

Six Book Challenge promotes benefits of reading

Ninety workplaces are now involved in the Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge - double the number who took part in 2009. With the support of unionlearn, The Reading Agency publishes today (Monday 12 July) a free booklet to celebrate the success of the scheme and spread good practice in running it. Six Book Challenge at Work: Unions and libraries promote reading is being launched at the fourth annual unionlearn conference at Congress House, Central London.

Now in its third year, the Six Book Challenge is designed to engage less confident readers in an enjoyment of reading and encourage them to take up more learning. The Reading Agency is working with the TUC's learning arm unionlearn and with individual trade unions, union learning representatives and local library services to deliver the Challenge in workplaces as diverse as food manufacturing companies, hospitals and local councils.

"Reading is food for the brain," says Tom Wilson, director of unionlearn. "It is the key unlocking the door to a better world. Reading makes life more fun and more sociable; it helps people get on at work; it helps people understand the world and control their lives. That's why unions want to help working people become more confident readers and why we are glad to support The Reading Agency's Six Book Challenge."

Six Book Challenge at Work showcases use of the scheme at Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Warburtons in Stockton and Newburn, Tameside Council, Transport for London, Fabrick Housing Group in Middlesbrough and McVitie's in Stockport. Each case study demonstrates how the Challenge brings improved skills, communication and motivation to a workforce.

"We would actively encourage other employers and HR managers to think about running the Six Book Challenge," comments Gary Thompson, HR manager at Warburtons in Newburn.

The booklet also outlines how the Communication Workers Union are building on the Six Book Challenge to link reading and learning throughout the year with a range of practical approaches. "These ideas are great," says Andy Sorton, North East regional project worker with the CWU. "I can really see them working and supporting learning in the workplace."

The Reading Agency is signing a Memorandum of Understanding with unionlearn at today's conference. "It's always brilliant when you find someone who really 'gets' and supports your work. Working with unionlearn has been like that," says Miranda McKearney, director of The Reading Agency. "We're delighted to have a new Memorandum of Understanding to seal our long-term partnership and signal our intention to work together to harness the power of reading for the benefit of workplaces across the country."

The Challenge now attracts around 10,000 people each year through libraries, adult education, prisons and workplaces. Genevieve Clarke, adult literacy expert at The Reading Agency, said: “Our research shows that the Challenge is a successful, simple way to engage fledgling readers in reading for pleasure as part of skills development. 90% of participants say they feel more confident about reading after taking part, and tutors say that the Challenge improves learners’ confidence, increases their motivation and helps them develop a reading habit.”

This year The Reading Agency has worked with the Campaign for Learning and Transworld Publishers to provide a prize draw to workplaces running both the Six Book Challenge and Learning at Work Day activities. Winner Royal Bolton Hospital will be provided with a visit from top US crimewriter Tess Gerritsen at an event for staff in August.

For a free copy of Getting reading to work, please visit www.unionlearn.org.uk/freebooks

For more information about the Six Book Challenge in the Workplace, please visit www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk or contact Genevieve Clarke on genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk or 01672 562080 or David Kendall at mail@davidkendall.co.uk or 07814 060572.

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Notes to editors:

- The Reading Agency is an independent charity working to inspire more people to read more. It is funded by the Arts Council and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. (www.readingagency.org.uk)
- The Six Book Challenge (www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk) is targeted at less confident readers, inviting them to read six books and record their reading in a diary for which they receive incentives and a certificate. The main activity takes place from January to June each year although the Challenge can be run at any time of year and the materials are available for purchase from www.readingagency.org.uk/shop. Two-thirds of library services have run the scheme this year in partnership with colleges, adult education prisons and workplaces.
- Unionlearn is the TUC’s learning and skills organisation, which, together with trade unions, has trained over 24,000 union learning reps. They encourage colleagues in the workplace to re-engage with learning. More information can be found at www.unionlearn.org.uk.

