

Review of national reading based partnerships for libraries Recommendations – discussion paper for ACL

Before finalizing the recommendations of our partnership review, we would like to discuss them with the Advisory Council for Libraries. This document gives you the review's context and main recommendations; the full review document will be available later this autumn.

What people say about national library reading partnerships

"We've spent too long consigning libraries to the past, when suddenly it's becoming clear that they have a big part to play in our future. Across our industry a spirit of partnership is opening up new possibilities for books."

**Anthony Forbes-Watson, Chief Executive of Penguin Group,
at this year's launch of Reading Partners**

"Our reading group is focusing on the Orange Prize and enjoying: discovering new authors and books we wouldn't have found without the prize; feeling part of a countrywide consensus via the libraries; our feeling of being at the cutting edge; and the opportunity to think about what the role of contemporary fiction might be and whether there is a continuing need for an all-female list. No conclusions reached yet on this."

Shoe Lane Lunchtime Reading Group, Shoe Lane Library, Corporation of London

"I feel like I am doing my real job when we're participating in these kinds of events."

Reader Development Manager reporting on the 2004 World Book Day online festival

"The Big Read outside broadcast gave us the perfect opportunity to give libraries primetime mainstream coverage that we as a radio station had never considered before. Ideas flowed in our local meetings, and I can assure you that the collective noun for a group of librarians is certainly not a hush!"

Laura Moss of BBC Three Counties Radio worked closely with library staff to produce a Big Read breakfast programme live from an MI service station

"As well as all the events and activities the Big Read has increased staff confidence; this is particularly noticeable in the number of outreach events, where staff have used the Big Read to take the library into the community and engage with non-users."

Priscilla Baily, Derbyshire Libraries

"We are so pleased The Reading Agency is doing this. We were caught unawares by the wave of interest in the Richard and Judy reading club recently."

Kent Libraries

"World Book Day shows what we can achieve when we work together to promote books and reading in innovative ways. Publishers, booksellers, librarians, the Arts Council, broadcasters and the ICT community have together created something that is unique. Readers, wherever they are, can be part of a massive online festival celebrating books and reading."

Martin Molloy, Society of Chief Librarians

1. Context

One of the objectives in MLA's Reading and Learning Action Plan is *to provide stimulating and contemporary reading experiences*. The plan includes a strand of work to create an annual partnership programme to help libraries do this.

In tackling the development of this programme, The Reading Agency (TRA) has been doing a partnership review. This will underpin our own planning, help build a long-term strategy for the sector, and provide useful models for other organizations leading library partnerships. The main focus of the review is the national reading-based partnerships which we have developed but it takes into account other important partnership activity, often led by Book Trust and the National Literacy Trust.

The experience of the past few years needs consolidating. There has been an explosion of media interest in promoting reading and of innovative partnerships, from the BBC's Big Read to the Orange-funded Chatterbooks network of children's reading groups. But to get the best for readers and libraries these partnerships need to be more than one-off initiatives, and to be developed in a stronger framework. They also need to be developed so that they are helping to position libraries as integral to broader agendas. And libraries need to take a more assertive stance with major partners.

The review relates to other work in the sector, including the reading development vision work being led by The Society of Chief Librarians and the debate around "national offers" emerging from the Books, Reading and Learning Action Plan.

2. The Review Process

Aims

- To underpin TRA's development of a national reading partnerships programme, and produce useful models for other organizations.
- To map recent national public library reading partnerships.
- To identify regional and local models with potential for national development.
- To evaluate impact, identify gaps and establish indicators for success.
- To identify priorities for future development and build a more strategic approach.

Methodology

- Face to face and telephone consultation with readers, policy makers, library professionals, partners and stakeholders.
- Workshops during the regional SCL driven sessions in early 2004 on a national vision for libraries' work with readers.
- Case studies to identify models of good practice.

3. Why reading partnerships are important

All the stakeholders consulted felt that national partnerships can play a vital role in helping libraries deliver a vibrant service to readers. They identified the benefits partnerships bring as being:

- New reading experiences for people and a more contemporary library service;
- Access to new audiences through partners' networks and marketing;
- Economies of scale leading to effective use of resources;
- Local and regional benefit from a nationally led programme;
- Staff development: new skills, ideas and experience of working in new spaces;
- Increased profile and status; access to new networks and advocates;
- A basis for increased private and public sector investment.

4. The recent growth of national reading based partnerships

This table shows the partnerships being handled by The Reading Agency. The growth in partnership opportunities is marked, as is the take up by library authorities. The full review report will provide a comprehensive map, including regional pilots.

	2002	2003	2004
No. of Projects	5	8	11
% Participation	66%	58%	74%
BBC Big Read		100%	
Booker	36%	60%	
Chatterbooks	31%	45%	52%
Daily Mail Book Club *still growing			51%
National Poetry Day *still growing			61%
Orange	45%	73%	79%
Penguin Good Booking			62%
R&J Summer Reads			79%
Radio 4 (2004 *still growing)	42%		73%
Summer Reading Challenge	78%	87%	90%
WH Smith People's Choice		18%	65%
World Book Day		84%	97%

As we write this report, we are developing other partnerships with:

Adult publishers: a high profile two year Reading Partners pilot with seven major publishers, exploring how to change library and publisher working practices to serve readers better.

BBC Learning: aiming for a 3 year partnership, linking libraries to all the major learning campaigns, starting in autumn 2005 with literacy.

BBC Radio 4 and 7: an experimental post, funded by the Arts Council, starts this autumn, exploring how to link radio output to libraries' reader development work.

National Literacy Trust and DfES: exploring how to gain greater recognition for libraries' reading for pleasure work, and build stronger partnerships with the formal education sector. Creative Partnerships are one element of this work.

Open University: exploring how to link the OU's activity to libraries' reading work.

The Poetry Archive: linking libraries to Andrew Motion's on-line poetry initiative.

Arts & Business: exploring how to use libraries' reading work as the basis for a sounder partnership with the corporate sector.

5. Areas for development

A more strategic approach to structures

The best partnerships are based on shared values and objectives. It is not always obvious where common interests intersect and partners often need to be "warmed up" to the value of a library partnership. An interface agency between partners and the library system is important. It needs to talk the language of both sides and help new partners see how working with libraries meet their own aims.

Since TRA came into being in 2002, we have increasingly acted as this interface agency where partners want a library partnership based on work with readers. We have brokered and managed national partnerships, and acted as a point of entry for potential partners who want to work with libraries but find the network opaque and unwieldy. We have worked fast to make sure libraries feature in major initiatives like *The Big Read* and the *Richard and Judy Book Club*.

One-off partnerships do not offer good value for the profession or the reader, but do begin to pay back when used as the foundation to build longer-term relationships. *The BBC Big Read* is a good example – this was originally conceived of as a self-contained promotion but is now being used as a platform to develop a more sustained relationship with the BBC. The review consultation identified weaknesses in *The Big Read* but also agreement that it is important to build on the experience gained and sustain the library/broadcast partnership. The main library bodies are now developing a strategic partnership with BBC Learning, which greatly strengthens libraries in the partnership and links to themes in the BBC's Charter Review.

The review has highlighted the need for TRA to work with the sector to consolidate the work of the last few years, develop a more strategic approach to library reading partnerships, and share models with other organizations. The creation of a long term partnerships programme would help get the best for readers, support library planning and link up with other strands of national work.

This development will involve strategic planning with stakeholders and the profession to shape a partnership project calendar with short, medium and longer-term priorities. A Libraries Partnership Advisory Group would help involve the profession more formally in partnership planning. A readers panel would ensure the user's voice is heard.

Regional structures need to be more involved in developing partnerships. These include regional SCL, ASCEL, the regional agencies for museums, libraries and archives and libraries' reader development forums. This would encourage a seamless interface between national, regional and local work and help pilot test bed projects. It could also increase the capacity of individual authorities and provide quality assurance, ensuring that agreed levels of participation in libraries are delivered.

Strengthening libraries' hand

The review has highlighted the fact that libraries are sometimes weak in their partnership negotiations. An Advisory Group could develop "minimum terms of engagement" for libraries, to underpin negotiations on big partnerships. Those developed for the current BBC negotiations can be used as a starting point.

Sample of libraries' "terms of engagement" being discussed with BBC

- Agreeing shared objectives and evaluation strategy for each campaign;
- On and off air crediting;
- Minimum 6 months planning time;
- Clear communication structure – one key link person in Learning; clear ways of working with other BBC departments;
- Simple logo/branding arrangements;
- Joint decision making and sign off on materials produced for libraries;
- Libraries able to input to creative development;
- Structured feedback for libraries on areas such as on-line voting figures;
- Chance to work on joint funding bids for big campaigns.

Many partners pay to involve libraries in their work and this can weaken libraries' negotiating position. A funded reading partnerships post within TRA would build capacity and help position libraries as stronger partners.

Work is also needed to help libraries be more assertive about what they bring to the table and quantify this meaningfully. Staff time, expertise and local knowledge are essential to successful reading development work. So is the library's community status, its outreach potential and its ability to work with both a wide audience and specific

groups. The sector needs to be able to quantify these assets in the partnership equation.

The review found a consensus that reading partnerships should deliver some key outcomes for libraries including a raised profile, more opportunities for readers, and support for delivering policy priorities. Work needs to be done to develop an outcomes based checklist covering the characteristics of good partnerships as a working tool for the sector.

Priorities for development and planning with the sector

An initial three year programme would focus first on the structured delivery of successful partnership models. All stakeholders consulted in the review identified media and book trade partnerships as short to medium term priorities. These areas for development sit alongside more established initiatives such as *Book Start* and the *Summer Reading Challenge* and there are other nationally important opportunities – for instance in the area of formal education and health. Discussions about these could be taken forward through a new Partnership Advisory Group, and criteria developed for prioritizing partnership development that link to the national work on a vision for libraries' work with readers.

Structuring the national partnership programme as a menu of options would help authorities plan their partnership work into existing provision. This should be published as a calendar of opportunities twice a year so that libraries can plan in advance. This approach should not preclude seizing last minute but important opportunities – for instance the *Richard & Judy Book Club*.

The role of regional pilots should continue to be explored. They should feature in the national programme so that library authorities know about them. Pilots for national initiatives would help enormously, although timescales do not always make this possible. The role of IT should be carefully considered in each partnership.

Delivering quality to readers and partners

At the moment, the level of library involvement in national partnerships is often unclear. Authorities opt in, but it is sometimes unclear exactly what they will do with the partnership opportunity. A progression framework defining how the project will be delivered locally would clarify for readers and partners the minimum they can expect, and help libraries give a consistent message.

A sample of early work on progression framework for BBC partnership. This approach could be adapted to support other partnerships. It shows how libraries could commit to different levels of involvement

Minimum	Medium (minimum plus this)	Advanced
Happening just in central library	Central library plus x% branches	All branches
BBC campaign information available	Dumpbins	Volunteers available to support links to local activity
BBC site bookmarked on PN computers	Dedicated computer IT taster and open days sessions focus on campaign	Volunteers support creation of local on line resources
Themed book displays or BBC branded areas of stock Integrated into the overall library plan; changed as the broadcast focus changes	Interactive displays, harnessing reader recommendations and experiences	Local readers create reading trails – off and on line Readers' days and author events Local press campaigns Outreach work with partners

The framework will need to be flexible so that libraries can get involved with the partnership at the level that is right for them. It can set a baseline for project delivery so that the national partnership brokers can speak with authority about the level of commitment from the library network, but it can also describe medium and advanced levels with stretched targets.

6. Summary of key recommendations:

These show how The Reading Agency could help develop a more coordinated approach to support for libraries, with tools that could be used by other organizations developing library partnerships.

6.1. A national partnership programme should be developed to support the sector:

- TRA should develop an initial 3 year partnership programme, supported and advised by a Partnerships Advisory Group and a readers panel.
- TRA should work with the sector to identify funding for a partnerships post within its structure to support and lead the programme and share models.
- The programme should be structured as a menu of options in a six monthly calendar of opportunities. This should allow for last-minute additions where important opportunities arise.
- The programme should be used to pilot regional approaches.
- There should be an annual seminar to encourage debate, inform target setting and review progress.

6.2. The programme should be used to deliver quality:

- Through the programme libraries should develop a stronger position on “terms of engagement” and quantify their contribution.
- A checklist of partnership benefits should be developed to make sure partnerships deliver key outcomes for readers and libraries. The model should be shared between brokering organizations.
- The programme should be underpinned by a progression framework defining the levels at which the project will be delivered locally..

6.3. Support structures and tools should be put in place:

- Part of the role of a national partnerships post should be to co-ordinate information from other organizations to get a full picture of all reading partnership activity and evidence.
- A staff skills audit should identify the skills needed to support reading partnership work. Training should be developed to fill any gaps and incorporated into existing workforce development programmes.
- Support tools should be provided as a central IT resource bank to enable libraries to participate in the programme.

6.4. The programme should be evaluated and used to promote public libraries' role in supporting reading:

- Evaluation of the programme should be developed to support existing performance management regimes.
- Support tools should be developed to help libraries collect standardised quantitative data and use *Inspiring Learning for All* to evaluate qualitative impact.
- Evaluation evidence from national reading partnerships should be collected centrally by TRA to use in national advocacy and planning.
- A marketing and communication strategy should be developed to promote the partnership opportunities and communicate with readers.

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