

## **Listening Posts Training Day**

Hello everybody – Firstly I want to say a big thank you to everyone for making time to be here to explore the exciting potential of using book linked listening posts in libraries. Its going to be a really stimulating day with a packed programme so particular thanks to the BBC and Denis Nowlan for hosting today’s training and making it all possible.

I have to say today is something of a milestone in the work that we have been doing to connect libraries up with radio. There’s lots to celebrate – including an exciting second stage of the library radio partnership supported by the secondment of Senior Producer Chris Wilson from the BBC to The Reading Agency as Partnership Director, a new phase for the work that we have been doing through the Listening Posts pilot and an important opportunity to think about how we roll that forward in a creative and practical way with partners in libraries, the BBC and wider the world of radio.

I’ll start with a bit of background because things have been moving really fast over the last year or so. The radio partnership, funded by Arts Council England and supported by the BBC, now sits alongside BBC Learning as part of broader BBC Libraries Partnership managed by TRA. This move from project status to an integral part of a longer term relationship between libraries and the BBC is an important recognition of the work we have been doing over the last couple of years and the gateway to some exciting new opportunities.

The general aim of the broader partnership is to build the relationship between the BBC and libraries – developing new ideas and approaches to linking libraries reading work to BBC output- with The Year of Reading on the horizon this is very fertile ground for development.

The radio end of the partnership has a lot of things planned. We want to explore new ways of linking library reading work with book related radio content, raise the profile of libraries on air, share library and radio audiences and develop some big creative ideas linked to the cultural Olympiad and the Year of Reading.

We also want to build on what we have already achieved in the first phase of the partnership including the Listening Posts pilot, the exciting work in the NE with the children’s radio clubs, outside broadcasts in libraries, the Open Book library special, library use of downloadable scheduling information and promotions such as Women’s Watershed Fiction featured in over 2,000 libraries

This is important work, we want it to continue and we want to convince funders and partners of its long-term sustainability. Libraries can offer radio a ready-made community of readers which includes both mainstream audiences and the hard to reach. They can provide access to a national network of reading groups, new ways of marketing to new audiences and to creativity and innovation in promoting books and reading. But it's certainly not a one-way street. BBC Radio can offer libraries a rich resource of book related programming material and opportunities for readers to engage with content and link up with programming. Combine the BBC's broadcast muscle with libraries community outreach and support and you've got a powerful partnership that's going places.

And libraries are really beginning to see the value that working with radio can offer. We set ourselves a target of a third of the network formally signing up to the second phase of the partnership. We have got 50% of UK authorities on board; that's more than 2,000 libraries. Of these, 68% or 1,406 are committed to promoting the partnership and displaying BBC radio programming information and a further 337 have signed up to more developed provision including a more active role in projects and promotions. That's a great start and a very firm foundation on which to build.

We are also developing an equally strong partnership base within radio. Chris is working hard with producers to look at how to develop broadcast library content, link up with readers in libraries and build a library angle into planned promotions.

So there is lots going on but the Listening Post has to be the jewel in the crown. It's almost exactly 2 years to the day since I stood in front of the first listening posts training day here at Broadcasting House. We launched the pilot with 30 posts situated across the country from Angus to Lambeth, Bridgend to Barnet. Participating libraries received either the Bug or Legato Pure Digital Radio and access to archived book material from radio 4 and BBC 7; the intention being to generate a new type of book experience in the library and to build audiences for reading and radio.

So how did it go? Was the pilot a success?

The fact that we are here again today is a sure sign that we've hit on something important. All the evidence suggests we are on the right road. Most listening posts were used regularly with library users and groups with a diversity of use ranging from adult and children's reading groups, schools and visually impaired groups and including children, teenagers and elderly people. Over a quarter of posts were used in outreach situations, nearly half were used to listen to scheduled broadcasts of book programmes

and a quarter to listen to archived book material. Libraries also used them to play audio book stock.

There is also evidence to suggest that the use of the posts has increased borrowing of featured books, encouraged users to read more widely and to talk about reading in the library and has attracted new users to the library. And there is a strong indication that listening in the library has encouraged people to listen to radio 4 and BBC7 at home building a new audience for radio book programmes. Evaluation findings also suggest that the listening post has also offered an alternative reading experience particularly for those for reading might, for whatever reason, be difficult.

And like all pilots, there have been lessons to be learnt and challenges to be met including for some areas the tricky issue of reception. We also need to think about how to make the best use of available content including more effective use of scheduling information by libraries to encourage live listening, new ways of using archived material, new partnerships, for example, with BBC audio and the use of library recordings of live material for later use. We also need to think about better listening posts marketing perhaps through downloadable materials, mentions on BBC websites and book programmes and linking the posts with book promotions and displays of featured books.

The potential for developing the use of the posts in outreach situations and with reading groups is also something to be explored further and there is loads more to think about in relation to the more creative use of radio content in libraries.

Technology has also moved on hugely in the last few years to really open up the listening post model in lots of exciting ways. There are lots of ways for libraries to access radio book content including web site listen again features, pod casts and internet radio. I know that we are going to be looking at some of these new access points as part of today's programme not in any way to undermine the original radio focused approach but as a means of developing this model to sign post the range of radio access points available to libraries.

So a positive start but lots to think about and plenty of new approaches and directions to explore. Hopefully by the end of today we will have lots of new ideas for how to take the listening post pilot forward and a methodology and timescale for doing so. It would also be really good to get your input into the development of the broader Library radio partnership. Is there anything coming up in your authority that would make good radio programme material? Is there anything planned for radio that libraries can help with? Have you got any big ideas that we should be thinking about?

As Mark Damazer Controller of Radio 4 said “ *The potential in this partnership for increasing people’s enjoyment and consumption of books is enormous*” Lets make the most of it – all ideas welcome...