

report

Six Book Challenge 2008

The Impact on Readers

Sarah Grylls
Learning for Learning

**The
Vital
Link**

read
readingagency.org.uk

Introduction

“I have become addicted to reading and myself and two children have become members of the library.” Six Book Challenge completer

“Learners have said the challenge has changed their lives. They previously didn't read much or couldn't complete books. Now they are reading and enjoying it.” Tutor

The Reading Agency launched the Six Book Challenge as an annual incentive scheme for emergent readers in association with Costa in January 2008. It forms part of its Vital Link programme run by The Reading Agency which encourages libraries and learning providers to work together to integrate reading for pleasure into literacy teaching and learning.

Our aim was to offer practitioners in the library and skills sectors an attractive and practical way of working in partnership to engage less confident adult readers in a reading habit.

The national Six Book Challenge has developed out of a local scheme pioneered by Hull Libraries in 2006 which itself was modelled on The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge for children. This was then piloted by library authorities across Yorkshire in 2007 with support from the BBC RaW campaign and Museums, Libraries and Archives Yorkshire.

145 library services across the UK (69%) signed up to run the Challenge in 2008 in partnership with colleges, community education and workplaces. Another 50 learning providers signed up separately and more than 50 prisons ran the Challenge. Evaluation data collected from participating library services, learning providers, prisons and work places indicated that 7000 adults across the UK took part through libraries, colleges, community education, trade unions and prisons with an average completion rate of between 40% and 50%.

There were 1236 entries from 89 different organisations for the national prize draw sponsored by Costa and entries from 24 prisons and YOLs for a separate prize draw for these institutions.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills funded The Reading Agency to develop and pilot impact indicators which could be used with learners undertaking the Six Book Challenge and to inform evaluation of other reading for pleasure activity. We therefore commissioned adult learning consultant Sarah Grylls to develop a methodology for evaluating the impact of the Six Book Challenge which we piloted during the first year of the national scheme.

This report is the result of that pilot exercise. It should also be seen in the context of earlier research to assess the impact of libraries' reading for pleasure activity with adult literacy learners which can be found on the Vital Link website at www.vitallink.org.uk

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Reading Agency ran the first national Six Book Challenge in association with the Costa Book Awards from January to June 2008. The Challenge was targeted at adults who wanted to improve their literacy skills, and formed part of the Vital Link programme for libraries and literacy run by The Reading Agency.

The Six Book Challenge invited adult literacy learners to read six books, and supported them with incentives and creative reading activities, guidance on choosing books and introduction to Quick Read and other recommended titles. It was delivered through libraries working in partnership with organisations which work closely with emergent readers¹ such as colleges, community adult education, trade unions and prisons.

All participants were to receive free Costa coffee cards and those who completed the Challenge would have the chance to win an all-expenses-paid trip to London for two, courtesy of the Costa Book Awards.

This evaluation sought to discover the impact of the Six Book Challenge on participants. It was conducted through three surveys, two to be completed by participants at the start and end of the Challenge and one to be completed at the end by tutors. Surveys could be completed online or in hard copy, and participants could complete them with or without support. This report is based on responses from 245 Starting Point surveys and 170 Post Challenge surveys completed by participants, together with reports from 21 Tutors who together worked with 235 Challenge participants. A small subset of 33 participants gave their names in both surveys, enabling individual “Before and After” analysis to be undertaken.

The profile of respondents was ethnically mixed though predominantly white, spread fairly evenly over all age groups from 16 to 54, and with slightly more women than men. Most came to the Challenge through Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 adult literacy and ESOL² classes in the South East, with some from prisons and smaller numbers from employers or directly through libraries.

There were two main expectations cited by respondents: that they would be given the support to get into a new or renewed habit of reading and/or that they would improve their literacy skills. Some also wanted to gain other specific knowledge or skills, and some had goals in relation to their overall personal development.

Key outcomes

- **The vast majority of respondents (79%) achieved their goal of reading six books, and it is clear that participating in the Challenge was a positive experience for almost all, with 88% saying they had gained something, including 59% who had gained a lot.**
- **A major development for many respondents was the realisation that they could enjoy reading (61% said they enjoyed it “a lot”, compared with 41% at the start) coupled with new knowledge and confidence about how to incorporate reading for pleasure into their lives. Responses give reason for optimism that participating in the Challenge may have a long term impact on some participants’ reading habits: 89% expected to borrow more library books, over 80% to read more magazines and more leaflets, official letters and documents, 77% to write more (eg diary, stories, letters, emails), and over 70% to read more fiction and non-fiction books, in the coming year than they had before.**
- **There is strong evidence to suggest that, for the majority of respondents, undertaking the Challenge contributed to the development of literacy skills, especially reading comprehension; listen to respond; speak to communicate and probably vocabulary and word recognition. Nearly 60% of participants identified literacy gains, and 81% (17) of the tutors reported that participation had definitely helped their students with at least one aspect of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum**
- **The Challenge gave almost all (94%) respondents a sense of achievement, and many gave examples of how they had gained in confidence. However it was also a genuine**

¹ Emergent readers are defined by The Reading Agency as adults who can read but who have yet to build reading stamina and experience

² English for Speakers of Other Languages

challenge for many, so that there were lows as well as highs, and confidence could dip as well as rise. Those with expectations of improving their literacy, getting into the habit of reading, and enjoying it when they did, were likely to have their expectations met but not all more specific or longer term aspirations were reported as being achieved.

- **During the Challenge there was a small increase in the number of times reading inspired respondents to do something different, or made them change their views, in contrast with the previous year. Examples include practical activities, specific ideas and more fundamental approaches to life.**

Other considerations

While an overall analysis of responses to the surveys shows very positive feedback with a trend towards all average impact scores improving during the Challenge, individual experiences were more complex than this, and confidence, enjoyment and specific aspects of reading could decrease as well as increase.

There was a moderate level of awareness of the Costa sponsorship, and a little disappointment among some respondents either that the free coffee did not materialise or that incentives were not as good as they could have been.

The evaluation itself was a pilot and should be reviewed, taking into account feedback on it from respondents.

Reflection and conclusions

The findings suggest that the Six Book Challenge has undoubtedly been successful in achieving its two main goals: firstly to give participants positive experiences of reading, leading to new or renewed enjoyment, confidence in their own abilities, and enthusiasm to develop reading habits for the future; and secondly, to support and enhance the development of literacy skills, in particular – though not exclusively - those related to reading for understanding, and those related to communication.

At its best the Challenge also seems to have skilfully and relatively seamlessly interwoven various aspects of library and adult learning service provision (skills development, discussions about books, library visits, guidance on and provision of appropriate books especially Quick Reads, meeting staff and in some cases writers) to produce a fabric of experience that neither could have made alone.

1. Background

The Reading Agency ran the first national Six Book Challenge in association with the Costa Book Awards from January to June 2008. The Challenge was targeted at adults who wanted to improve their literacy skills, and formed part of the Vital Link programme for libraries and literacy run by The Reading Agency.

The Six Book Challenge invited adult literacy learners to read six books, and supported them with incentives and creative reading activities, guidance on choosing books and introduction to Quick Read and other recommended titles. It was delivered through libraries working in partnership with organisations which work closely with emergent readers³ such as colleges, community adult education, trade unions and prisons.

All participants were to receive free Costa coffee cards and those who completed the Challenge would have the chance to win an all-expenses paid trip to London for two, courtesy of the Costa Book Awards.

2. Evaluation aims and methodology

This evaluation sought to discover the impact of the Six Book Challenge on participants. It was conducted through three surveys, two to be completed by participants at the start and end of the Challenge and one to be completed at the end by tutors. Surveys could be completed online or in hard copy, and participants could complete them with or without support.

This evaluation set out to discover the impact of the Challenge on participants, as reported by themselves and by tutors working with them. There were a number of requirements for the evaluation design which were not always fully compatible, but the aim was to produce a process which would, as far as possible:

- be accessible to participants with modest literacy skills, with or without support from tutors;
- produce a large enough sample for conclusions to be representative;
- be proportionate in cost and time requirements;
- provide both quantitative data and qualitative accounts of personal experience;
- refer to and build on existing approaches to impact evaluation undertaken within The Reading Agency and library services;
- be concerned with the Challenge's impact both on participants' literacy, and on their confidence, personal development and other self-defined benefits.

The surveys contained two kinds of question: firstly, those asking directly for feedback on respondents' expectations and experiences of the Challenge and how they felt it had impacted on them; secondly questions about reading habits, experience, enjoyment and confidence which were not directly related to the Challenge but which were replicated so that before and after comparisons could be made. It is important to be aware that there may have been other factors in respondents' lives, in particular their participation in literacy or ESOL⁴ classes, which may have contributed to any change identified in response to this second set of questions.

The information in this document was taken from 245 Starting Point surveys and 170 Post Challenge surveys completed by participants, together with reports from 21 tutors who together worked with 235 Challenge

³ Emergent readers are defined by The Reading Agency as adults who can read but who have yet to build reading stamina and experience

⁴ English for Speakers of Other Languages

participants. Post Challenge surveys were completed either after six books had been read, or by the end of May if the number was fewer than six. All libraries and learning providers sponsoring the Challenge in the South East region were asked to encourage participants to complete the surveys, either online or in hard copy, and either alone, or with individual support, or as an activity in their learning group. Other regions were also invited to use the evaluation but not required to do so. Whether or not participants completed the forms would depend both on their personal preferences and on decisions made by tutors and library staff about whether to introduce the evaluation as an appropriate activity for their groups at a particular point in their programmes.

Exact numbers for Challenge participants and completers are not available, so it is not possible to be certain what proportion of possible participants the respondent samples provide. A rough estimate suggests that the Starting Point sample could represent about 3% of those registering for the Challenge, and the Post Challenge sample could represent about 5% of those completing by the end of June. Age-wise the samples match quite closely the information available from libraries on numbers registered for the Challenge. The evaluation response set has a higher proportion of men than this overall figure, but as the latter excludes participants registering through prisons and workplaces the difference is not thought to be significant. No ethnicity information is available for the whole participation set.

Participants were asked for their names and other demographic data for both surveys, but it was made clear that this was optional. In the event, 202 Starting Point respondents and 123 Post Challenge respondents gave their names, and 33 of these were the same people. This indicates that the two groups, though demographically similar, were largely made up of different individuals. However the 33 did provide a useful subset which could be analysed for “Before and After” comparisons.

Figures given in this report are percentages of actual replies received for each question. Almost all individual questions were answered by at least 80% of the respondents, and where lower response rates were received this is made clear. Direct quotations from respondents are shown in italics.

3. Who the respondents were

The profile of respondents was ethnically mixed though predominantly white, spread fairly evenly over all age groups from 16 to 54, and with slightly more women than men. Most came to the Challenge through adult literacy classes in the South East, with some from prisons and smaller numbers from employers or directly through Libraries.

Respondents to the participants’ surveys were roughly 40% male and 60% female, with more than half being in the 25-34 or 35-44 age bands, most of the rest being 16-24 or 45-54, and a few being older, up to 65-74. They were predominantly White British with the next largest ethnic group being Asian.

As the evaluation was being treated primarily as a South East pilot, around half of responses came from that region, with a large contingent from Buckinghamshire, but all other regions were represented except Eastern, and there were some from Scotland. The majority of respondents came through library service partnerships with Adult Learning or Colleges of Further Education. About 8% of Starting Point respondents and 15% of Post Challenge respondents were involved with the Challenge whilst in prison. A small number came from one employer, Transport for London.

Most of the respondents were currently undertaking adult education courses, some of them taking more than one. Literacy students were spread fairly evenly across Entry Levels and Levels 1 and 2, ESOL students were more likely to be at Entry Level. Those who were not on courses at present tended to come from prisons or direct from libraries.

Figure 1

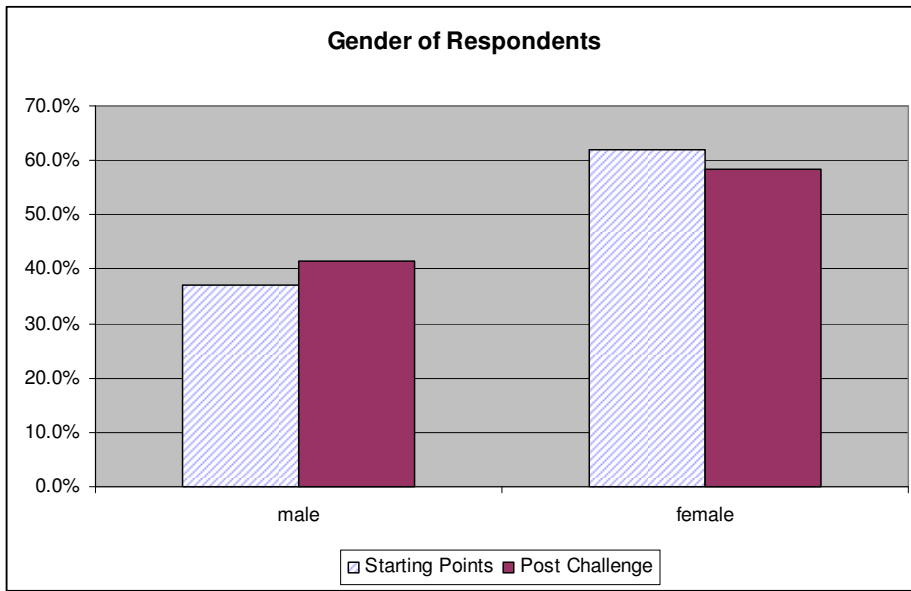


Figure 2

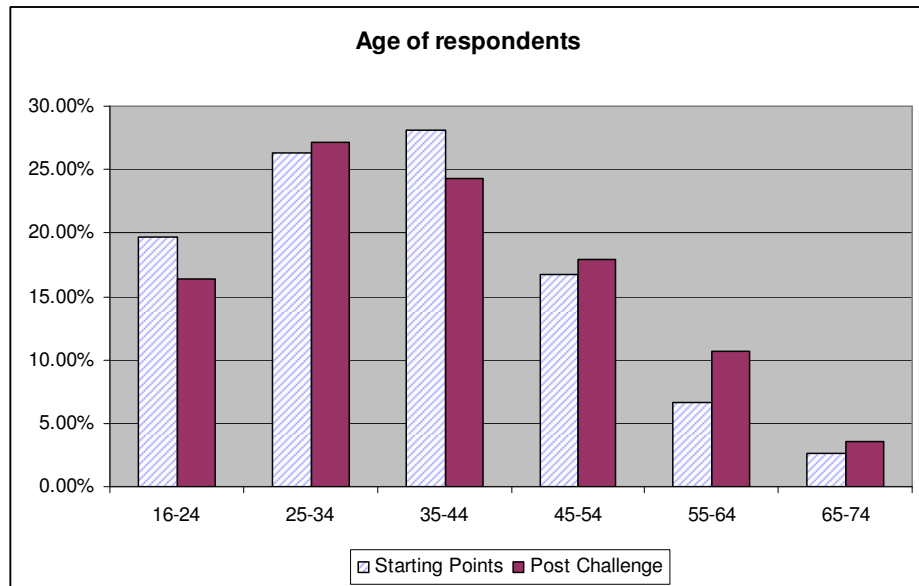


Figure 3

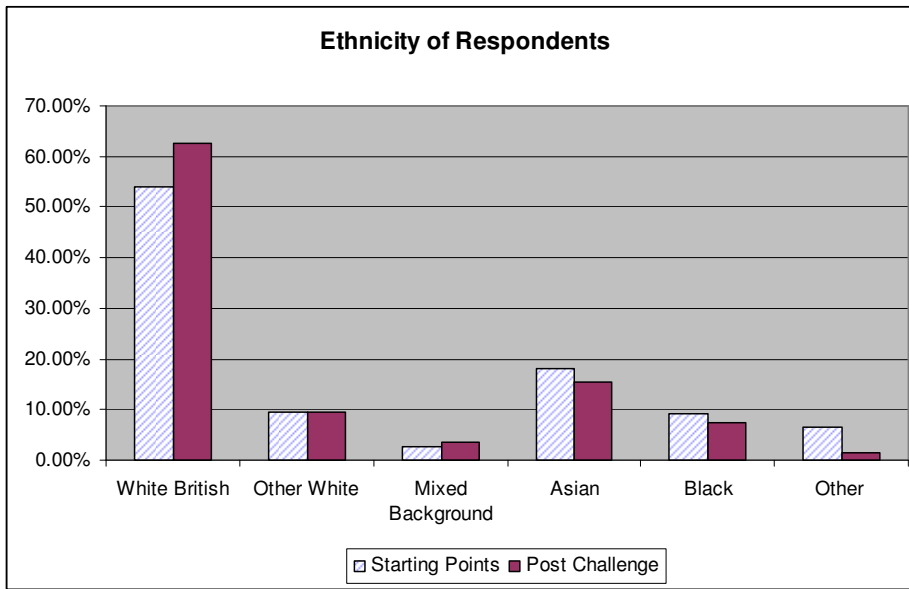
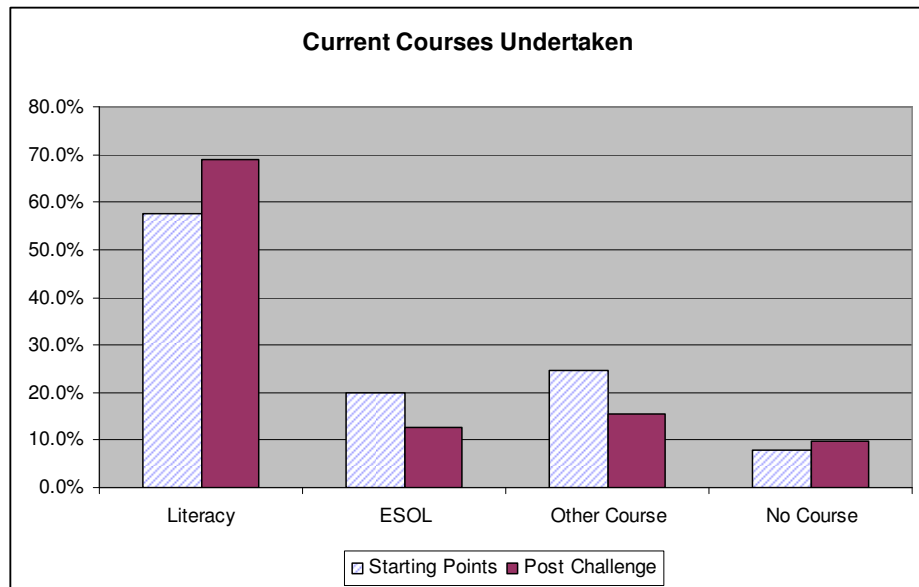
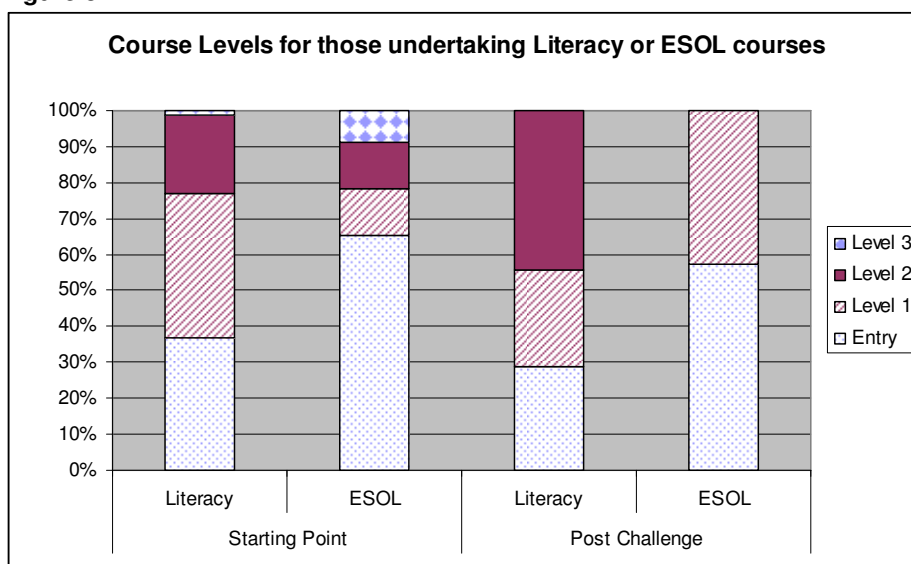


Figure 4⁵



⁵ Totals are more than 100% because some respondents were involved in more than one course.

Figure 5



4. What respondents sought

There were two main expectations cited by respondents: that they would be given the support to get into a new or renewed habit of reading and/or that they would improve their literacy skills. Some also wanted to gain other specific knowledge or skills, and some had goals in relation to their overall personal development.

Respondents were asked an open (unprompted) question at the beginning of the Starting Point survey, about their hopes in signing up for the Challenge⁶. At the end of the same survey they were asked again about what they hoped to get from the Challenge, but in a semi-closed question with category prompts and open text boxes⁷. This was a complex question which was answered by a 66% of respondents. Together, answers to these questions tell us about the expectations and motivating factors for participants.

Unprompted, 34% of respondents suggested they were simply looking for support, encouragement or a framework to help them **do and enjoy more reading**.

“To learn what books I enjoy and to encourage me to read more”

“I have never read a book so I would like to just read a book.”

“Having more time to read and challenging bigger books”

“To enjoy it and pass the time of day or night. It’s calming and relaxing.”

“I hope to gain the enjoyment of reading a book every couple of weeks.”

“To extend my reading range and try new authors”

The largest category of prompted responses (65%, endorsed by 33% of unprompted responses) was to **improve or practise reading and writing**. Some were quite specific, for example:

⁶ “What do you hope to get out of the Six Book Challenge?”

⁷ “Is there anything specific you hope to gain from the Six Book Challenge? If so please give details in *one or more* of the boxes below: Something you’d like to know about; A skill to help your reading or writing; Any other skill you’d like to learn; Inspiration or ideas you are looking for; Something you would like to improve about your own feelings, confidence or relationships; Anything else.”

“Improve reading, speed, punctuation, spelling, better understanding of words”

“I would like to be good enough to do my GCSEs.”

“To read faster and not keep going over things again and again what I’ve already read”

“To improve proofing reading drafting”

“Understanding what I am reading/to write better letters”

An additional 11% (unprompted) who were mostly ESOL students hoped the Challenge would improve their English:

“Deeper and broader command of the English Language”

Many (33% prompted and 11% unprompted) were looking forward to general or specific **knowledge and stimulation**, including *Politics, Other countries, More on martial arts, Law, Jane Austen, Internet, Icing cakes and making icing flowers, Psychics, Mediums, Tarot Cards, Paranormal Activities & Astrology.*

“... and be able to approach and understand new subjects though reading books of different subjects”

“Hopefully, learn more about what's going on around me & in the world . Basically, just general knowledge really...”

“A change from reading cookbooks”

“Knowing more about history mostly Black history and slavery”

“Know more about culture of English”

27% (prompted) were looking for “something you would like to improve about your **feelings, confidence or relationships**” and 15% (unprompted) were looking for confidence either generally or with specific aspects of reading and talking about reading.

“I hope I will be able to express my feelings in English without problems.”

“I would like to spell that would give me the best confidence ever.”

“[So that] People don't think I am slow”

“Hopefully be able to be confident enough to communicate with people of all levels”

“Being a better person”

“Confidence in my job”

“... understand others point of view”

26% (prompted) were hoping to acquire a **skill**, such as *Bricklaying, Plumbing, Dressmaking, Different languages, Computing*

“To learn how to make words exciting”

“Interested in gardening”

Almost as many (22% prompted) hoped for **inspiration or ideas**:

“Ideas for my own writing”

“Music/singing”

“Meaning”

“Reading books on healthy living and exercise”

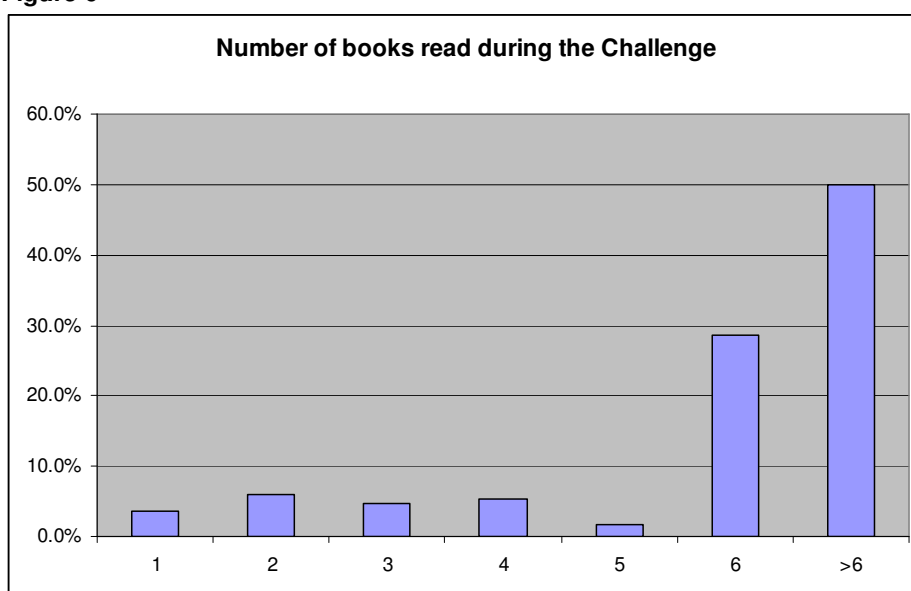
“Where my life's leading to”

5. Development of a reading habit

The vast majority of respondents achieved their goal of reading six books, and it is clear that participating in the Challenge was a positive experience for almost all. A major development for many respondents was the realisation that they could enjoy reading, coupled with new knowledge and confidence about how to incorporate reading for pleasure into their lives. Responses give reason for optimism that participating in the Challenge may have a longer term impact on some participants' reading habits.

As described above, a key motivation for many respondents (in line with one of the aims of the Challenge itself) was simply to be supported and encouraged to read more. Post Challenge surveys show that 79% of respondents had read at least six books during the Challenge. More may well have continued to finish six books even if they had not done so by the official end date: the tutors' survey showed that 59% of their learners had completed the Challenge at the time surveys were filled in, but that they expected 83% of their learners who had started the Challenge to complete it eventually.

Figure 6



88% of respondents felt they had gained something out of doing the Challenge, including 59% who had gained a lot out of it. About half of the open responses about gains referred to getting into the habit of reading; overall 38% of respondents suggested in responses throughout the survey that the Challenge had changed their attitude to reading – they had discovered that it was enjoyable and were beginning to incorporate it more into their lives, including for some joining and using their library, and sharing their reading enjoyment with children, family and friends:

“Managed to finish three books (Quick Read) from start to finish. Never before.”

“It showed me how to choose different books and I was so proud of myself.”

“I was not a reader but I can read now.”

“Encouragement; Barrier broken down between me and library; books are no longer alien to me.”

“It's got me back reading again maybe now that I am older it got me feeling good again.”

“I do read but I have never been interested in reading fiction books. Doing this challenge has been great and I have recently joined my local library and I have also bought two short novels by Ian McEwan to take on my holiday this summer.”

“I have never read a book. It has been enjoyable. It was interesting to find out about different authors and the kind of stories they write.”

"I am more interested in reading now. Also, I am not put off by reading books that are more than 100 pages."

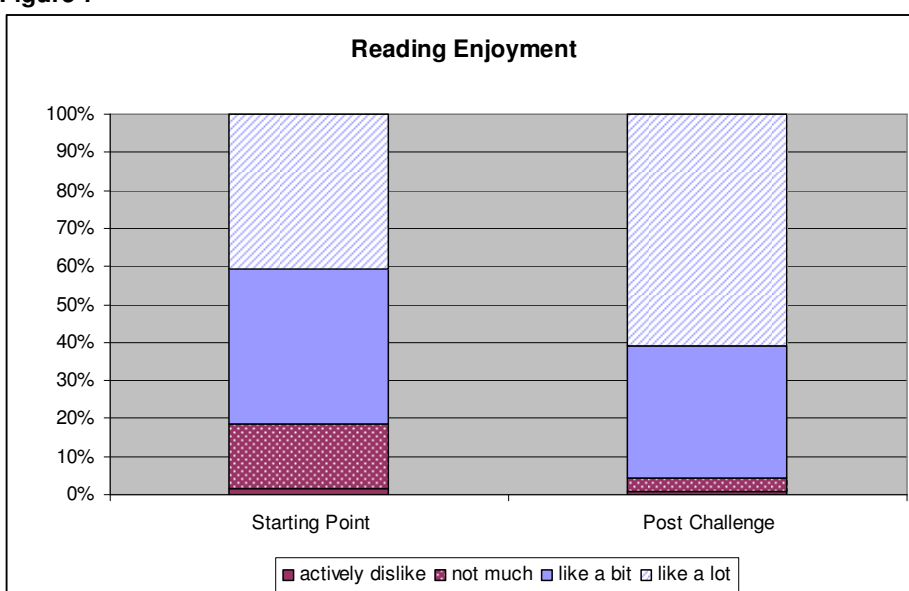
"I had never read many books before doing the challenge, since doing this I have never read as much, I really enjoy reading, and I get that I don't want to put some books down as they are so good."

"I can read quite well but lacked the motivation - the challenge has got me reading eagerly again."

Those few who said they had not really got anything out of the Challenge did not seem to come from any particular group or category of respondents, and interestingly more than half of them did later say that they had a modest or even big sense of achievement from the Challenge, and all but one of them was able to identify something specific they had gained when prompted to do so.

Both Starting Point and Post Challenge surveys asked about participants' level of reading enjoyment. A comparison shows that, although enjoyment started reasonably high, with 81% expressing positive enjoyment, this figure increased to 96% by the end of the Challenge, and respondents were much more likely to say they enjoyed reading "a lot", the final score being 61%, in comparison with 41% at the beginning.

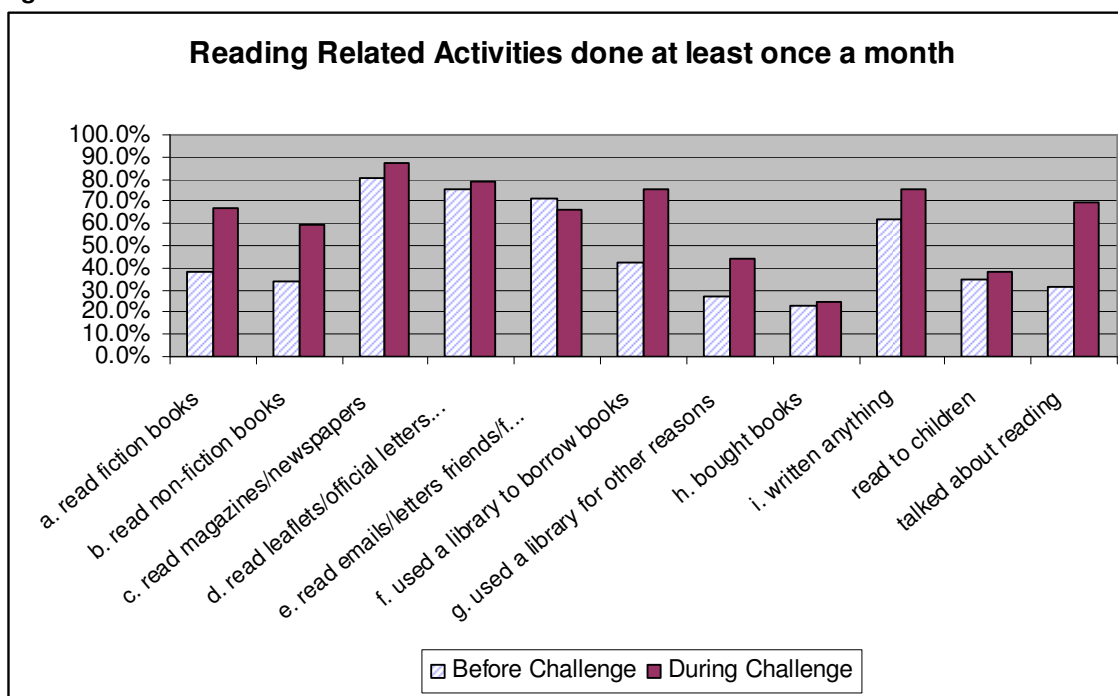
Figure 7



Respondents were asked about their reading-related habits before and during the Challenge, and also about their expectations for the coming year⁸. Answers suggested that reading books, writing, library use and talking about what they had read had all significantly increased during the Challenge.

⁸ The question gave them the option of saying they had done something at least once a week, at least once a month (but less than once a week), less than once a month or not at all

Figure 8



Answers to the “reading to children” question were difficult to interpret as we had no way of knowing whether respondents had their own or any other children to or with whom they might hope to read. However a few people did spontaneously refer to this benefit, as did one tutor:

“I have become addicted to reading and myself and two children have become members of the library”

“I was pleased with myself because I completed it and it got me to read more as well and it helped my son too.”

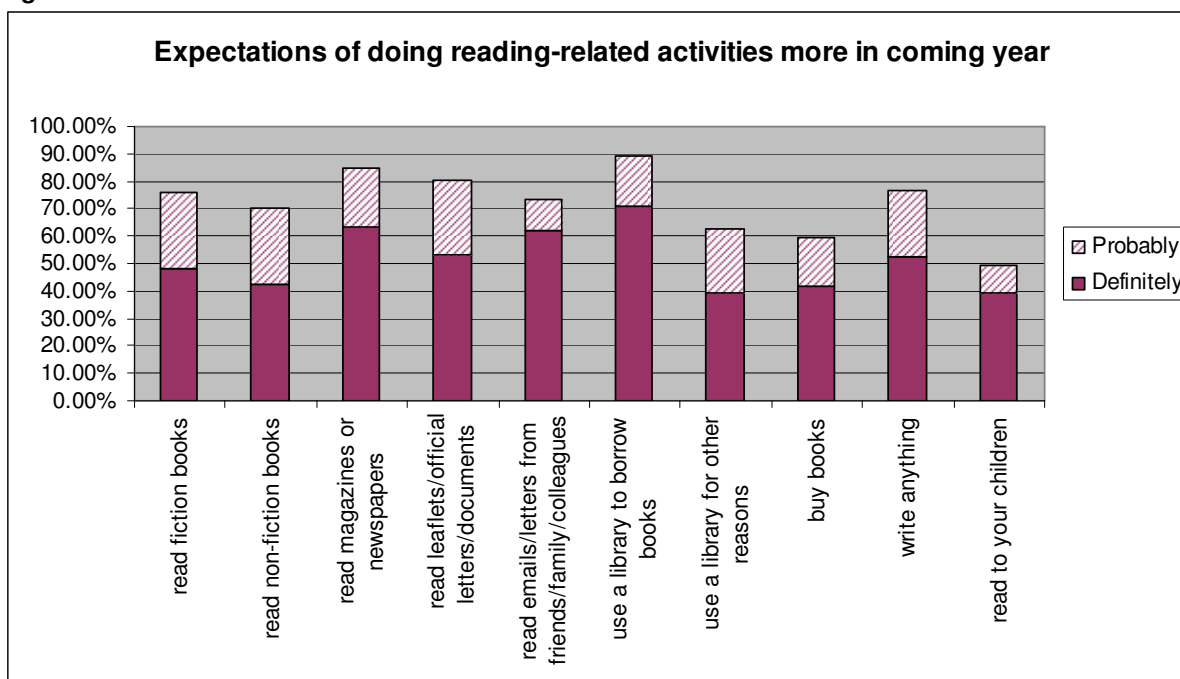
“I can read more easily with my children.”

“Myself and my children enjoy reading more and enjoy going to the library”

“I encourage all my learners to read and emphasise the importance of it to my higher level learners as well to make sure they are reading for pleasure and to their children as well.”

Looking to the future, in the coming year 89% definitely expected to do more of at least one of the reading-related activities listed in the survey, and 62% definitely expected to do more of at least four. Looking at individual activities, over 75% expected (probably and definitely) to borrow more library books, write more, and read more magazines, more fiction books, and more leaflets official letters and documents in the coming year than they had before:

Figure 9



The attitudinal changes described above were also reflected in tutor feedback:

“They are now more confident & willing to try!”

“It has also encouraged students to speak to friends and family about books and recommend some of the titles they have read during the challenge.”

“Some of the students had not read for pleasure for over 20 years. They are now keen to continue reading even though the challenge is coming to an end.”

“It encouraged them to visit the Library and feel ok about doing so. Their self-esteem has risen as they now realise they can finish books and enjoy them.”

“Lots of talk and enthusiasm for reading and books. Also a very interesting visit to the library.”

6. Contribution to literacy skills

There is strong evidence to suggest that, for the majority of respondents, undertaking the Challenge contributed to the development of literacy skills, especially reading comprehension and various communication skills specified in the national literacy curriculum.

As most participants in the Challenge were involved in literacy or ESOL courses, it is not easy to isolate the effects of the Challenge from other improvements in literacy made through their courses. The allocation of cause and effect is made even more complex by the fact that the majority of tutors (62% of those completing surveys) integrated the Challenge into their courses, so that for many respondents there may not always have been a clear distinction between Challenge and other course activities. As the Challenge actively encourages such integration, this is an evaluation dilemma we have to live with.

Nevertheless, the people involved felt there was a link between Challenge activities and literacy skills development. When asked specifically about any reading or writing gains, almost 60% of respondents said they felt these had improved due to the Challenge, with 28% listing literacy gains unprompted. The majority of responses refer to general improvements in reading, but there are also references to writing and to specific literacy skills such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar and punctuation:

“I am better at reading now though it is sometimes hard.”

"Scanning and skimming, reading and writing"

"I learned lots of new words, had to look up new words in the dictionary."

"I've learnt how to choose books at the library, I've learnt new words, I've written more."

"When I read a book I understood better"

"I have learned new words, how to write beautiful sentences."

"I got to know the availability of books and polish up on my reading skills too."

"It helped my English. It encouraged me to visit the library every week."

Tutors were asked to consider whether they felt the Challenge had enhanced their learners' literacy or ESOL skills. 81% (17 tutors) reported that participation had definitely helped with at least one aspect of the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum. There was fairly strong feeling that it had contributed particularly to four elements: reading comprehension; engagement in discussion; listen and respond; and speak to communicate; probably to vocabulary and word recognition, and possibly to other elements too. Tutors' comments include:

"As the challenge has progressed students have begun to spontaneously discuss the books they are reading/have read. They have predominantly discussed why they liked/disliked the book, what characters they liked/disliked, what they thought of the author's written style and whether they would read another book of the same genre or by the same author."

"Speaking and Listening targets were met through discussion about the books read, it encouraged learners to voice opinions and make contributions to group."

"One student learnt keywords about her hobby, horse riding. Another improved pronouncing words using phonetics. One student engaged in discussion about an autobiography."

"Learners were encouraged to listen to the talk from the library and ask relevant questions. This linked in with their City and Guilds qualification. Reading comprehension was enhanced as many learners read whole books and then discussed them with each other informally."

"Encouraged learners to write, communicate verbally, participate in discussion, review language, writing style etc"

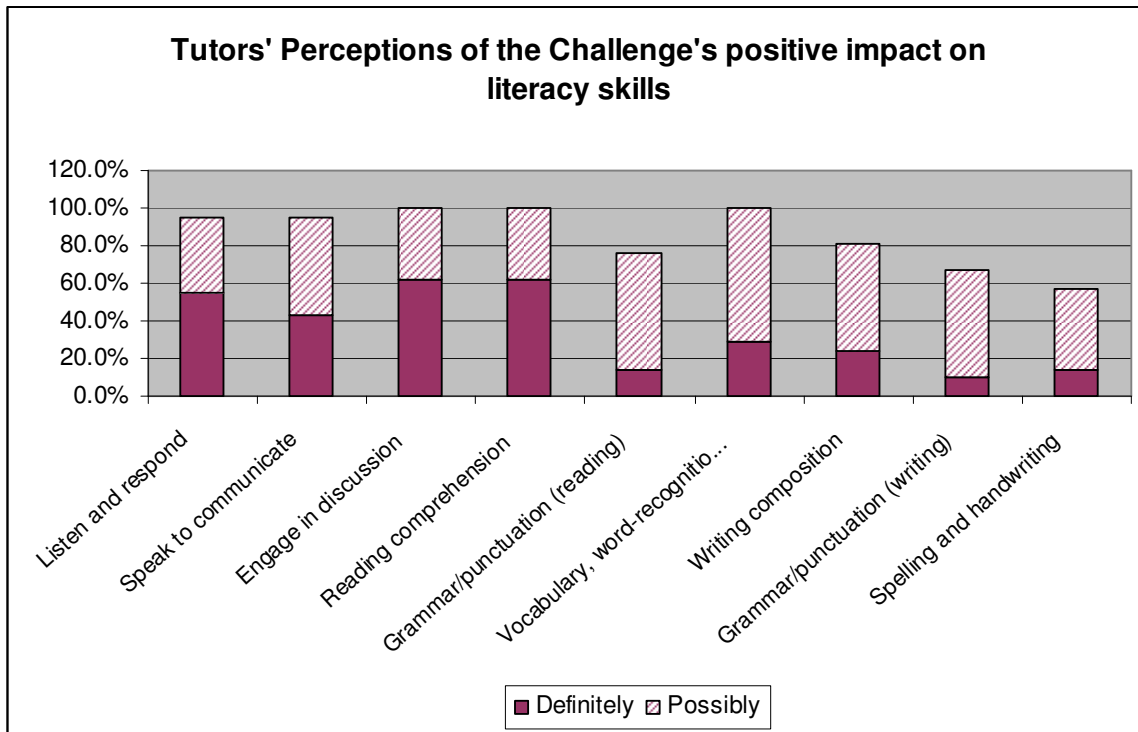
"Reviewing of books helped to make students think of words which could be used - meaning, spelling."

"In one case an almost complete non-reader was able to use books with accompanying CDs - he had never read a book before."

"Enhanced sentence recognition. Improved ability to read a sentence and pause at the full stop. Improved word recognition and using phonics to break down a word."

"Definitely participating in discussions; verbal communication skills and reading comprehension skills as learners were providing very detailed verbal synopses of the books they'd read."

Figure 10



The majority of tutors incorporated the Challenge into their courses, planning learning activities around it. 16 (80%) reported that the Challenge had had a positive impact on the course, with the others saying either it had had no impact (2) or mixed impact (2). The kinds of activities described included library visits, looking at new vocabulary, group reads, discussions, book reviews, book sharing, and:

"We carried out some background reading about one of the book's topics; we read 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time' and did some reading around Asperger's. We also looked at the different book covers first and students discussed what type of book they expected it to be and why they thought it had more than one cover design."

"We also had 'The Game' as another set text and students read the book and watched the film and then compared the two."

"Invited a local author to talk to the group. This has developed into a creative writing session which we now do after talking about the books we have read. The author now plans to set up a creative writing group which two of the learner are keen to join."

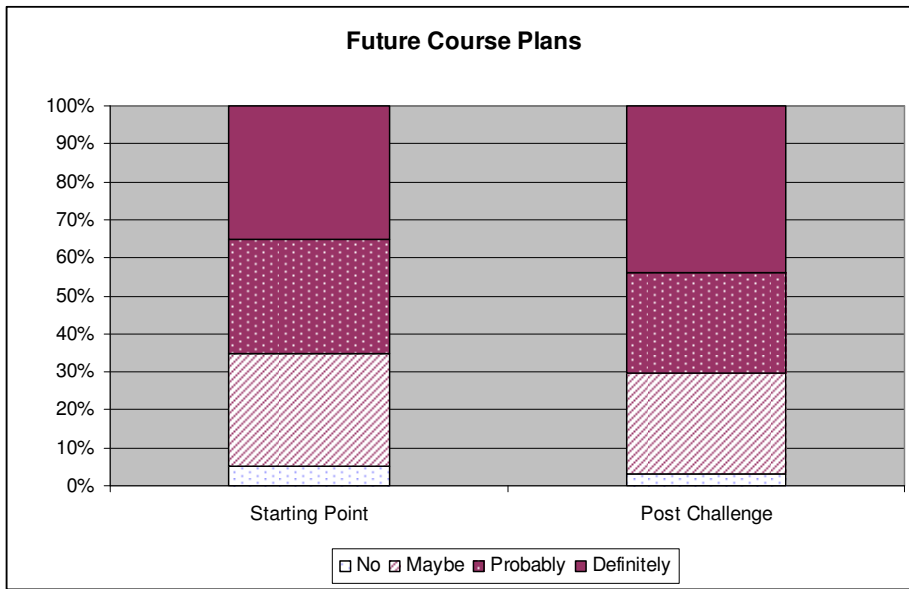
"Writing book reviews (one of the learners had her review printed in the local newspaper!)"

"Writing articles for magazine about experience of being involved in challenge"

"A piece of comprehension work (for Level 1 students) about Andrew Carnegie and particularly the development of public libraries"

By the end of the Challenge respondents' plans to do further courses had become a little more definite, with 44% definitely and 27% probably planning to do more. This outcome may have been partly due to the fact that the Post Challenge survey was completed towards the end of the academic year.

Figure 11



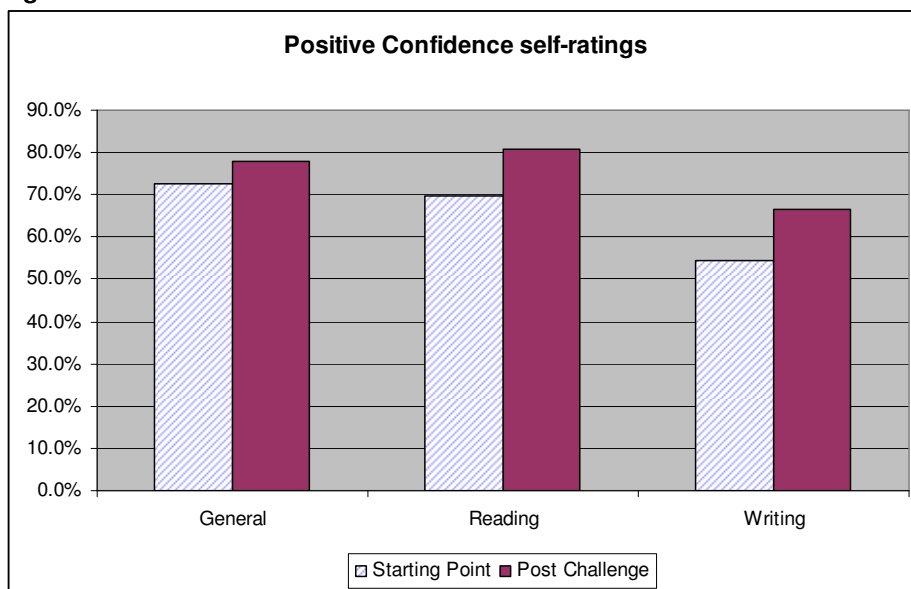
7. Other gains

The Challenge gave almost all respondents a sense of achievement, and many gained in confidence. However it was also a genuine challenge for many, so that there were lows as well as highs, and confidence could dip as well as rise. Those with expectations of improving their literacy, getting into the habit of reading, and enjoying it when they did, were likely to have their expectations met but not all more specific or longer term aspirations were reported as having been achieved.

94% of respondents reported that participation had given them a sense of achievement, including 49% for whom it was a big achievement. There seems to be no very strong correlation between the number of books read and the amount of achievement felt – this may have been related more to respondents' starting points and their approach to the Challenge.

With this sense of achievement, it is not surprising that confidence levels should rise. Both surveys asked for self ratings of confidence⁹, in relation to life in general, and also specifically in relation to reading and writing. A comparison between the two surveys shows a modest increase in positive (fairly and very confident) scores for all three, but especially for reading (from 70% to 81%) and writing (from 54% to 67%):

Figure 12



47% of respondents, when prompted by a question, said that they had gained in confidence and many gave examples:

"I feel myself much more confident than before. I've got a few English friends."

"I am much more confident about expressing my feelings and emotions."

"Yes, more confident in the knowledge that things can happen to anyone."

"Being able to read to my girl"

"I learn to be more braver and to try new things."

"My confidence has changed greatly. The more you read the more confident you become"

"Before I was afraid about I could not speak English well so I seldom went out alone. But now I feel more confident I tried to talk to people around me. I found they were quite friendly. I'm happy. I have new friends."

⁹ Options were: very confident, fairly confident, rather unconfident, very unconfident.

"I am taking a more active part at work with writing observations. Before the Challenge I backed off."

Several participants also emphasised the pleasure they got from the chance to talk about their reading:

"Could talk about books with other people."

"Feel more confident about reading and talking in a group."

"Feeling very good about myself and confidence that I can talk to friends about my reading and my course."

Almost all tutors reported that the Challenge had produced general benefits for participants, many of which enhanced their learning experience:

"A sense of belonging to a group that each participant enjoyed attending each week. Friendships were also formed and participants' self-esteem and confidence enhanced."

"When learners feel confident and successful this has a impact on other aspects in learning and in life."

"Encouraging a broader range of interests"

"Learners can appreciate that learning occurs outside the classroom and can be part of a leisurely pursuit. They can also appreciate that they can take control of their own learning path."

"It encouraged learners to participate in a group as we all read the same book and then discussed it. It exposed the learners to different types of writing, encouraged them to broaden their horizons and gave them the confidence to do it. It also integrated computing skills - registering online - and social skills as we all went for a group coffee."

"Learners have said the challenge has changed their lives, they previously didn't read much or couldn't complete books, now they are reading and enjoying it."

38% of respondents (prompted) said they had gained knowledge through the reading they had done on the Challenge, and the examples given show a wide spectrum of interests, including:

Ancient history

Baby care

Brand new bike specification

British kitchen

Children's dreams

Driving

Gardening

History

How Virgin Empire started off

I have learnt about English culture

Mafia and FBI

Meditation

Second World War

Shakespeare's books

Sports therapies

More about David Livingstone

You can always find a fact that you did not know prior to reading about it!

Smaller numbers gained inspiration, for some this was inspiration to develop their reading and writing further, and for a few the inspiration had a wider application, including being inspired by Colin Jackson's story, Martin Luther King's famous speech, war poetry, and general positive thinking such as *"life is what you make it"*.

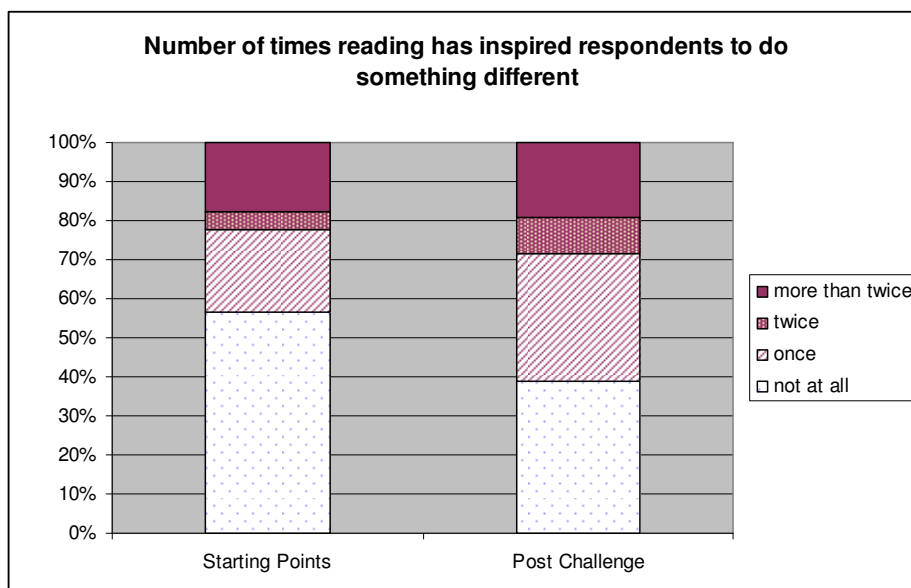
Very few said they had gained specific other skills from the Challenge.

8. The influence of reading

During the Challenge there was a small increase in the number of times reading inspired respondents to do something different, or had made them change their views, in contrast with the previous year. Examples include practical activities, specific ideas and more fundamental approaches to life.

The emphasis of the Challenge was on reading for pleasure rather than for more instrumental benefits. However, the boundary between the two is often blurred, and two questions explored respondents' experience of reading influencing their actions or their thinking. They were asked at the start to think back over the previous year, and say how many times, if at all, reading had inspired them to do something different, or made them change their views. They were then asked the same question at end of the Challenge, looking back over the past five months or so of the Challenge. Responses show a modest increase in the number of times reading had had either of these effects, and it might be surmised that comparisons for equal twelve month periods might show a bigger increase.

Figure 13



The kinds of actions described were

"I found out how to get my baby to sleep."

"I have started using words in my vocabulary that I haven't heard or used before."

"I tried to visit the David Livingstone Centre but it was shut for the time being."

"Running the London Marathon for the first time for charity and enjoying my work"

"Borrowed books on cooking, which made me get more for different recipes."

"Wrote an article on Britain's involvement in the slave trade as recent articles/reports etc blamed the Brits unfairly."

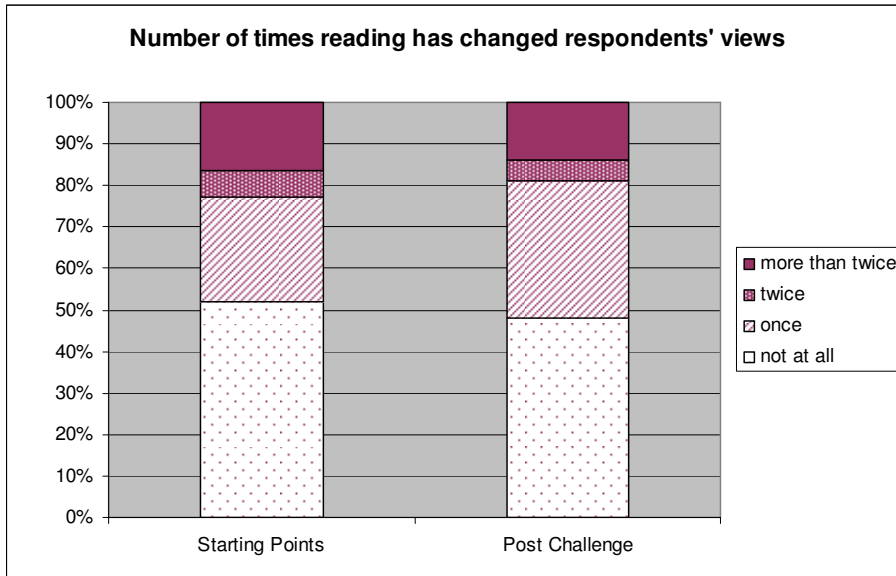
"Taping a film on telly. Taping a documentary."

"Just started - theory books for driving."

"Changed the way I spoke to people."

"This will help me with my work as I work with children which involved doing some reading."

Figure 14



Changes in views included:

"After reading both of John Bird's stories and one by Richard Branson, all of which are from the Quick Reads collection made me change my views on life's challenges."

"Life's full of surprises."

"Appreciate how difficult other people's lives have been."

"Read Jordan's life story and think about her better."

"Be more proactive."

"Reading some books certainly inspires you to take hold of your life and get the maximum out of it."

"Just to look on the bright side of life - made me realize my life isn't as bad as I thought compared to books I read!!"

9. Individual experiences

While an overall analysis of responses to the surveys shows very positive feedback with a trend towards all average impact scores improving during the Challenge, individual experiences were more complex than this, and confidence, enjoyment and specific aspects of reading could decrease as well as increase.

The information given so far in this report shows *overall* differences and similarities, between the Starting Point and the Post Challenge responses. In a small number of cases, it has been possible to trace individuals and compare their before and after responses – this is the “Before and After comparison set” of 33 people who gave their names on both surveys. This group had a rather higher percentage of male respondents, was younger, had fewer white respondents, fewer doing ESOL courses, and more doing other courses, than either of the whole response sets, so is unlikely to be fully representative.

It does however enable us to look at individual experiences and get a better “case study” picture of how the Challenge was experienced by individuals. It is clear that while the overall trend is for positive feedback and for most scores to improve, many individual scores stayed the same and a small but not insignificant number also worsened. While this may reflect a problem with the methodology, and a tendency for respondents to interpret rating scales differently on different occasions, it almost certainly

also shows that for some people various aspects of reading activity and attitude did dip during the Challenge.

There were three individuals out of the total of 33 who did not show an increase in confidence in any category, despite all showing positive feelings of achievement. One said:

“I think I took on too much this year including the six book challenge”

The Chart (Figure 14) which follows shows the pattern of increases, decreases and “no change” for a range of responses for the Before and After set. The table (Figure 15) that gives summary examples of four individual people’s responses.

Figure 15

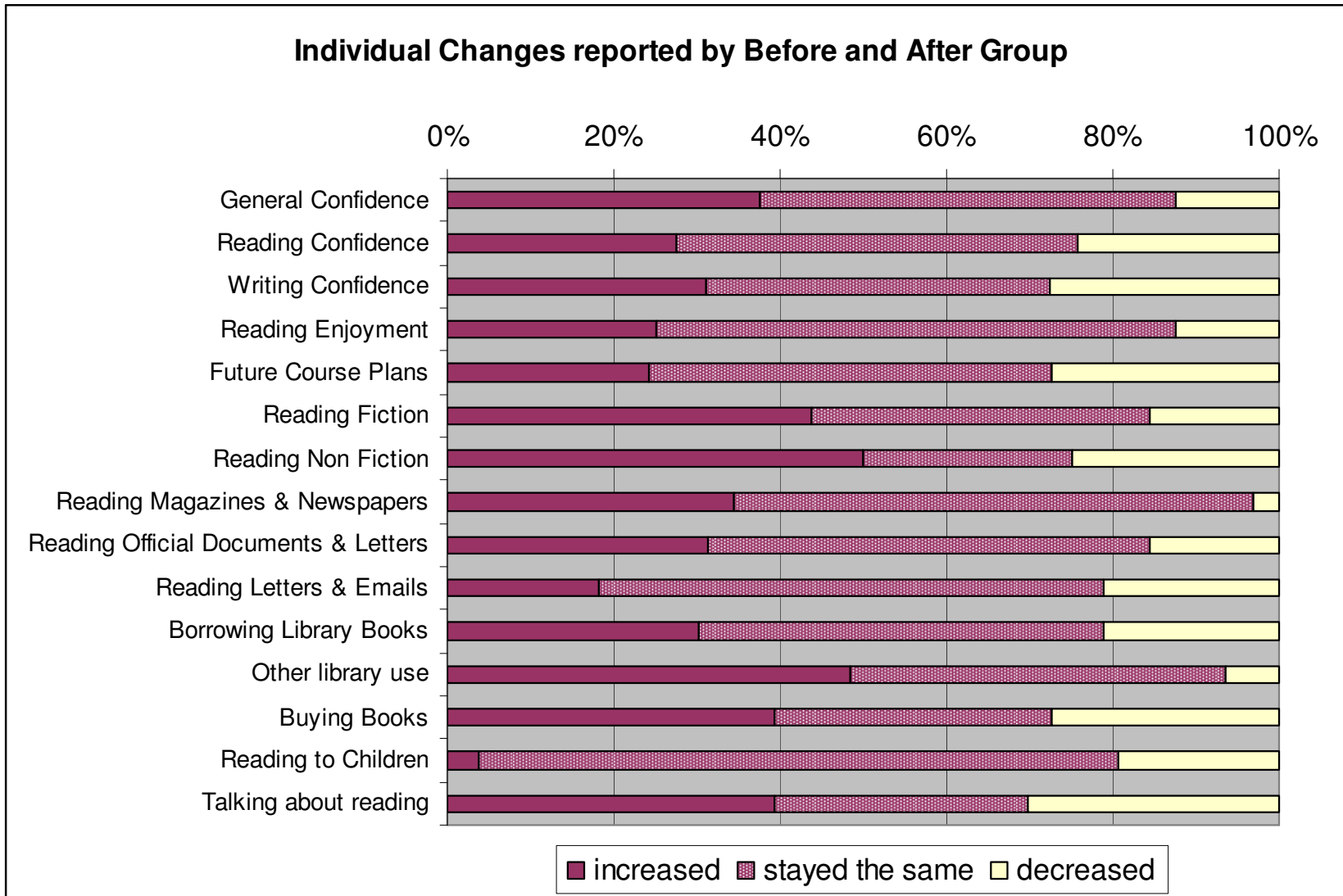


Figure 16

No	What hoped for	Gains?	Their comments	Summary of other responses
1	To read faster	Yes, a lot	No comments given	enjoyment and confidence increased, was already doing a lot of reading but read more non fiction and less fiction, definitely expects to do more reading, library book borrowing stayed high and increased library use for other purposes, plus increased writing. Reading to children stayed high and talking about reading increased.
2	1 Improve my reading skills 2 to discuss the books with others 3 Self confidence to speak within the class about books 4 Develop understanding of punctuation	no answer given	When you read a book it tell you how the person thinking and what the person or persons doing. Keeping you in suspense right through the book and if it a good book you don't want to put it down when you got other things to do. I now look deeply into TV dramas and films. I feel that my spelling and punctuation has improved	Reading enjoyment was high and stayed high, reading and writing confidence stayed high, general confidence stayed low. Future course plans stayed high, fiction reading increased but non-fiction and official docs decreased. Reading of magazines, newspapers letters & emails stayed high. Library use for borrowing books and other purposes increased, as did buying books. Writing stayed high, reading to children and talking about what he read decreased.
3	Improve my reading and spelling	Yes, a little	I feel a bit more confident but still need to work on it more.	General confidence went up to high, reading confidence stayed low, writing confidence stayed high. Course plans became firmer, fiction and non fiction reading stayed low, reading magazines and newspaper increased to high, reading docs and letters stayed high. Library use stayed low but buying books increased to moderate and writing increased to high. Reading to children stayed high and talking about books increased from low to moderate.
4	improve my spelling	Yes, a lot	I have done a lot more reading and been a lot more confident in my self. I have great pleasure in reading	General and reading confidence rose to high and writing confidence rose to moderate, reading enjoyment stayed high, course plans got stronger, fiction reading increased to moderate and non fiction and newspaper reading stayed moderate. Reading official documents decreased but reading emails & letters went up to high . Library use of both kinds stayed low but buying books and writing went up to high and moderate respectively.

There were only ten people in the whole Post Challenge response set who made any criticisms of the Challenge. Six of these related to the incentives, one found the reading too easy and one too difficult, one had overloaded himself, and one thought there should be more publicity. An analysis of the full Post Challenge qualitative replies of those with negative comments suggests that for only three respondents (under 2%) the experience was not at all successful.

Figure 17

	Gains?	Achievement?	Criticism	Other comment
1	not really	modest disappointment	I did not receive my Costa voucher	None
2	not really	big disappointment	I think I took on too much this year including the Six Book Challenge. Doing too much, has overloaded me!	None
3	not really	neither	Nothing except an extra bookmark. There should have been more personal incentives	None
4	a lot	modest achievement	That you could have spread the word a bit more, as most of the people I know had never heard of it until I told them about it.	I like to read but I got to explore more library services, plus it's a challenge to read different books too.
5	a lot	big achievement	However I will be disappointed if I don't win the holiday to London. I never got my free cup of coffee.	Feeling more confident about reading generally.
6	a lot	modest achievement	Not given enough time to complete the challenge and had to read short stories to complete it in time.	books read before were too complicated and felt was setting goals too high.
7	a lot	modest disappointment	We were supposed to get freebies	I have become addicted to reading and myself and two children have become members of the library.
8	a lot	modest disappointment	We were meant to get freebies	Good to read lots of interesting books and enjoyed reading them.
9	a little	modest achievement	The freebies weren't that good though. Better freebies for completing the challenge	To make reading more fun for me and my daughter.
10	not really	modest achievement	Books were too short and did not provide compelling reading.	I think it is an excellent way to encourage people who do not usually read to read more.

10. Costa awareness

There was a moderate level of awareness of the Costa sponsorship, and a little disappointment among some respondents either that the free coffee did not materialise or that incentives were not as good as they could have been.

The question about the Challenge's sponsor was only answered by 59% of respondents but 79% of those who did reply knew that it was sponsored by Costa – some referring to it as a coffee company, some in relation to the book awards. A few more knew it was sponsored by a coffee company but did not know the name.

There was a small amount of disgruntlement from a few respondents, either that they did not get their coffee tokens or that they were not a very good incentive. A few referred to hoping to win the prize.

11. Reflection and conclusions

It is important to exercise some caution in interpreting the evaluation findings, partly because the Starting Point and Post Challenge respondents were not, in the main, the same people; partly because we cannot be entirely sure how representative they were of the whole participant group; and partly because, as is always the case in this kind of evaluation, responses are likely to be influenced by other factors in people's lives, including in this case participation on literacy and other courses. Nevertheless, the combination of qualitative feedback, quantitative self-ratings which could be compared, and tutor reports, gives some confidence that the picture painted by these findings has validity.

This picture is extremely positive. A major indicator of success is the paucity of negative qualitative statements. Even allowing for the likelihood that the Post Challenge respondent group over-represented those who persevered most, to have fewer than 6% making any criticism at all, and only 2 (1.2%) of these being criticisms about the core participant experience, should give the promoters, organisers and staff involved considerable encouragement.

The findings suggest that the Six Book Challenge has undoubtedly been successful in achieving its two main goals: firstly to give participants positive experiences of reading, leading to new or renewed enjoyment, confidence in their own abilities, and enthusiasm to develop reading habits for the future; and secondly, to support and enhance the development of literacy skills, in particular – though not exclusively - those related to reading for understanding, and those related to communication.

At its best the Challenge also seems to have skilfully and relatively seamlessly interwoven various aspects of library and adult learning service provision (skills development, discussions about books, library visits, guidance on and provision of appropriate books (especially Quick Reads), meeting staff and in some cases writers) to produce a fabric of experience that neither could have made alone.

The evaluation itself was set up as a pilot exercise, and a more detailed examination of its approach and processes should be undertaken separately. In general terms it worked reasonably well, with a high response rate for almost all questions and well over the minimum target number of returns for all three surveys. However, it was not without its problems. Nine of the Starting Point respondents and 16 of the

Post Challenge ones were critical of the survey. In both cases there were also a few appreciative comments. In the first case the main concern was about the ethnicity question, whereas in the second case it was that the survey was too long. These two points should definitely be considered as part of the evaluation review, as should consideration of the usefulness and ease of completion of each question as phrased, and methodological issues including how to ensure a representative sample of participants are involved, how to produce a larger comparison group, and how to integrate the evaluation more into the project design. Thought should be given to developing the evaluation approach, by, for example, following up a number of those who leave the Challenge before completion, adding some interviews for deeper case study information, and possible longer term follow up to explore continuing impact.