

# the reading agency

Press Release

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## **Libraries must innovate and work together to get through tough times ahead**

**\* The Reading Agency outlines its five-point action plan for change \***

In the face of public sector spending cuts and changing public expectations, The Reading Agency today (8 October) calls on public libraries to innovate, take risks, form partnerships and involve the public in designing future services.

The national charity wants to encourage libraries to demonstrate the social importance of reading – the role it plays in bringing communities together, building literacy skills, improving people’s health and providing community volunteering opportunities.

The Reading Agency has produced a five-point plan – outlining how it will be working with libraries to ensure that crucial activities that improve and encourage reading are not marginalised by public sector cuts.

The five-point plan addresses:

- National Reading Programmes
- Partnerships
- 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce
- User and author power
- Innovation

Speaking at the Public Library Authorities Conference in Bristol, Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency, today says:

“Public demographics, expectations and needs are changing fast. Libraries will need to cater for a much more diverse population, more children in care, continuing literacy and skills problems, and an ageing population. All on the reduced budgets that are horribly likely with impending public sector cuts. So libraries will need to innovate and work together as a network to make it through tough times. We hope we can help.

“There’s lots The Reading Agency is powerless to change - the government mess where library policy and finance sit in two different departments, the confusing plethora of library reports and the strange performance measures where the English indicator for libraries is about adult use only...

“So our five point plan - our own ‘manifesto for change’ – concentrates on what we **can** change. We know from working with libraries what an appetite for innovation and improvement there is. By spreading best practice, injecting innovation and building national partnerships, we can do our bit to close the gap between the best and the struggling services.”

The Reading Agency’s five-point plan – to be delivered in partnership with libraries – identifies the following priorities as key to the future:

1. National reading programmes

Increasing the social impact and reach of libraries’ national reading schemes – like the massive children’s Summer Reading Challenge and the promising adult literacy 6 Book Challenge. Working them harder to create economies of scale across the network.

## 2. Partnerships

Creating new and stronger partnerships between publishers, broadcasters and new media – helping libraries to address the digital challenge and keep up to date with fast-moving trends such as eBooks.

## 3. 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce

Developing a library workforce fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through skills sharing work and training – with publishing partners and those from other sectors, such as the health and youth sectors.

## 4. User and author power

Involving the public and authors in decisions on future library services – with the aim of galvanising a new army of author and reader campaigners for libraries.

## 5. Innovation

Focusing on areas where reading can meet social need – like developing new work to increase the impact of reading on health. And using the public appetite for other creative activities, such as online gaming, to boost reading and literacy.

Ends

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### **Notes to Editors:**

- Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency, is available for interview via Colman Getty
- The full text of Miranda McKearney's speech to the Public Library Authorities Conference on Thursday 8 October 2009, is available from Colman Getty

**The Reading Agency** is an independent charity whose mission is to inspire more people to read more. The Reading Agency believes that reading changes lives, and is at the forefront of innovation and cutting-edge creative projects designed to encourage reading. It runs a number of high profile, national initiatives that reach out to and inspire readers of all kinds – children, teenagers, families, adult learners and general book lovers.

It specialises in spreading reading by working with public libraries, and also teams up with prisons, publishers, unions, businesses, broadcasters, and others. It is supported by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council ([www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)).