



Reading for pleasure

Ideas to inspire people in the workplace



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'The National Year of Reading gives us a great opportunity to work together to promote reading for pleasure to adults who are improving their skills.'

*David Lammy MP, Minister for Skills,
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*

'If you read, the world has never been more accessible and more exciting. If you don't, the door on opportunity has never been more firmly shut. By starting with what people love – be it sport, music, film, family history, magazines or adventure gaming – the National Year of Reading is a perfect opportunity to weave a rich variety of reading into all your work with learners.'

Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Project Director, National Year of Reading

'I can underestimate learners' understanding until they tell me about a book they have read.' *Adult literacy tutor*

Start with what you love. This is the message of the National Year of Reading. And this is the message for adult learners as much as for any other audience.

The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme, together with the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), have created this series of ideas packs for practitioners working with adults in a range of different settings. **This pack contains ideas to inspire people in the workplace. There is a full list of all the packs available on page 10.**

The aim is to support you in introducing learners to reading in all its forms – books, magazines, websites, lyrics – not just this year, but every year. We need to widen people's concept of reading so that they can think of themselves as 'readers' whatever kind of reading they enjoy. We know that learners can get the reading bug if they are encouraged to choose what they read and can share their experience of reading with others. Reading needs to fit into their busy lives, be relevant to their interests and concerns but also to surprise them with new ideas and ways of looking at the world.

Research tells us that reading for pleasure 'helps to increase enjoyment, self-confidence, motivation and the acquisition of functional literacy skills'. Libraries are ideally placed to support learners as they discover an enjoyment of reading of all kinds. But other organisations also have expertise and resources to offer, which can help to engage people in a love of reading. Local authorities, colleges, prisons, trade unions, businesses and voluntary organisations have all made a commitment to use the National Year of Reading to create new readers.

Please make good use of these ideas while the profile for reading is high and help us to make 2008 an exciting point in their reading journey for adult learners across the country.

Genevieve Clarke, The Vital Link and **Jenny Cobley**, NIACE

See www.yearofreading.org.uk for more information about the National Year of Reading.

Introduction

Building confidence in reading will improve the performance, morale and commitment of a business. The workplace demands an ability to read a wide variety of texts such as policies, instructions, emails, health and safety notices, tables and charts in order to perform effectively. Reading is key to understanding health and safety as well building awareness of the wider aims and values of an organisation.

The Leitch Review of Skills, published in December 2006, warned that the UK must 'raise its game' on skills at all levels if it is to sustain and improve its position in the global economy. The Government's Skills Pledge is a voluntary, public commitment to support employees to develop their skills, including literacy. Employers who make a commitment to the Skills Pledge will have access to free literacy and numeracy and first full Level 2 qualification courses and can use this opportunity to support reading development.

A new type of union activist, the union learning representative, has been instrumental in raising interest in training and development, especially among the lowest skilled workers and those with literacy and numeracy needs. By 2010 there will be 22,000 union learning reps across the country and they can play a key role in supporting reading in the workplace. Unions know their members and they know their workplace. They can guide providers to find their way through a complex organisation to make things happen. Employers and unions can encourage reading in a variety of ways.

Top ten ideas

- 1.** One of the most important actions you can take is to make sure all staff are committed to using plain English when writing letters, emails, notices and any form of written communication. Unnecessary use of complex language and jargon will put people off reading and they will miss vital information.
- 2.** You can nominate a union learning rep to be a Reading Champion, to encourage reading in the workplace – perhaps implementing and sustaining some of the activities outlined here.
- 3.** Book swaps can build up a workplace library. Staff can bring in their unwanted books and set up informal lending libraries in canteens and rest areas. You can also get staff to post short reviews on the company's intranet or a noticeboard placed near the library or to include an ongoing review placed inside the front cover of a book. At the top of a blank sheet of paper, just write *'I recommend this book because....'*
- 4.** Use an electronic display board at the entrance so staff and customers can read short bullet points that are up to date. These can be a mixture of information and good news stories.
- 5.** If there is a television in any part of the building, activate the subtitles buttons by pressing 888 on the remote control. This will help staff for whom English is a second or additional language.
- 6.** Employers can buy packs of Quick Reads. Reading is not just about competence but also about attitude. Quick Reads can be instrumental in fostering a positive attitude towards reading and getting learners to read more. They are short books by popular authors for people who want a short, fast-paced read.

'I think to me personally, when the book was first given to me, I thought I'm not a reader. I have trouble reading. I've never kind of sat down and read a book, so when we were in class and started reading it, it was really good, I really enjoyed it.' Christine, Widnes focus group
- 7.** Encourage reading through good news stories. Nominate an 'Employee of the Month'. Display their photo and a short accompanying text explaining why they were nominated.

Top ten ideas cont...

- 8.** You can get employees to arrange their own magazine clubs by following these simple steps. Collect a nominal amount of money each month from a group of staff and buy some magazines. Vary the titles. Attach a circulation list to each magazine and allow people to pass them round between them. This encourages wider reading of magazines they wouldn't normally buy and allows people to have the luxury of reading just one interesting article instead of feeling they have to plough through the whole thing.

- 9.** Adults are often motivated to read by becoming a parent, step-parent or grandparent. For a small cost, you can start a story sack library for staff to borrow and take home to share with their children or grandchildren. Story sacks are a popular, non-threatening way of encouraging parents and carers to start sharing stories with their children. A story sack is a large cloth bag containing a children's book, together with items to stimulate reading activities and make shared reading a memorable and enjoyable experience. A sack could contain soft toys of the book's main characters, props or scenery that you can use with children to bring a book to life. They can be bought or made.

- 10.** Display leaflets about the local area including places to visit and prospectuses from local colleges for staff to pick up and read.

Case study 1: Fletcher's Bakery, Sheffield

It's not easy making the time for reading or visiting the library when you're working, particularly if you are on shifts. Fletcher's Bakery in Sheffield is part of Northern Foods and employs 400 people. To reach people at work, the library and reading promotion came to the workplace. The Six Book Challenge provided an opportunity for staff across the whole factory to get reading. The union learning reps used their learning centre as a mini-library and stocked it with Quick Reads. They then thought about how they could motivate people to read six books – for some it would be the first time they'd read a book in years.

Library staff timed visits to arrive at the end of one shift and the beginning of the other and announced their arrival over the tannoy system.

Working with Human Resources, the reps devised a key incentive: to give all Challenge participants a free lunch in the staff canteen when they reached their fourth book!

Union learning reps approached people to get them involved in the Six Book Challenge. Posters advertising the library and the Challenge were put up around the factory. On launching the Challenge, 14 staff immediately signed up and this number had increased to 50 a couple of months later.

Case study 2: First UK Bus in partnership with TGWU

To encourage reading, you can start by encouraging writing. First UK Bus ran a new writing competition for all its employees as part of its Skills for Life programme, which has successfully provided learning opportunities for its 20,300 drivers through 40 learning centres across the country. The competition was a joint effort organised by First UK Bus and the Transport and General Workers Union lifelong learning partnership. The organisers were overwhelmed with the response which totalled nearly 300 entries.

The entries were judged externally by Business in the Community and NIACE. The judges were not aware of names of authors or their job roles. The winners fell into several categories including Depot level winners, Overall Operating Company winner and Regional Winner (based on the Transport and General Workers Union training regions).

The competition was strongly supported by union learning reps who encouraged people to enter – the winner actually had his first draft retrieved from the waste paper basket by his rep! NIACE published an anthology of the short stories in a book called 'First Fiction' and a copy was given to every employee.

'This is another example of some of the great local talent we have working in both Operating Companies. This type of competition encourages people to explore and improve their reading and writing skills and First is supporting them through places like our learning support centres. I am very proud of everyone who took part and they have all demonstrated what can be achieved with a little support and self-belief.'
Tony Anthistle, Managing Director of First Bristol, Somerset & Avon.

Case study 3:

NIACE

Establishing a reading group is difficult when half your staff are not office-based. NIACE is an organisation of about 260 staff. Around half are based in the main office but many work regionally or from home. A Reading Group is held once a month during the lunch break and all staff are invited via email. Those who can attend have tea and cakes together in order to make it a social event. Staff working off site can join in through logging onto Moodle, a virtual learning environment. This allows them to make their comments live through the 'chat' facility. The first meeting attracted 17 people and a wider conversation about the book continued on Moodle for several weeks.

Each book is decided using an electronic voting system. Everyone can nominate a book and a 'randomiser' is used to select it. The Reading Group, along with the Christmas lunch, is probably the only opportunity where all staff can come together socially. It provides an opportunity for people working in different teams to get to know each other and to make connections and build relationships based around a love of books.

Resources

The TUC's **unionlearn** spreads the lifelong learning message to union members. To find out more about how union learning representatives can support learning, go to www.unionlearn.org.uk

The **Campaign for Learning** website at www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk has ideas to promote learning at work.

The **National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)** provides courses for employers on readability. For more information go to www.niace.org.uk

The **Plain English Campaign's** website www.plainenglish.co.uk gives free guidance about using plain English.

The **Six Book Challenge**, in association with the Costa Book Awards, is a national scheme for adult readers run by The Reading Agency as part of The Vital Link programme. For more information go to www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk

Quick Reads packs for employers can be found at www.niace.org.uk/quickreads. Downloadable files providing ideas for using the books can be found at www.vitallink.org.uk

The **Workers' Educational Association (WEA)** is the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult learning. Their website at www.wea.org.uk has a section on workplace learning with a tutors and learners zone.

The government's **Train to Gain** initiative encourages workplace learning and information on the Skills Pledge. Visit their website at www.traintogain.gov.uk for information.

Please also see the resources listed in the packs for New readers 1 and 2.

Full list of *Ideas to inspire* packs

New readers 1 (up to Adult Literacy Entry Level 2)

New readers 2 (Adult Literacy Entry Level 3 – Level 2)

Parents and carers of young children

Dads and male carers of young children

ESOL learners

People in prisons and young offender institutions

People in the workplace

FE college students

HE students

Readers with additional needs

These packs are available to download as individual PDF files from www.vitallink.org.uk or www.niace.org.uk

Ideas to inspire people in the workplace

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Case study 1 contributed by David Kendall

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We welcome all feedback on these ideas and on how you are promoting reading to your learners. Please contact genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk



The Vital Link libraries and adult literacy programme is run by The Reading Agency in partnership with the National Literacy Trust. See www.vitallink.org.uk



NIACE is a non-governmental organisation working for more and different learners. See www.niace.org.uk