent readers who haven't used libraries before have a more positive of their role and value through involvement in Vital Link activity. Most respondents report new or increased library use and use of a wider range of library services. Librarians' egalitarian ethos in delivering the Vital Link approach is key to this, as are multiple library visits and the warmth of welcome received in libraries.

Visits to libraries in Syston have helped overturn negative perceptions of libraries for emergent readers taking part in Skills for Life classes at Wreake Valley Community College

'[The library's] more relaxed now. It's not as stuffy.

When I was younger

I always thought it was really quiet.'

Adult Learner, Leicestershire

Increase in skills

Improved literacy, thinking and learning skills are found to result from reading, discussing and writing about books. These skills are further reinforced by learning how to select books and how to use a library.

Change in attitudes and values

Strong personal development outcomes, resulting in significant increases in self-confidence, arise from a greater ability for self-expression, enhanced self-esteem, a sense of achievement and improved self-worth among emergent readers. The whole reader development process offered by libraries contributes to this from choosing and reading books to thinking analytically and creatively and taking part in discussions. It gives the adults involved a sense of greater independence and increased control over their own lives, leading to empowerment and self-motivation.

Emergent readers participating in the research feel that they obtain a wider view of the world and an understanding of multiple perspectives through reading and discussion around books.

Health and well-being

Respondents report that reading for pleasure gives them time out and escape from daily life and in doing this provides relaxation and stress-release.

Social inclusion

The improved social confidence of individuals, sense of independence and empowerment described above provides a platform for greater social inclusion including increased social interaction and feeling more respected by others. At a societal level this contributes to greater social connectedness.

Employability

The increased self-esteem, confidence, motivation, empowerment and skills identified by individuals are highly likely to contribute to their improved employability. However the short-term nature of this evaluation – with people who are *currently* participating in Skills for Life learning – means that it is not possible to prove direct economic impact such as improved performance at work or increased earnings because these impacts are only likely to occur in the medium to longer term.

Benefits for family life

The individual outcomes reported above can also result in benefits for families. These include family sharing of books, children reading more and the use of books as a tool to change patterns of family behaviour such as quiet times and bedtime routines.

2.5 What makes the difference?

The critical success factors for libraries' use of the Vital Link approach are:

Positioning: the approach is purposefully positioned to encourage people to read for pleasure through libraries as an enhancement to formal learning.

Egalitarian ethos: the ethos behind delivery of the Vital Link approach, which is presented simply as a group of people sharing books with the support of library and Skills for Life or other learning professionals, makes it accessible for emergent readers and enhances their sense of social inclusion.

Self-motivated and independent activity: emergent readers *choose* to engage with this activity and are responsible for their own reading.

The range of activity involved: choosing and finding appealing books, reading, analysing and discussing them with others, recommending and writing about them and visiting and using libraries, all requires emergent readers to develop and use a variety of skills, both learning and personal.

Effective resources: the range of books employed, including the Vital Link's *First Choice* collections with associated promotional and display materials, are pitched exactly at the right level and presented in the right way.

The delivery partnership between libraries and Skills for Life which creates added value for both sectors. Libraries gain access to emergent readers and non-users in a context in which they are open to the library offer. For the Skills for Life sector, libraries' use of the Vital Link approach extends and embeds emerging literacy skills. The enjoyment and achievement arising from reading for pleasure contributes to increased learning motivation.

2.6 Fit with Policy Agendas

The research showed that the outcomes arising from libraries' use of the Vital Link approach align most closely with two of the five Shared Priorities embraced in the Public Library Impact Measures.

The increased confidence, skills and self-esteem identified by emergent readers contributes clearly to the outcomes for *Promoting the Economic Vitality of Communities* and consequently indirectly to better employment opportunities.

The personal development and family outcomes identified from libraries' use of the Vital Link approach also align with the outcomes for the *Improving the Quality of Life for Children and Young People, Families at Risk and Older People*. However, the main emergent reader audience extends well beyond these target groups.

For the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum, libraries' use of the Vital Link approach contributes directly to all the outcomes identified at Entry Level 3 and Levels 1 and 2 of the curriculum, developing and embedding emergent readers' skills in:

- Listening and responding
- Speaking to communicate
- Engaging in discussion
- Reading and understanding
- Reading and obtaining information
- Writing to communicate

2.7 Recommendations

The research suggests that while libraries' use of the Vital Link approach is clearly contributing to significant outcomes for individuals, there are ways in which the impact can be enhanced. Key recommendations include:

Strategic

Embedding use of the Vital Link approach at a strategic level within libraries' and the Skills for Life sector to ensure inclusion in core delivery plans and continued funding to aid sustainability.

Extending and promoting the existing product range to ensure that both tutors and emergent readers are aware of the full range of books offered through the Vital Link's *First Choice* collection and associated ranges to include, amongst others, a wider range of fiction, more non-fiction, poetry, books for parents to share with children at different ages and books in multi-media formats.

Developing an evaluation framework to measure the impact of the Vital Link approach at a strategic policy level, at delivery level with libraries and the Skills for Life sector, and for emergent readers as the target users. This should include piloting the generic and specific outcome measures developed on the basis of the evidence from this research.

Undertaking longitudinal evaluation with individual emergent readers from the start of their learning journey through their engagement with the Vital Link approach and into the medium and longer term so that the full impact of the outcomes, especially in terms of economic impact, can be confirmed.

Delivery

Ensuring that both for libraries and the Skills for Life sector sufficient resources are allocated to partnership development, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This will enable the development of a more effective partnership to ensure maximum benefit for users and encourage sustainability of the Vital Link approach.

Training all librarians, not just those involved in delivery of the Vital Link approach, in the personal and curriculum needs of adult learners and emergent readers. Also training Skills for Life staff to integrate

use of the Vital Link approach into their teaching in order for it to contribute towards the outcomes they must achieve.

Raising awareness that some emergent readers need a lot of encouragement and support to engage fully with libraries. This could include providing a wide range of resources in non-library locations through library outreach as a stepping stone to library use.

Encouraging multiple library visits for adult learners and making engagement with the library as interactive as possible in order to build awareness and knowledge and create a sense of belonging and ownership. This engagement should include involving emergent readers in stock selection, display and development of promotional materials.

Stepping up the promotion of what the library has to offer which, for new users, can change their perceptions of libraries. Benefits include being able to experiment with book choices, ease of renewals, lack of fines wherever possible and libraries' increasing role as social, community spaces welcoming to all, including families.

3 Context

This section outlines Vital Link strategies and activities and the fit with central government, libraries' and Skills for Life policy agendas.

3.1 The Vital Link

The target beneficiaries of libraries' use of the Vital Link approach are those emergent readers between Entry Level 3 and Levels 1 and 2 of the National Standards. These are people who might be described as having functional literacy ability.

The outcomes sought for emergent readers, through libraries, are:

- more enjoyment of reading
- more confidence
- increased skills and employability
- more involvement in their community
- an improved quality of life
- increased well-being
- increased motivation and inspiration.

The Vital Link does not work directly with emergent readers but provides a framework and resources to create a partnership between the library and Skills for Life sectors. The strategy is to build libraries' capacity to support adults with intermediate skills through creative reading activity and to link this into effective literacy teaching and learning, particularly with those adults who are just getting into reading for enjoyment and interest.

Vital Link activity includes:

- Defining libraries' offer for adults with intermediate skills and developing frameworks to enable libraries to achieve this
- Development of an online implementation toolkit for the Vital Link improvement framework, focusing particularly on partnership development and engaging emergent adult readers
- Provision of mainstream stock collections for emergent readers. These consolidate fiction and non-fiction selected for adults with a

readability level of between 9 and 14 into the *First Choice* and *Got Kids? Get Reading!* collections

- Advising UK publishers on the Quick Reads list of paperback fiction and non-fiction for emergent readers to be launched for World Book Day 2006
- Provision of attractive, non-stigmatised promotional materials for emergent readers
- Resources for libraries to develop creative activities focused on reading for enjoyment and interest at the appropriate reading levels, in library or class and integrated into the curriculum
- Working closely with the BBC on its plans for the RaW adult literacy campaign to launch in autumn 2005
- Working with DfES Skills for Life Strategy Unit on a reading for pleasure campaign targeted at Skills for Life practitioners

3.2 Fit with government policies

The Vital Link ecology is framed by the Shared Priorities agreed between central and local government in 2002. The programme builds libraries' capacity to support the Government's Skills for Life strategy. The Vital Link is part of the Books, Reading and Learning strand of the government's Framework for the Future strategy for public libraries being implemented by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA).

Shared Priorities

The outcomes sought for the Vital Link's target audience support the outcomes of the seven Shared Priorities agreed between central and local government in 2002. These are intended to improve overall quality of life, particularly for the most excluded sectors of society. The five shared priorities which libraries are working to meet through the Public Library Impact Measures are as follows:

- Raising standards in schools
- Improving the quality of life for children and young people, families at risk and older people
- Promoting healthier communities
- Creating safer and stronger communities
- Promoting the economic vitality of localities

Luton Libraries' creative reading work with North Luton Adult Education's Skills for Life participants has given emergent readers tools to change patterns of family behaviour through engaging their children with reading.

***'He asks Mummy to read a book
and I used to get frustrated and say watch TV
so he doesn't go to bed till maybe 11 o'clock
because he stays up watching cartoons.
And I would stay up with him watching cartoons,
which didn't do him any good, either.
But now I can put him to bed a bit early
and he says, "read a book" and I pick up a book ...
and I say I am going to read a story and then say
night night and then he goes to sleep
... and that gives me a bit of time to myself.'***

Adult Learner, Luton

Skills for Life

Skills for Life is the government's national strategy for addressing the needs of adults with poor literacy and numeracy. It aims to improve the basic skills of 2.25m adults by 2010.¹

The Adult Literacy Core Curriculum² works to the National Standards for Adult Literacy and Numeracy. These are specified at three levels. Levels 1 and 2, corresponding to National Curriculum Levels 4 and 5, equate to GCSE level. Below this Entry Level is split into Entry Levels 1, 2 and 3. The table below illustrates this structure, showing the appropriate adult literacy level alongside the related National Curriculum and related age level.

Adult Literacy National Standard Level	National Curriculum Level
Level 2	Level 5: GCSE A*-C (Age 16)
Level 1	Level 4 / 5: GCSE D-E (Age 16)
Entry Level 3	Level 3 (Age 9)
Entry Level 2	Level 2 (Age 7)
Entry Level 1	Level 1 (Age 5)

¹ DfES (2003), *Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills – focus on delivery to 2007*, DfES

² The Basic Skills Agency (2001), *Adult Literacy Core Curriculum including Spoken Communication*, The Basic Skills Agency

Libraries' use of the Vital Link approach is focused particularly on adult learners at Entry Level 3, Level 1 and Level 2, ie 'emergent readers'. In the main they reach these people through partnership working with the Skills for Life sector.

The national standards for adult literacy³ sets out what should be taught in Skills for Life programmes, as outlined below.

Main areas	Components
Speaking and Listening	Listening and responding Speaking to communicate Engaging in discussion
Reading	Read and understand Read and obtain information
Writing	Write to communicate

At each level, the range of skills and capabilities that adults need in order to function – both at work and in society – are identified. In the Implications for Skills for Life, Section 8 in this report, we outline the expected requirements at Entry Level 3, Level 1 and Level 2.

The national standards also provide examples of the social roles and activities in which adults need literacy and numeracy in order to function independently and exercise choice within society. These include:

- Citizenship - participation in public life
- Economic activity – employability - help get work / at work
- Domestic / family life
- Leisure / enjoyment /cultural participation
- Social use of ICT

The research explores the contribution of libraries' creativity reading activity to the national standards for adult literacy and to the social roles identified.

³ Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2000), *National standards for adult literacy and numeracy*, QCA

Framework for the Future

*Framework for the Future*⁴ is the government's ten-year vision for public libraries, defining how libraries can best serve their communities in the 21st century. It aims to promote public libraries, to set out why libraries matter and to develop their capacity to improve through innovation, operational effectiveness and efficiency. The central themes of the framework are:

- Books reading and learning
- Digital citizenship
- Community and civic values

The framework also identifies the pivotal role that libraries should play in delivering the shared priorities (see above) of central and local government.

MLA has identified nine strategic objectives from the original *Framework for the Future*⁴, which are laid out in MLA's *Framework for the Future: Action Plan*⁵ according to the main themes, and are summarised below. Libraries' creative reading activity can contribute across the range of objectives but clearly makes the most significant contribution to the *Books, Reading and Learning objective* which is to 'promote literacy skills and an appetite for reading and learning'.

Building capacity to deliver transformation

1. Develop and promote the role and contribution of public libraries through a clear vision supported by effective advocacy and communication
2. Build libraries' capacity to improve through better quality of leadership and workforce skills
3. Implement innovative solutions to achieve maximum impact from available resources
4. Achieve excellent planning and quality assurance systems to ensure sustained improvement

Books, reading and learning

5. Promote literacy skills and an appetite for reading and learning

⁴ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2003), *Framework for the Future: Libraries, learning and information in the next decade*, DCMS

⁵ MLA (2004), *Framework for the Future: Action Plan 2004-06*, MLA

Digital citizenship

6. Provide access to the services people need through effective use of ICT
7. Contribute to achievement of e-government targets for service take-up and audience engagement

Community and civic values

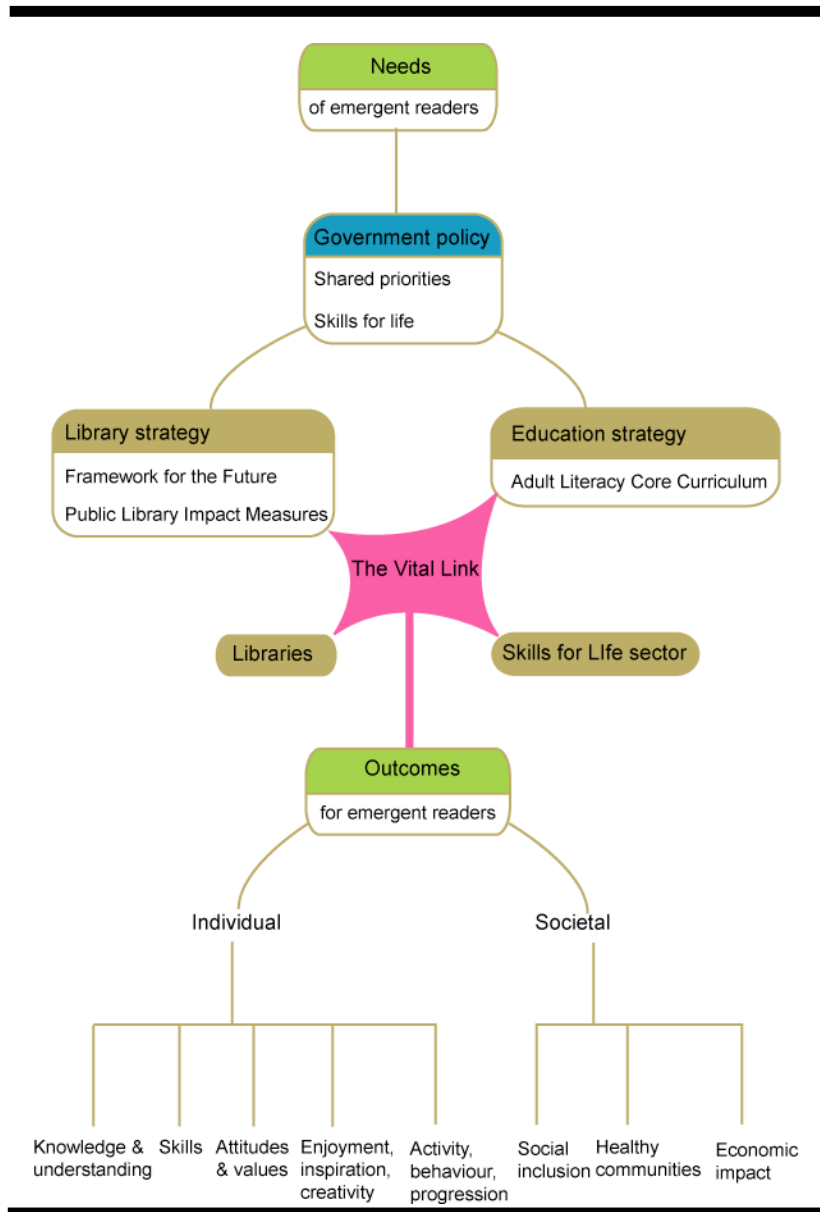
8. Deliver an inclusive service that reflects and helps build cohesive communities
9. Provide library premises that meet the needs of twenty first century communities

*Public Library Service Impact Measures*⁶ have been developed to show the value and impact of public library services on people and communities by illustrating the contribution of public libraries to the shared priorities, delivered through *Framework for the Future*. Again, the research suggests that Vital Link activities, delivered through libraries, potentially contributes to most of these measures.

⁶ MLA (2005), *Public Library Service Impact Measures – Proposals for 2005-06*, MLA

3.3 Ecology of the Vital Link

The model below outlines the complex ecology within which the Vital Link operates



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4 Our Approach

4.1 Our approach

- The evaluation focused on:
- outcomes achieved for individuals and potential subsequent outcomes for their families and society, arising from libraries' creative reading activity using the Vital Link approach
- how these outcomes fit with central government, Skills for Life and library policy agendas
- delivery of the programme by libraries and Skills for Life providers.

4.2 Individual and Societal Outcomes

Individual outcomes were explored within the framework of the *Generic Learning Outcomes* (GLOs) contained in MLA's *Inspiring Learning for All* (ILFA) framework⁷. These are all outcomes for individuals, including:

- Increase in knowledge and understanding
- Increase in skills
- Change in attitudes or values
- Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
- Evidence of activity, behaviour and progression

While these are defined as *learning outcomes*, we also explored specific personal development outcomes arising from reading for pleasure and participation in reader development activity through Skills for Life learning, including increased social inclusion, increased employability and improved health and well-being.

We also sought to determine if and how these individual outcomes ripple outwards to impact on families and society more widely, in terms of:

⁷ MLA (2005), *Inspiring Learning for All Toolkit* [online], MLA. Available from: www.inspringlearningforall.gov.uk [Accessed 20 May 2005]

- Increased social capital potentially arising from greater inclusion and social interaction of individuals
- Economic impact potentially arising from increased employability of individuals
- Healthier communities arising from improved mental and physical health of individuals

The evidence of societal level outcomes will contribute to the potential social outcome measures around healthy communities, social capital and community identity and cohesion, currently being developed by MLA.

4.3 Fit with policy agendas

To illustrate the fit between these outcomes and central government policy agendas, we have mapped the outcomes achieved through libraries' creative reading activity against the:

- Shared Priorities
- Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

4.4 Delivery Implications

Libraries are attempting to deliver their Vital Link activity in the context of MLA's *Inspiring Learning for All* (ILFA) framework. This describes the characteristics of accessible and inclusive libraries' focusing on learning, around the four themes of:

- people
- places
- policies
- partnerships.

These themes primarily represent the *ways* in which services are delivered. As far as the emergent reader is concerned all aspects of the *complete experience* contribute to these outcomes. The findings from the research with emergent readers, tutors and librarians suggests that a broader framework is needed to present the full range of implications for the Vital Link, libraries and the Skills for Life sector.

This would begin with a consideration of the market segments, **ie** *who* the Vital Link is aimed at. Any programme delivery has to be designed with their motivations, needs and wants in mind.

A broader framework would also include a focus on all the different aspects of the product and service which contribute to the user outcomes. The process of designing all elements of a programme to address the complete range of benefits sought by individuals is known as developing the *Marketing Mix*. This approach ensures that organisations are market-focused in their approach to strategic planning.⁸

The marketing mix encompasses:

- product
- process
- place
- price
- people
- promotion

Clearly there is some cross-over here with the ILFA framework. To inform our analysis we have developed the following Evaluation Framework to show *all* the aspects of the Vital Link programme and libraries' use of the approach which affect the outcomes for users. The model highlights the four themes which are also elements of the ILFA framework. The implications of the evaluation for the Vital Link programme, for libraries' use of the approach and for the Skills for Life sector have all been mapped against these themes.

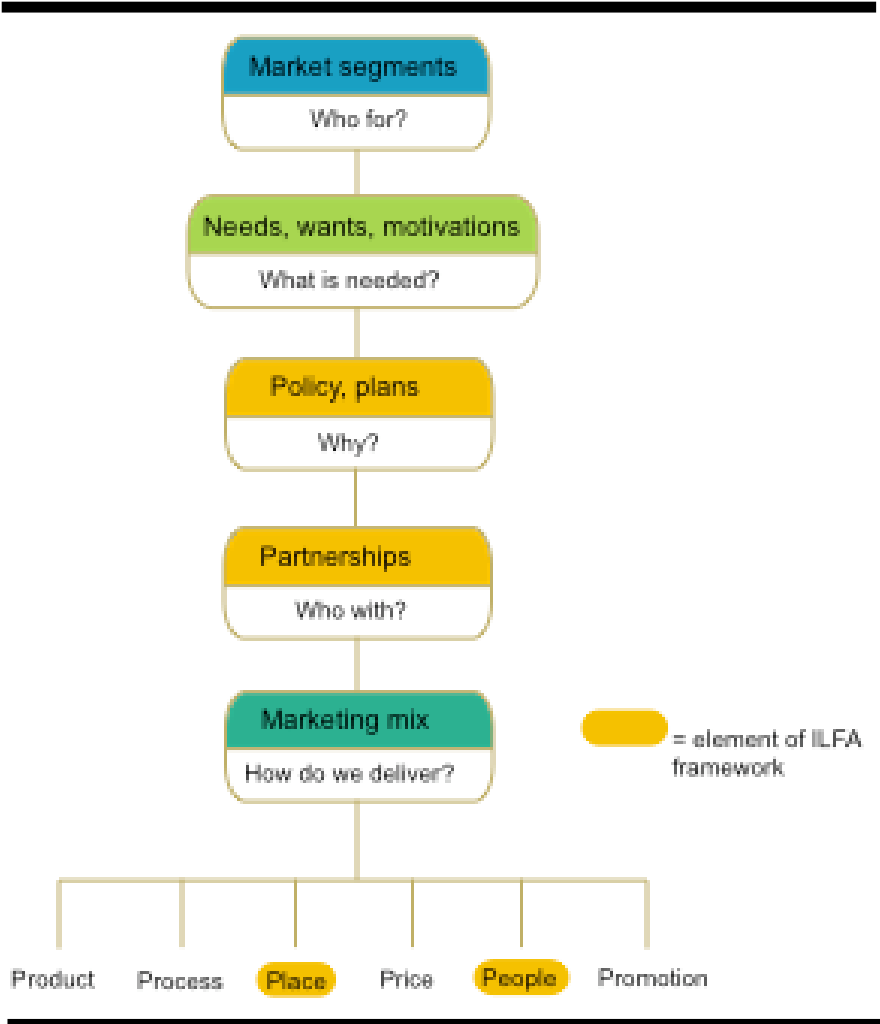
Participating in the Skills for Life *Move On* course at Barrow-in-Furness Library develops emergent readers perceptions of the library as a social, welcoming, community space.

***'I love to come out of the house
to the reading group at the library.
I love to come here and see all my friends.'***

Adult learner, Barrow

⁸ J McCarthy, *Marketing: A Managerial Approach*, Homewood, 1981

Vital Link Evaluation Framework



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5 Individual and Societal Outcomes

The research sought to establish the broadest possible potential impact of libraries' creative reading activity, including the clear and previously established impact of literacy on the personal development of individuals, as well as any potential societal level outcomes.

Throughout, we are attempting to answer the questions '*what difference does libraries' creative reading activity make*' and '*how does the Vital Link approach effect these changes?*'

It can be difficult to separate the direct impact of libraries' creative reading activity from the impact of the Skills for Life work. We have tried to be clear about cause and effect in order to show which activities cause or contribute to which outcomes.

The outcomes were mapped against MLA's Generic Learning Outcomes:

- Increase in knowledge and understanding
- Increase in skills
- Change in attitudes and values
- Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity
- Evidence of activity, behaviour and progression

We have also attempted to show how the Vital Link programme and reading for pleasure contribute to wider societal outcomes including:

- Social capital potentially arising from greater inclusion and social interaction of individuals
- Economic impact potentially arising from increased employability of individuals
- Healthier communities arising from improved mental and physical health of individuals

Clearly these have not been measured from a societal perspective but from individuals reporting changes in attitudes and behaviour in these areas.

It can be unclear which category an outcome might be classified under. Is enhanced self-esteem for example and consequent improvement in self-confidence, evidence of a change in attitudes by

an individual towards themselves or evidence of progression? To address this, within each outcome area we have listed the type of outcomes we have included in that category.

A quantification of the generic outcomes achieved has been undertaken and a range of specific outcomes identified. These will form the basis of a set of outcome measures to evidence the impact of libraries' creative reading activity, using the Vital Link approach, to be piloted with libraries over the next year.

5.1 Increase in knowledge and understanding

For around four out of every 10 research participants, libraries' use of Vital Link activities contributed to increased knowledge and understanding. In reality the extent of this outcome is likely to be significantly higher as it was not possible to explore every change in knowledge and understanding with every respondent.

Specific Outcomes

In summary, increase in knowledge and understanding for individuals, from taking part in libraries' creative reading activity, includes:

- New knowledge and deeper understanding about the wider world, both in terms of their local communities and how the world works
- Deeper understanding of the technical aspects of literacy, including grammar and writing styles
- Development of new personal interests
- Extension of existing interests
- Learning about family behaviour
- Gaining different perspectives which provides insight into their own lives

How these outcomes are achieved

At the most direct level, reading for pleasure helps emergent readers to gain greater knowledge and understanding about the subjects covered in the books:

'Basically, you are learning new things about the topic that you are reading about ... like places I've never been.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

Use of First Choice collections or other reading for pleasure texts both in and outside class helps learners gain a deeper understanding of their literacy work, by providing multiple examples of how grammatical rules or words are used in different contexts. It helps embed the classroom learning

'It just stays in your mind. I did a test last week and there was a word I didn't know: "caustic". I was reading a book and a couple of pages later there was this word in this book.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

Through reading for pleasure, emergent readers are able to find out more about their own particular interests, or to develop new interests – for example, about local history – which they might not have considered before.

'I like factual historical books and stories that are true. John of Gaunt is just up the road and you can stand up there and imagine what it must have been like as an iron age fort.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

'I was doing a patio and I saw a book: it gave us loads of tips. And cooking as well, it is nice just to get a different book out and try a different recipe that you might not think about.'

Adult learner, Essex

By reading about other people's lives and family situations, emergent readers are able to gain a better understanding of their own lives, and look at alternative ways for dealing with problems:

'Storybooks are informative as well. You can read a book and identify with a character and how they deal with a situation, and you can learn from that and think "yeah that is what I can do".'

Adult learner, Derbyshire

5.2 Increase in skills

Emergent readers are learning to do new things and to do things differently as a result of reading for pleasure and participating in libraries' creative reading activity. Over three-quarters of respondents reported an increase in skills.

Specific Outcomes

These are particularly:

- Improved literacy skills
- Development of intellectual / thinking skills
- Learning skills – learning *how* to learn and techniques for finding information
- ICT skills
- For both adult and family learners, the outcomes include:
- Book and library skills – learning how to select books both for self and children; learning how to use a library
- For family learners specifically, the outcomes include:
- Learning how to read for pleasure with children and using reading as a tool for changing child and family behaviour patterns

How these outcomes are achieved

Improved literacy skills, such as use of grammar and different writing styles, arises from increased reading and exposure to a wider range of materials.

'You take a look at how it's written down [in your book] so you've got an idea of how to write yours. Then I can phrase it properly; when I read I notice that if they've use one big paragraph, I can do the same.'

Adult learner, South Leicestershire

Libraries' creative reading activity provides a forum for discussion of the technical and content aspects of books (in class discussions, for example), which means that learners engage more deeply with the learning points from reading in terms of technical knowledge and understanding of content. This helps embed these skills.

'When you hear other people's opinions you think "hmm I forgot about that": they will remind you of bits you missed out.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

Wider reading and reading for pleasure contributes to people's development of learning skills – learning *how* to learn – by increasing their use of dictionaries, for example, and encouraging the development of discipline and concentration skills:

'I never understand long words so he said if I ever come across a word I don't know, just look in a dictionary – and I have.'

Adult learner, Barrow

'You have got to concentrate [when you're reading] haven't you? If you keep wandering, you are not going to get into [the story] and it is not really going in, so you forget everything. When you concentrate it's good.'

Adult learner, Essex

Choosing books and resources helps people learn research skills including how to find information and understanding alphabetical and chronological order:

'There was a book on the Titanic and we looked at the index to pick information out ... we have been looking at alphabetical and chronological order and the library helped us with both of those.'

Basic skills tutor, Middlesbrough

Putting reviews on the web, printing and photocopying materials for class use all contribute to the development of ICT skills:

'You used the internet for the very first time and printed that picture off.'

Basic skills tutor, Middlesbrough

For both adult and family learners, choosing books to read for pleasure helps them learn how to select books for themselves and their children which empowers them to make their own choices about books:

'If the first couple of pages don't interest us, I won't read it. But if it catches my interest I will finish the books.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

5.3 Change in attitudes and values

Reading for pleasure through libraries' creative reading activity has a powerful impact on the personal development of individuals, both in themselves and also as parents. Over half of the research participants commented on some change in attitudes or values.

This provides the basis for changes in how they perceive themselves, how empowered they feel, in attitudes to family life and in their views towards and engagement in wider society. For most of the emergent readers consulted these are among the strongest outcomes of reading for pleasure.

Specific Outcomes

Particular changes in attitudes and values include:

- Increased self-confidence as a result of greater ability for self-expression leading to enhanced self-esteem; a sense of achievement and improved self-worth
- Feeling empowered and self-motivated as a result of perceived greater independence and consequent increased control over their own life
- Seeing the world differently as a result of becoming aware of multiple perspectives; that different people see and understand things differently
- Changed attitudes to parenting
- Changed perceptions of libraries

How these outcomes are achieved

The self-confidence of learners increases through choosing books, reading independently, thinking analytically, critically and creatively about books and taking part in discussions about books. All these activities improve readers' self-expression, renew their self-esteem, foster a sense of achievement and increase their sense of self-worth. Involvement in the research project itself adds to this.

'I used to get shouted down but now I can stand up more for myself. Now I can say "I believe it is this way". I think it gives me confidence all round.'

Adult learner, Essex

'I was so pleased when I was able to read the book, and because the tutor has listened to me'

Adult learner, Luton

'I couldn't believe the change in the group. Before our visit to the library, they were very shy and would not even speak to other teachers. Now, they seem more confident in class to say what they think and more confident generally that their opinion is worth being heard.'

Basic skills tutor, Middlesbrough

The family learning sessions also resulted in increased self-esteem by children from having their own reading club and from adults from participating in the selection of appropriate materials for their children.

'My kids really enjoyed [the after school story sessions] because they got to do something after school like their older siblings. That was their after school club.'

Family learning participant, Stockport

'The librarian always wants lots of input from the people that are going to go to the activities. She wanted ideas on what we thought the kids would like, and we've helped with choosing the books as well.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

By taking part in group discussions, readers become aware of the opinions of other people and learn to consider other perspectives.

'Everyone had different points of view about the reading of that one book – it was amazing.'

Adult learner, Luton

Reading about other lives and stories – both past and present – also contributes to this understanding of different viewpoints and lifestyles. In short, it helps people see *the world differently*:

'I like reading a war time book – it doesn't remind me of myself, but it's my grandparents' generation and it sets me off imagining what life was like for my great aunt.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

As a result of this personal development, individuals have more self-respect and feel more respected by others. Initially, this has family outcomes. Both adult and family learners reported changed attitudes to parenting as reading for pleasure with children provides tools for different family routines and encourages quieter and more creative family activity:

'I've never once heard them say "I don't want a book". I think it's time for them – quality attention. She never refuses to go to bed because she knows she gets time on her own with me for at least 15 minutes reading a story.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

Libraries' creative reading activity, particularly when it involves learners meeting librarians and visiting libraries, has changed perceptions of libraries. Emergent readers, both adults and families, feel more welcome in libraries and become more aware of the wider range of activities and services on offer.

'[The library's] more relaxed now. It's not as stuffy: when I was younger I always thought it was really quiet.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

The perception of libraries as a community space, both for individuals and families has changed.

'I love to come out of the house to the reading group at the library. I love to come here and see all my friends.'

Adult learner, Barrow

However, the perception of limited borrowing time and fines still acts as a deterrent to some emergent readers' use of libraries. The lack of these constraints when borrowing from emergent reader collections provided by libraries was therefore very popular:

'You didn't feel there was a time constraint on it: you just brought it back when you'd finished it.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

5.4 Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity

Enjoyment from reading is the foundation stone of libraries' creative reading activity. The research found extensive evidence of enjoyment and inspiration arising from participation in these activities and reading for pleasure. The research suggests that over three-quarters of all respondents experienced enjoyment, inspiration or creativity as a result of their involvement in libraries' Vital Link activity.

Specific Outcomes

The range of outcomes include:

- Enjoyment from reading for pleasure
- Experimentation in the range of books read
- Awareness and use of own imagination
- Inspiration to undertake own creative writing
- Inspiration to take part in new or develop existing interests and cultural activities
- Inspiration to undertake reading for pleasure as a family
- Provision of inspiring resources for basic skills work

How these outcomes are achieved

Libraries' creative reading activity certainly encourages reading for pleasure by almost all research participants. For some people it is the first time they have read a book for enjoyment since childhood. The primary outcome from some emergent readers on basic skills courses is reading for pleasure itself – not all feel they need to acquire qualifications:

'[If I didn't have to read for class] I would be reading with the bairn, but I don't think I would be reading books because I never really put any time out for it: I wouldn't have been actually sitting with a book.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

It broadens peoples' reading horizons, motivating them to experiment with a wider range of books:

'I am in a reading club ... it was getting into books that maybe I would never have picked up.'

Adult learner, Derbyshire

'That is the good thing when you go to the library: if you pick up a book and it is not that good, you can just take it back.'

Adult learner, Essex

Emergent readers participating in Essex Libraries' creative reading activities have developed their confidence in choosing books and in appreciating the opportunity that libraries offer in enabling experimentation with books

'That is the good thing when you go to the library: if you pick up a book and it is not that good, you can just take it back.'

Adult Learner, Essex

Some emergent readers feel that they have become aware of their own imagination through reading for pleasure, preferring to read books which they feel engage their imagination, particularly compared to watching television.

'With a book I think you get in more deeply: you have got your own imagination and I think that is brilliant.'

Adult learner, Derbyshire

A few emergent readers in Skills for Life classes have been inspired to start creative writing for themselves including children's books and poetry. This is as a result of the combination of technical understanding gained in the Skills for Life classes and their imagination being fired from the range of books they have been introduced to.

'I have started writing this little children's book ... I have done the first little one and I am thinking of another one.'

Adult learner, Essex

'I want to write a book about my life and my experiences.'

Adult learner, Luton

Reading for pleasure motivates people to develop new interests or extend existing ones. This ranges from reading about subjects they are interested in by a majority of participants to trying related cultural activities such as going to see a play of a book they are reading for a small number. Libraries' Vital Link activities provide a reason for and safe framework in which people can develop these new interests.

'When [learner's name] was reading The Tempest she said "I understand that, so now I'd like to see a Shakespeare play". So there's thirty of us going tomorrow to an open air Shakespeare play of Romeo and Juliet.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

Some parents describe vividly how much enjoyment they get from reading for pleasure as a family. Both reading and taking part in the family learning activities provided by libraries stimulates their motivation to do this.

'It's the kids' faces when you're reading a story, the excitement. It's only five minutes, ten minutes, it doesn't take long. Nice quiet time, turn the television off. You don't need to ask them twice if they want a story.'

Family Learner, Solihull

As part of their creative reading activity, libraries encourage emergent readers to choose books that are of personal interest to them. The use of these in Skills for Life classes provides learners with interesting resources for work in class to support the curriculum:

'You take a look how it's written down [in your book] so you've got an idea of how to write yours. Then I can phrase it properly; when I read I notice that if they've used one big paragraph, I can do the same.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

5.5 Evidence of activity, behaviour and progression

Most of the outcomes described so far could also be used as evidence of activity, behaviour or progression. Even allowing for this, more comments were made which reflect this than any other outcome. *All* emergent readers in the study illustrated this outcome in some form. Here we have focused particularly on outcomes related to reading for pleasure.

Specific Outcomes

- Individuals and families reading for pleasure for the first time
- Increased reading
- Reading a wider range of books
- Taking part in reader development activity
- Desire to continue reading for pleasure
- Developing and pursuing personal interests
- New and increased library use
- Use of a wider range of library services
- Contribution to retention in Skills for Life training
- Changed and greater family interaction
- Family sharing of books
- Children reading more and more widely
- Higher family learning aspirations
- New engagement in family learning sessions in libraries

How these outcomes are achieved

The First Choice and similar collections such as Essex Libraries' Quick Reads are successful in engaging many emergent readers. They cite the scheme display materials, length of the books, larger print size, cover design and coding system as engaging them to start reading.

Continued and increased reading is helped by recognition and use of the promotional materials in the library and by seeing a familiar face in the library as a result of having already met the librarian in a class or group setting.

Provision of books in non-library settings is important as a stepping-stone for the most hesitant emergent readers.

'I borrow books from here [college] because before I couldn't read any book, but since I have started here I have borrowed some books from the box, which has really, really, helped.'

Adult Learner, Luton

For most emergent readers in the study, access to and use of the library and the First Choice collections has led on to them buying books both new and second hand:

'I went to the library and bought some lovely [ex-collection] books.' Adult learner, Barrow

Particularly for many Skills for Life learners, the use of books as a focus for group discussion in class encourages them to read a wider range of books than they otherwise would.

Participation in libraries' creative reading activity encourages self-motivated reader development activity for both adult and family learners. This includes book recommendations; book swapping; development of personal reading diaries. Suggestions for further reader development activity in family learning contexts specifically included reviewing of books to help others and book groups for parents only:

'We had little comment books to write in. I filled one in and I think a lot of people did.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

'We asked other parents what the books were like and saying which ones my child likes.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

Almost all the emergent readers consulted reported that they intend to continue reading for pleasure.

New, increased or wider use of libraries, by most emergent readers in the study is an outcome of libraries' creative reading activity.

Emergent readers are borrowing books for the first time; borrowing more and a wider range of books. Most emergent readers progress to

independent library use, although some need greater facilitated involvement with libraries than others before they feel able to do this.

Stockport Library's provision of books for family learners in Stockport via the Surestart Storybus engages families who would be less likely to visit the library itself.

'It's access to the books without having to drag the kids down to the library... before we go to the nursery we will go in and get a book and sit and read until it is time to go in.'

Family learning participant, Stockport

For some emergent readers, libraries are a more appropriate venue for undertaking basic skills and reading for pleasure activities because they are perceived to be less intimidating than formal education venues.

For a small minority however, libraries' role at the heart of the community makes them too public a venue.

By using personal choice books in coursework and the classroom, learners feel more engaged with their course, are able to sustain interest for longer, and want to learn more deeply. Reading for pleasure feeds these aspirations and contributes to retention on Skills for Life courses as it offers inspiration and creativity and makes the courses more enjoyable, all of which add value to the experience.

'Just the basic discussions about the books – everyone's different opinions, whether they enjoyed it – I enjoy doing it and I think we wouldn't come back if we didn't enjoy it.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

Family involvement in libraries' creative reading activity and reading for pleasure has a powerful effect. Families report increased reading: increased enthusiasm for books by children, increased family interaction through sharing books together, and higher family learning aspirations. These arise from being shown how to share books with children, how to choose books, provision of family reading packs and use of children and family activity sessions in libraries:

'We have done courses [at the library] as well. They have done puppet making and I have been to most of those with the kids.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

'The library just started doing the activity boxes and my daughter's hooked.'

Family learning participant, Solihull

'My little girl is only three, but if I am sitting reading a book she will pick one up and say "I am reading my book". So it does encourage her to pick up something and have a look – copy off mummy.'

Adult learner, South Tyneside

'We are reading more now. My daughters...will go in and get four or five books at a time.'

Family Learner, Solihull

For family learning groups in community settings, the availability of collections on-site is important.

'It's access to the books without having to drag all the kids down to the library ... before we go into nursery we will go in and get a book and sit and read it until it is time to go in.'

Family learning participant, Stockport

5.6 Social inclusion

The research explored if and how these individual outcomes make any contribution to increased social capital at a societal level. For around four out of every ten emergent readers in the study we could make a clear connection between an individual outcome and some type of social inclusion.

Specific Outcomes

The evidence suggests reading for pleasure and participation in libraries' creative reading activity contributes significantly to personal development outcomes for individuals, including:

- Improved social confidence
- A sense of independence
- Empowerment

These provide people with a stronger foundation for greater inclusion in society, which results in:

- Increased social interaction by both individuals and families
- Feeling respected by others in society
- Greater family communication
- Increased involvement in children's education
- Social independence

A few individuals within the research illustrated the ways in which libraries' use of the Vital Link approach can contribute to:

- Enhanced sense of place and identity
- Capacity building within communities
- Greater citizenship through increased participation in public life

How these outcomes are achieved

Reading or family learning groups and library visits, both facilitated and subsequent independent ones, provide opportunities for social interaction.

'I love to come out of the house to the reading group at the library. I love to come here and see all my friends.'

Adult Learner, Barrow

Learning together and sharing books and experiences reduces peoples' sense of social isolation and enhances their confidence in social settings. In turn, this leads to greater social interaction as individuals feel more comfortable and confident engaging in social activities.

'Say a conversation starts sometimes and you are reading a book and someone will say I am reading that. With the last Juror by John Grisham and you know you just get talking on it and things like that.'

Adult Learner, Essex

A strength of these activities is perceived to be the bringing together of people from different walks of life and different ages.

The egalitarian ethos of libraries' delivery of reading for pleasure sessions helps people to feel respected, included and on a par with others in society. This is achieved by the sessions being positioned

along the lines of a group of people sharing books rather than a more formal taught session with a tutor and learners.

'You are not spoken down to, you are spoken to. You are a human being.'

Adult Learner, Barrow

'Whatever you say it is never put down and it is always a different opinion. It is your opinion and it is not wrong. You are just seeing it differently.'

Adult Learner, Essex

There was some evidence from the family learning groups of libraries' reader development activities contributing to capacity building within communities by motivating participants to get involved in Bookstart initiatives, to organise similar reading sessions and to use ideas experienced in the sessions in other schemes.

These outcomes could all be grouped under the banner of increased social capital, if defined as:

*'The networks, norms, relationships, value and informal sanctions the shape the quantity and co-operative quality of a society's social interactions.'*⁹

The research shows that engagement with libraries' creative reading activity and reading for pleasure contribute to all three types of social capital identified:

- Bonding: among family members or within community, ethnic or cultural groups
- Bridging: across groups
- Linking: between different social classes or ages

5.7 Healthy Communities

If good health is defined as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, the evidence in this research suggests that engagement in libraries' creative reading activity can have a positive impact on health, particularly mental health, both for individuals and families, with a consequent contribution to healthier communities. Around three-quarters of all emergent readers in the study described

⁹ Performance and Innovation Unit (2002), *Social Capital: A Discussion Paper*, Performance and Innovation Unit

an outcome which might be regarded as contributing to individual health and well-being.

Specific Outcomes

The most prevalent outcomes for individuals include:

- Stress-release
- Relaxation
- Self-help
- Life guidance and inspiration

For a small proportion of individuals, the outcomes include:

- Catharsis
- Provision of a diversionary activity

It was beyond the scope of this research to measure the impact from a societal perspective but there is evidence of how the improved mental health of individuals contributes to healthier communities through providing opportunities for and motivating greater social interaction by individuals, resulting in social connectedness.

There is also evidence of positive impact on family health and of a contribution to greater interaction within families and between families and communities. Outcomes for families included:

- Better parenting
- New models of family behaviour
- Increased family interaction
- Improved child behaviour
- Social connectedness

How these outcomes are achieved

Reading books for pleasure provides opportunities for time-out, to relax and to escape from pressures of everyday life, which releases stress for individuals.

'I just love reading. Escapism.'

Family Learner, Solihull

'It can take you away from the life, the boring housework.'

Adult Learner, Essex

Some emergent readers find self-help and receive life-guidance from reading for pleasure. This arises both directly from reading self-help books but also indirectly from insight gained from reading about other people's lives. This enables them to gain perspective on their own lives and problems. This can have an impact on physical health through participation in issue-based family learning activities such as healthy eating for example.

'If you have got worries or are unhappy or something and things are getting you down you know that you can pick up your book and you can get into your book and your imagination like you said it can take you away. You can sit down for a while and sometimes I have read and put the book down and have felt a lot happier with the world and have got up and got on with things. I think books really do help you.'

Adult Learner, Essex

Writing about their own life and experiences in a creative context is a powerful form of catharsis for some emergent readers.

Libraries' creative reading activity can provide a potent tool for changing patterns of family behaviour. Respondents explain how reading for pleasure and participation in family learning activities contributes to better parenting, improved child behaviour, increased interaction within families and greater social connectedness between families and society. These also contribute towards stress-release within families.

These changed routines and attendance at family sessions learning sessions both contribute to improved child behaviour.

Reading together stimulates family conversation and child learning.

'It's a nice end to the day as well isn't it? Yeah, winds them down. And then I can go off and read my book as well then.'

Family Learner, Solihull

'A lot of it is reinforcing what they learn at school – taking turns, respecting other people – and realising that that applies out of school as well. But they can still have fun whilst taking turns!'

Family learning participant, Stockport

5.8 Economic impact and employability

The Skills for Life Strategy Unit estimates the cost to the economy and business of people having people with low skills to be in the region of £4.8bn per year. Employees with poor skills have lower confidence and motivation, are more prone to errors and sickness absence and stay in employment for shorter periods. For individuals, a lack of skills can often trap people into low-skilled, poorly paid jobs. On average, employees with poor skills can expect to earn 11% less than average and 45% of those with literacy Level 1 or below in work earn less than £10,000 a year.¹⁰

Clearly, improving people's skills will reduce these costs to both individuals and the economy.

The short-term nature of this evaluation – with people who are *currently* participating in Skills for Life learning – means that it is not possible to prove direct economic impact such as improved performance at work or increased earnings because these impacts are only likely to occur in the medium to longer-term.

This was the area in which fewest direct outcomes were identified. Around 1 or 2 in every 10 of the participants in the research felt that libraries' creative reading activity and reading for pleasure made a *direct* contribution to their employability. In practice, the strongest contribution to employability outcomes arises from their involvement in Skills for Life or family learning. However, the increased self-esteem, confidence, motivation, empowerment and skills identified by individuals in this study as a result of creative reading activity are highly likely to contribute to their improved employability and potentially to subsequent economic impact.

Specific Outcomes

Employability outcomes identified include:

- Increased desire to obtain work
- Improved performance at work
- Career development aspirations
- Career change aspirations

¹⁰ www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus

How these outcomes are achieved

Increased skills and the associated self-confidence that comes from reading for pleasure enhances self-confidence in an employment context which can lead to increased career development aspirations within current work or a desire to do different work:

'I think it has take the fear away from looking at different work.'

Adult learner, Leicestershire

Sector professionals, both librarians and Skills for Life tutors, can act as role models for future employment aspirations for a small number of individuals with examples in the research of people becoming interested in library or child-related career options.

'I want to come and work in a library now.'

Adult learner, Essex

6 Recommendations

Librarians identify their motivation for using the Vital Link approach to partnership with the Skills for Life sector as being to:

- Raise awareness of the library offer
- Increase library membership
- Increase usage of library by both adult and children
- Develop independent use of library services
- Encourage use of wider range of library services
- Help emergent readers improve their skills
- Encourage reading for pleasure
- Encourage adults into Skills for Life learning

Skills for Life and family learning tutors include the Vital Link approach in their teaching because it provides:

- A framework through which tutors can incorporate reading for pleasure into their course work
- A ready-made, accessible package
- Pre-selected books
- Practical resources for lessons
- Specialist advice on choice of books
- Inspiring activities to extend and enhance class work
- A methodology for emergent readers to use their own interests in class work which increases motivation
- Embedded literacy learning for adult learners
- Added value beyond the investment required by tutors

The research provides strong evidence of the impact of libraries' creative reading activity using the Vital Link approach and how this helps achieve the objectives of both libraries and Skills for Life identified above.

The research also suggests how this activity can be enhanced and extended. Recommendations are identified for The Vital Link programme and for libraries and the Skills for Life sector as the

agencies delivering activities to emergent readers. The implications are presented within the *Inspiring Learning for All* framework of people, places, policies and partnerships. Additional factors, which contribute to the experience for end-users, are also identified, including the products and activities provided, the processes through which the approach is delivered and the branding, positioning and promotion of the approach.

6.1 Policies, plans, performance

Embedding the approach at a strategic level

Both libraries and the Skills for Life sector believe that their partnership, utilising libraries' creative reading activity, adds true value on both sides. However at present the work is mostly treated as an additional activity, often supported through one-off project funding. To be sustainable, libraries' creative reading activity with emergent readers needs embedding at a strategic level within both libraries and the Skills for Life sector.

For the Skills for Life sector, this process will be assisted by detailed mapping of the contribution of libraries' creative reading activity to the outcomes required by the Adult Literacy Curriculum.

There is clear evidence of how libraries' creative reading activity helps achieve libraries' core objectives of increased and wider library usage and of encouraging adults into Skills for Life learning. It is also evident that there is potential for libraries to direct emergent readers onto a wider range of opportunities with broader societal outcomes in terms of employability or healthy communities. Mapping of the contribution to these wider government agendas will help embed the approach with libraries, particularly in the context of wider local authority agendas.

While both libraries and Skills for Life have stated aims and objectives, reflecting their motivations for using this approach, there are few actual targets attached. Both libraries and Skills for Life should agree SMART objectives, both quantitative and qualitative,

These three factors – embedding the approach at a strategic level, mapping the contribution to sector and governmental agendas and using SMART objectives – will contribute to the sustainability of the approach by ensuring its inclusion in core delivery plans and allocation of core resources within both libraries and Skills for Life.

Monitoring and evaluation

Current monitoring by both libraries and Skills for Life is primarily limited to simple quantitative collection of output data such as numbers of people participating or using particular services. Libraries are at different stages of development in their use of the ILFA frameworks and the Generic Learning Outcomes as a monitoring tool. There is a clear need to develop generic outcome measures, both learning and societal, to enable libraries to measure the impact of their creative reading activity on emergent readers.

An evaluation framework should be developed to measure the extent to which libraries' creative reading activity meets the specific local, regional and national agendas of stakeholders and partners and achieves outcomes for emergent readers.

The Evaluation Toolkit being developed as a result of this research should provide this framework but a pilot evaluation phase is recommended to test out the suggested generic and specific outcome measures.

While there are immediate, short-term outcomes for individuals from engaging with libraries' creative reading activity, many outcomes are likely to be longer-term or to become stronger and more concrete in the longer term. This means it is imperative to undertake longitudinal monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes. This could include mapping individuals' 'learning journeys' from the point at which they engage with Skills for Life learning, through their engagement with libraries' creative reading activity and onto the medium and longer-term impact.

6.2 Partnerships

Where the partnership between libraries and Skills for Life works most effectively, it truly creates added value for both. Libraries gain access to emergent readers and non-users in a context in which they are open to the library offer. For Skills for Life, libraries' creative reading activity extends and embeds emerging literacy skills. The enjoyment and achievement arising from reading for pleasure contributes to increased motivation to learn on the part of emergent readers.

Development of personal relationships between individual members of library staff and tutors is key to the success of the partnership. This can be constrained by many tutors working on a part-time basis.

Engaging Skills for Life practitioners and emergent readers in product and process development helps ensure the effectiveness of the products and activities, embeds the partnership approach and contributes to a sense of ownership for emergent readers.

For both libraries and Skills for Life, greater resources need to be allocated to partnership development, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This will ensure that the partnership is not only embedded strategically at an organisational level but sustainable at an operational level and can achieve maximum benefit for emergent readers.

6.3 Product

A key facet of the success of the libraries' use of creative reading activity with emergent readers is in the identification of suitable reading materials to engage emergent readers and develop their enjoyment of reading. The Vital Link collections, First Choice and Got kids? Get reading!, have pioneered this approach but further development is needed. The points below should be taken into account as The Vital Link programme continues to undertake this work.

Range of books

The range of books offered should be broadened where possible to include:

A wider choice of non-fiction to engage a range of interests. This should include books about local history, culture and environment and also poetry.

Self-help books around mental and physical health, including personal development, life-guidance, family behaviour and learning and healthy eating.

Wider range of fiction, especially to appeal to male emergent readers

Books for adult learners to share with children at different ages

Books for teenagers

Books for adult learners with lower levels of literacy including pre-entry level to complement the Vital Link's focus on emergent readers

Books for people with special learning needs including autism and dyslexia.

More accessible versions of famous or 'difficult' texts.

A continuing focus on known authors and celebrity names as flagships for different styles of writing.

Format

The larger print size used in most titles in the Vital Link collections is important for accessibility.

Variety of media

Encourage the provision of books in multiple media including audio and DVD which give emergent readers different routes in and help formal and family learning.

Design

Continue to develop attractive, non-stigmatising promotional materials for collections as these are important in motivating choice.

Packaging

Package books and resource materials to help libraries meet the needs of specific segments such as packs for family reading and tools for reader initiated book groups.

6.4 Process

Adding value to formal learning

It is important to emphasise libraries' promotion of their creative reading activities as being about enjoyment and fun and, as such, a self-motivated enhancement to Skills for Life learning. This activity may be integrated into a Skills for Life or family learning group or it could be run as a separate 'reading group' or 'book club', although emergent readers need to be comfortable with the terminology used.

Book discussion

Ensure book discussion is embedded in the approach, motivating retention and commitment to future reading and learning.

Encourage use of both a mix of whole-class books and books which reflect personal interests. Whole class books facilitate discussion, help emergent understand multiple perspectives and encourage a wider range of reading. Personal reading of books which reflect personal interests ensures that reading for pleasure is continued outside the Skills for Life context.

Self-motivated reading around interests

Work with emergent readers at an individual level to identify their interests and recommend suitable reading resources. This not only sustains reading but develops the relationship between the reader and library staff which then helps emergent readers feel comfortable when making independent library visits.

Review and recommendation

Ensure that that the process of reviewing and recommending books is included in the approach as this enhances emergent readers' sense of creativity, self-esteem and inclusion

Library visits

The facilitated library visit is crucial for previous non-users as this makes them feel comfortable and at ease. Familiarity and confidence to use libraries independently is quickly gained. The visits are successful in overturning negative pre-conceptions of libraries. They also raise awareness of the full range of services on offer through libraries with non-users. Ideally a minimum of three library visits is recommended to ensure that emergent readers progress to independent library use.

Interactive involvement with libraries leads to particularly effective outcomes. Examples include a Skills for Life group writing a leaflet about the library as part of their class work; recommending books to inform the library's stock acquisition and involvement in the planning of events.

In-library activities that address social as well as learning motivations are attractive to emergent readers.

Swadlincote Libraries' *Books with a Bite* programme engages emergent readers in the learning activities by also addressing their social motivations through this reading group, which also offers a buffet lunch and crèche facilities.

Progression to independent library use

Provide a map for emergent readers of all the different ways they can engage with libraries and how they can progress. These might include follow-on or taster sessions and promotion of libraries social / community roles and facilities.

Stepping stones

Provide stepping stones to library use for more hesitant Skills for Life learners. Family learners, for example, are more likely to attend informal reading activities in a library if they are first warmed up at family outreach sessions and are aware of the book collections they might find in the library.

6.5 Price

Free access to books encourages experimentation with book choices. Libraries need to strongly promote their offer and emphasise flexibility of renewals and limited charges for lost or damaged books in order to overcome negative perceptions which still exist amongst non-users.

6.6 Place

Libraries are felt to be an ideal venue by many emergent readers who see them as welcoming, accessible community spaces. However, for some more excluded emergent readers, libraries are still felt to be intimidating and inaccessible.

Libraries need to provide their creative reading activity with Skills for Life learners in a range of different contexts including libraries, colleges and family learning centres as this is important in ensuring involvement by the broadest range of target users.

Libraries need access to spaces to undertake reader development activity and to enable self-motivated reader development by emergent readers.

6.7 People

A critical determinant of the success of libraries' creative reading activity is the motivation, enthusiasm and creativity of individual library staff and tutors. An inclusive, collaborative approach builds trust. Selecting the right library staff to work with emergent readers is crucial.

Tutors and emergent readers feel that not all library staff fully understand the learning and personal needs of emergent readers. Some libraries are taking the need for Skills for Life training on board comprehensively with several authorities initiating authority wide awareness training and accreditation. While some tutors fully embrace libraries' creative reading activity, others are more removed.

There is a need for training for all library staff in the personal and curriculum needs of adult learners and emergent readers. Similarly, Skills for Life tutors would benefit from awareness raising and training in how libraries' creative reading activity can support their work.

6.8 Promotion

Promotion is key to getting the message about the library offer over to emergent readers.

Key components of the brand profile of libraries' creative reading activity using the Vital Link products and approach, which need to be promoted to emergent readers are that:

It is a process that will give the emergent reader a sense of achievement.

It adds value, it is a process which is fun and which will enhance their formal coursework.

The experience will inspire them, and give them things to think and talk about.

It is empowering – it will put readers in a situation where they have control and independence.

It can potentially providing help with many different aspects of their lives from personal development 'self-help' to 'how-to' guidance for leisure interests.

It can have a potentially beneficial impact on their family in terms of enjoyment from shared reading, spending time together, help with child development and behaviour and with support for their child's education.

Emergent readers need to be offered guarantees that libraries are for them. This means that the promotion needs to:

Position libraries as social, community spaces welcoming to all, including families.

Within this, emergent readers need to be assured that library staff will understand their needs, both personal and curriculum, in a non-patronising and non-didactic way, to feel that it is for 'people like me'. This means the relationship between librarians and emergent readers needs to be presented as egalitarian.

Within their displays, libraries need to signpost readers to the full range of materials by:

Displaying appropriate books in both dedicated / identified displays for emergent readers and integrated within library stock.

Direct emergent readers onto other titles by adopting amazon.com type techniques such as 'If you like this, you might also like this' or 'People who read this, have also read...'

7 Fit with Policy Agendas

The objectives of the evaluation included:

- Contributing to the development of the Public Library Impact Measures
- Providing an evidence base for advocacy to the education sector

7.1 Fit with Public Library Service Impact Measures

The *Public Library Service Impact Measures* aim to show real evidence of the value and impact public library services have on people and communities. Developed in the context of Framework for the Future, they do this by illustrating the contribution libraries make to five of the seven Government and LGA Shared Priorities:

- Raising standards across schools
- Creating safer and stronger communities
- Improving the quality of life for children, young people families at risk and older people
- Promoting healthier communities
- Promoting the economic vitality of localities

The measures are acknowledged to be a work in progress with first year measures for 2005/06 agreed and second year measures under development.

The Public Library Impact Measures contain specific measures for the current year but also identify a range of 'example project outcomes'. Libraries' creative reading activity using the Vital Link approach potentially contributes across the range of measures and to many of the example project outcomes, but they align most closely with two of the five Shared Priorities embraced in the Public Library Impact Measures.

Promoting the Economic Vitality of Localities

Libraries' creative reading activity contributes strongly to the increased self-esteem and self-confidence and skills of emergent readers. More than three-quarters of all respondents in the research

reported an increase in skills of some form, mostly in literacy, thinking, learning, reading and library skills.

These outcomes will clearly contribute to better employment opportunities in the longer term and thus will have an impact on the economic vitality of a locality. Longitudinal monitoring is required to confirm the full extent of this contribution.

The enjoyment arising from South Shields Central Library's creative reading work with a group of women of mixed reading ability at Bedewell Early Years Excellence Centre in South Tyneside contributes to their retention on these Skills for Life classes.

'Just the basic discussions about the books – everyone's different opinions, whether they enjoyed it – I enjoy doing it and I think we wouldn't come back if we didn't enjoy it.'

Adult Learner, South Tyneside

Improving the Quality of Life for Children, Young People, Families at Risk and Older People

The personal development and family outcomes identified by emergent readers also align clearly with example project outcomes for *Improving the Quality of Life for Children, Young People, Families at Risk and Older People*. However, the main emergent reader audience extends well beyond these target groups.

7.2 Fit with Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

As described earlier, the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum defines the content of what should be taught in Skills for Life programmes and the National Standards for Adult Literacy outline the range of skills and capabilities that adults are believed to need in order to function at work and in society. These are outlined in the table below.

Libraries' creative reading activity contributes directly to the outcomes identified at Entry Level 3 and Levels 1 and 2 of the curriculum, by developing and embedding emergent readers' skills.

Detailed descriptions of *how* these contributions are made by the Vital Link approach are contained in Section 5.

Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

Curriculum Themes		Contribution of the Vital Link approach
Speaking and Listening	Listen and respond	Provides forum for discussion Encourages people to listen to and understand others points of view Engagement in discussion around books
	Speak to communicate	Presentation of personal points of view Requests for information about books and other reading materials
	Engage in discussion	Discussion of books and personal points of view
Reading	Read and understand	Reading texts and analysing from multiple points of view to inform group discussions
	Read and obtain information	Obtaining information from dictionaries and personal interest books Independent use of libraries
Writing	Write to communicate	Writing book reviews to communicate views on books to others Writing about personal interests

Curriculum delivery must also include texts relevant to the interests of the individual. This links directly to the kind of support provided to tutors and emergent readers by libraries.

The standards also provide examples of the use of literacy skills in different contexts. These are essentially the communication skills, which enable people to function independently in social roles. The skills are outlined in the table below, along with the examples of the contribution made by libraries' use of the Vital Link approach.

Impact of Literacy Skills identified by Adult Literacy Curriculum	Examples of how the Vital Link approach can contribute
Citizen and Community Skills for participation in public life	Empowerment: greater self-confidence to engage in public life because of enhanced self-esteem and sense of achievement A greater understanding of multiple perspectives Independent use of a community information resource such as a library
Economic Activity Employability skills Help at work / to get work	Increased confidence, skills and self-esteem contributing to increased employability Examples of potential work roles from meeting a wider range of people
Domestic and everyday life Involvement with other people	Learning about family life and improved parenting from participation in family learning sessions and reading books about other people's lives
Leisure Leisure, enjoyment, participation	Extension of existing interests and development of new ones by being able to read for pleasure Enjoyment from and experimentation in reading for pleasure
Education and Training Learning activities	Learning how to learn through critical analysis of texts Increased confidence, skills and self-esteem Motivation to continue reading and learning Increased learning aspirations from enjoyment of creative reading activities
Using ICT in social roles Use of computer and ICT systems for social purposes	Use of ICT for writing book reviews for websites

8 Monitoring and evaluation

8.1 Future evaluation

The *Evaluation Framework* model illustrates that if The Vital Link programme is to enable libraries fully to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their creative reading activity on emergent readers, it is recommended that an evaluation framework is developed as outlined in the table below. This would illustrate the impact of the approach on:

- Central government and non-departmental public body policy
- Delivery partners: libraries and the Skills for Life sector
- End-users: emergent readers

Segment	Evaluation content
Central government	Impact on Shared Priorities and Skills for Life strategy
Delivery partners	<p>Libraries Impact on Framework for the Future and Public Library Impact Measures</p> <p>Skills for Life Sector Impact on Adult Literacy Core Curriculum</p>
End-users	Outcomes for emergent readers

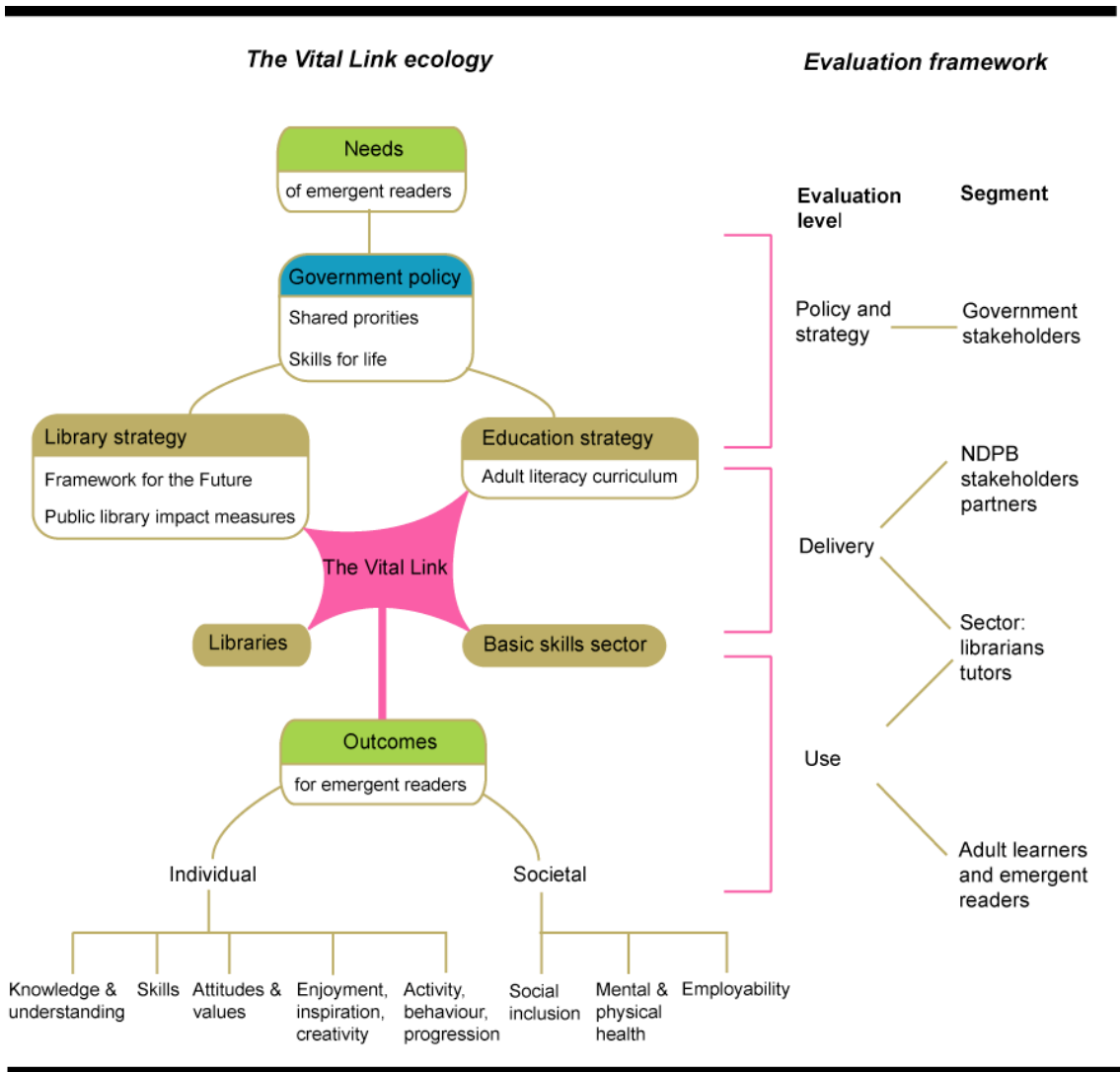
Longitudinal evaluation with individual emergent readers is also recommended. This should encompass their progression from the start of their learning journey through their engagement with libraries' creative reading activity and into the medium and longer term so that the full extent of the outcomes, especially in terms of economic impact, can be confirmed.

In the short-term, the brief for this evaluation required the development of a research methodology to focus on the impact of libraries' creative reading activity on emergent readers, as the end-users, and to make this available as an online evaluation toolkit.

This evidence from the research is therefore being used to develop a series of outcome indicators and measures to provide evidence of the contribution to these outcomes in the context of the Shared Priorities through the Public Library Impact Measures, Skills for Life through the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum and the current BBC RaW campaign.

The resulting Evaluation Toolkit will be piloted with a number of library authorities in late 2005/early 2006 and finalised for wider use by library authorities from spring 2006 onwards.

The Vital Link evaluation framework



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9 Appendices

Separate Data Appendices

Key quotes by outcome

Sampling

Focus Group Discussion Plan

Tutor / Librarian Interview Template

Transcripts



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