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**READING PASSPORT**

This report is illustrated throughout with images from the Reading Passport project, a partnership between SWRLS and Literature Works, with funding from Arts Council England and support from Royal Literary Fund.
Introduction

“The magic spark between customers and the books”

Reader and Literature Development continues to be an exciting and important part of library services. The South West has vibrant examples of creative writing and reading initiatives; and successful partnerships such as the annual Reading Passport project. Libraries across the South West are contributing in imaginative ways to the Universal Reading Offer.

In times of challenging priorities, change and reducing budgets, it is more important than ever to explore the place of Reader Development. The Society of Chief Librarians in the South West (SCL SW) agreed the need to examine the work being undertaken in the region and how libraries can work together. A successful bid to Arts Council England enabled SCL SW to commission this project.

Reading The Region highlights both the current support and anticipated challenges for Reader Development. The report has key messages for collaboration across the region and for an effective structure for both strategic planning and action.

Medi Bernard
Chair of SCL SW
(Service & Strategy Manager Bournemouth Libraries)
Background

2.1 The research

This research is commissioned by SCL SW (the Society of Chief Librarians-South West), in partnership with Literature Works and Arts Council England, South West.

SCL SW represents all 17 library services across the local authorities in the South West and is the largest delivery agent for Reader Development in the region, with experience of delivering large scale reader focused projects throughout the year and in partnership with national, regional and local partners. These authorities are:

- Bath and North East Somerset
- Bournemouth
- Bristol
- Cornwall
- Devon
- Dorset
- Gloucestershire
- Guernsey
- Jersey
- North Somerset
- Plymouth
- Poole
- Somerset
- South Gloucestershire
- Swindon
- Torbay
- Wiltshire

Jersey and Guernsey were not part of this research project.

Literature Works is the regional literature development agency for South West England, a National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England with responsibility for research, fundraising and Reader Development.

Plymouth Literature Project (formerly the Literature Fundraising Centre) is a research partnership between Literature Works and Plymouth University.
2.2  The need to take a look

The Society of Chief Librarians – South West (SCL SW) discussed and agreed in June 2013 that there was a need for an examination of the work being undertaken in the South West region in the area of Reader Development. Many authorities no longer have a dedicated Reader Development librarian or promotion staff. Although there is very good work being done throughout the region, authorities may not know about work in other places and the sector is missing the chance to learn from good ideas or develop projects that could be replicated with little additional staff resources.

SCL SW agreed to develop a bid to the Arts Council, with support and advice from Literature Works, which was successful in January 2014, and match fund the resources equally among the 15 authorities. SCL SW wanted to achieve a review of activity in the region, an understanding of good practice and where there might be gaps, an understanding of the perception internally of the importance of Reader Development and the resources allocated to it.

The existing network of library Reader Development representatives is a group called Read South West, which meets quarterly to share ideas and has worked together on larger projects such as the Reading Passport.

Reader Development, working with writers and readers, is the spark which ignites and animates libraries’ vast collections of books and materials to readers and customers. 87% of library authorities in South West England view Reader Development as a statutory duty (a finding from this research) - including the promotion of the service, which is how Reader Development attracts and grows new customers and can reach many more communities and individuals by creating innovative partnerships with local and area organisations.

At a time of reducing resources South West libraries needed to comprehensively examine what they do as a region and how libraries can work together to share ideas and make services sustainable.

The South West local authorities have a cohesive regional identity and so an examination of the work in Reader Development, that reflects the region, that examines impacts and current/potential partnerships is invaluable, both as an advocacy document and discussion document for all local authorities to embed Reader Development as a core service.

In Literature Works, the South West also has a regional development agency and National Portfolio Organisation of Arts Council England with a remit to support their work in Reader Development.

This exploration of reader development is accompanied by recommendations approved by the forum of SCL SW in June 2015.
2.3 Why now?

Local government is facing increasing pressures and library services nationally have seen unprecedented change. There is often opportunity in large scale change and library services have often been protected and preserved rather than allowed to adapt and change with the swift moving developments in customer expectations and new technology. This has meant that change - when it comes - has been controversial and difficult.

In the time that SCL SW has debated this report, most of the 15 SW authorities have been through consultation and reviews to achieve savings and this is highly likely to continue unabated. The national Offers (developed by national SCL and partners e.g. The Reading Agency) have been launched and developed and received national media attention. The Universal Reading offer is the national offer aligned to this piece of work. Many of the authorities are placing this offer at the heart of their Reader Development work.

In the drive to review services, the examination of what constitutes a statutory service is pertinent. Service reviews are time consuming and anxious times for staff and managers and it is difficult to continue the day job and continue work for Reader Development. In the changing circumstances, it can be difficult for external partners to find the right route into the library service and also the right level of engagement. Equally staff become unsure of how much delegated responsibility they have. This may have the effect of doing less external promotion or activities or to stick with tried and tested activities.
2.4 Routemap

This preparation of the document has followed these stages:

- In order to provide some background with which to inform the research, Plymouth Literature Project undertook a brief piece of desktop research to collect and review Reader Development strategies from other parts of the country.

- The main part of the research consisted of a survey of library authorities from across the South West involving senior staff members at all 15 library authorities in the South West and inviting each of them to participate in an in-depth telephone interview about their authority’s involvement in Reader Development. 14 of the 15 authorities participated in the interviews which lasted between one hour and one and a half hours. The interviews consisted of a range of qualitative and quantitative questions covering: job roles; definitions of Reader Development; Reader Development initiatives; resources and technology; and impact and evaluation.

- In order to provide additional depth around existing Reader Development each authority was asked to provide case studies on specific Reader Development initiatives.

- Every local authority Head of Service was then interviewed.

- External partners were invited to feed back on the key research themes.
Context

3.1 Why Reader Development?

This document does not seek to re-establish the widely held conviction about the benefits of Reader Development – from education outcomes to health promotion. The Universal Reading Offer has been specifically developed to promote the work that is the bedrock of library services:

“This is a strategic planning framework which enables us to develop, deliver and promote reading services within libraries. This offer sets out what public libraries will offer in order to provide a modern reading service within a local community. It builds on public demand for a lively and engaging reading offer with reading groups, challenges, promotions and author events. It aims to focus libraries’ attention and efforts on promoting key shared reading programmes. It is supported by the reading calendar, a toolbox of reading programmes and a raft of national partnerships. This offer has been developed in partnership with The Reading Agency.” (SCL).

This document seeks to address practical delivery issues facing our region.

3.2 Reader Development as a statutory service

87% of library authorities in the South West view Reader Development as a statutory role as part of their response to the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act requirement of encouraging “both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it.” Reader Development – readers’ groups, author events, festivals and the many different successful approaches employed by librarians – is seen as one of the most fulfilling and enjoyable means to promote the service.

3.3 The South West demography

A number of demographic characteristics pose challenges to the effective promotion of Reader Development initiatives in the region.

The South West region has a total population of 5.3 million, slightly larger than Scotland and the sixth largest of any region or nation of the UK. Just over a fifth of the population is aged 65 or over, the highest of any other region or nation of the UK, while 23 of the 37 district and unitary local authorities in the region are classified as ‘predominantly rural’. Consequently, accessibility to public services such as libraries is a major issue in some parts of the region, while social isolation, particularly amongst older people, is a concern.
Overall, the region has relatively healthy employment and skills levels, with employment amongst the working age population at 74.6% in 2013 compared to 71.7% for England as a whole. Similarly, while the percentage of 16-64 year olds qualified to NVQ Level 4 or above is just below the English average (at 34.1% compared to 35%), the percentage with Level 2 qualifications or above is higher at 75.8% to England’s 71.7%. The percentage of 16 to 24 year olds classed as Not in Employment Education or Training (NEET) is also relatively low at 10.9% compared to 13.1% for England. However, the South West fares less well in terms of income levels, with median annual income at just £20,362 compared to £22,204 nationally.

The library authorities interviewed covered a total of 364 individual libraries (an average of 26 per authority). However, there was considerable diversity between the authorities, with one authority being responsible for as little as four libraries, while another supported 57. All but three authorities supported at least one mobile library, while nine authorities supported a prison library and three authorities supported community libraries.

### 3.6 Strategies in the South West

The majority of library authorities in the South West have no current operational Reader Development strategy.

Of the ‘no’ responses, 29% of library authorities in SW have previously had an operational strategy in the past.

Of the ‘no’ responses, 21% of library authorities in the SW use the Universal Reader Offer as a reader strategy.

It is clear from individual senior responses that there is a lack of appetite for complicated definitive strategies, or a lack of capacity to undergo work towards them from authority to authority, where some authorities have more development resource than others.

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1 ONS, Mid-Year Population 2012  
2 ONS, Rural/Urban Local Authority Classification  
3 ONS, Annual Population Survey sourced from NOMIS  
4 Department for Education & Department for Business Innovation and Skills, NEET statistics quarterly brief: October to December 2013
3.7 Current Partnerships

All library authorities engage in collaborative working, whether at a national, regional or local level. Key partners and initiatives at a national level include:

- The Reading Agency
- The Association of Senior Children and Education Librarians (ASCEL)
- The Reader Organisation
- The BBC on National Libraries Day
- Booktrust
- Literature Works

The key regional partner is Literature Works. Five authorities are members of the Libraries West Consortium, which includes collaboration around Reader Development.

Respondents reported working with local educational institutions including universities, schools and colleges. This included jointly promoting Reader Development initiatives, such as the Reading Passport and the Six Book Challenge, as well as delivering class visits.

In addition respondents mentioned working with healthcare organisations. This included funding and publicity from Public Health for ‘books on prescription’ and working with the carers team of the local health watch organisation.

One respondent mentioned working with children centres and developing a joint membership policy with them, while another authority works with parish councils and actually bases one library in a parish building. Other collaborations mentioned by just one respondent each included: the Dementia Fund; a local festival; a theatre; and a cathedral.

3.8 Current Activity

To gain a deeper understanding of different Reader Development initiatives provided by library authorities, respondents were asked to indicate whether they developed national, regional and/or local initiatives. For national initiatives this usually meant the authority had undertaken action to complement or adapt the initiatives as opposed to just joining in.
Most respondents indicated that their library authority developed national Reader Development initiatives at either a local or regional level. These included:

- The Summer Reading Challenge
- Six Book Challenge
- Reading Passport
- National author promotions or tours
- Grassroots Literature funded activity
- Read/Write South West Activity
- Books on Prescription
- World Book Night or Day
- National Libraries Day
- Jewish Book Week
- Adult Learning Week
- Public health initiatives
- Associations with local book festivals

All respondents identified their library authority as providing Reader Development initiatives which were delivered solely at a local level.

Adult local initiatives included:

- Authority wide initiatives based around encouraging people to read the same book
- ‘Book in a Bag’. Readers are given a bag with an unknown book in it and are encouraged to take a chance on it
- Writing initiatives, including Young Writers Squads and a ‘Literature Live’ bulletin produced for local writers’ groups
- Twinning, whereby people who don’t normally read, collect information on twin towns, encouraging them to look at old maps and written documents to find out more about the names of the towns
- Shakespeare Aloud
- Work with a poet laureate to bring together poetry in the area
- An initiative to support those with a multi-sensory disability
- Local author visits
3.10 Current views on the place of Reader Development

With only one exception, library authorities in the South West view Reader Development as important, and integral to their core purpose:

- It is seen as a proactive part of what libraries do and a core part of the service offer:
  “The magic spark between customers and the books”

- It is considered a key part of the outreach work of a library service. As one senior librarian put it, “Reader Development is “fundamental to all that we aspire to.” Another: “It is the cornerstone of what we are here to do, or support, or encourage. It is from encouraging reading, a reader environment, and exploration of books that the broader outcomes we also deliver come”

- Reader Development is implicitly built into strategies, plans and purpose and vision documents. It is often a clearly recognised part of overall directorate business planning, where priorities might include: delivering the Universal Reading Offer, promoting books and reading using targeted outreach activities to maintain and improve literacy levels, in order to enhance educational achievement in adults, children and young people

- Promoting reading for pleasure, widening the choices of current readers, and encouraging non-readers to take up reading for pleasure is seen as central to the role of a public library service

- Reader Development training remains a fundamental requirement for staff at library sites

However, the view is not complete. One authority views Reader Development as costly in terms of staff time and is doubtful whether it is the best investment of that time.
3.11 Current view on challenges to Reader Development provision

Library authorities identified the following challenges to maintaining a Reader Development service:

**Making the case**
- Advocating the importance of Reader Development, and the value of Reader Development librarians
- Making the case for the benefit of Reader Development across a range of local government outcomes
- Successfully arguing that Reader Development is a core purpose for library buildings and their staff in the face of corporate priorities towards using libraries to deliver general customer contact/services which create tension in resource availability and capacity
- Achieving a clarity of mission and purpose, a shared definition of what Reader Development is actually about. Allowing the concept of Reader Development as a statutory service to be eroded is dangerous

**Sustaining the case**
- Evaluation and data, creating a realistic model, with achievable business and action plan

**Making the case together**
- Better infrastructure and partnerships
- There is a need for more collaborative working and sharing

**Funding**
- Finding alternative routes to funding
- Creating more capacity for fundraising and understanding current expenditure better as local government funding diminishes
- Targeting approaches to Arts Council Library Funding at areas of maximum benefit and sustainability for Reader Development in the service

**Capacity**
- There is a skills drain, and reduced staffing and staff hours almost everywhere
- Most staff hours are invested keeping libraries open
- There is a fundamental lack of strategic capacity
- There is low morale and inertia as front line staff and senior managers alike face wave after wave of cuts
- Need for new training and building community capacity

**Staying ahead**
- Becoming leaders in the Reader Development digital and social media environment
- Being better informed about Reader Development initiatives and activities
- Being more business-like and staying ahead of competitors. Utilising digital technology sustainably
- Regaining ground as the go-to experts in the field of Reader Development, rather than customers or trainees
Research

4.1 Definition

Surveyed librarians with a Reader Development remit were read a list of statements related to defining Reader Development and asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with them.

- The highest level of agreement (with 13 ‘strongly agreeing’ and one ‘agreeing’) was with the statement that Reader Development “opens up reader choices”
- This was followed by the statement ‘increases people’s confidence and enjoyment of reading’ which 11 ‘strongly agreed’ with and three ‘agreed’ with
- Ten respondents ‘strongly agreed’ and four ‘agreed’ with the statements that Reader Development ‘offers opportunities for people to share their reading experience’ and ‘encourages readers to try something new and different’
- The statement which had the highest level of disagreement was “Reader Development attracts all readers”, with six ‘disagreeing’ compared to eight ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’
- While 11 respondents ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that Reader Development “concentrates on the act of reading”, one “disagreed” and two put “neither nor”
- All but one participant (who put ‘neither/nor’) agreed that Reader Development “is a reader centred approach”

The surveyed librarians were also asked whether they had any other ways of defining Reader Development in addition to the statements discussed above. Three of the 14 respondents felt that the statements were comprehensive and no additional definitions were needed. Amongst the remaining twelve respondents the following additional definitions were offered (respondents could provide more than one response):

- Expanding people’s horizons in terms of trying new types of books (3 respondents)
- To increase overall literacy and support learning to read (2)
- To provide social and health benefits (2)
- Wider development than reading – encompassing writing and the creative process (2)
- Encouraging more people to read more books (1)
- A broad definition covering a range of activities from posters of books to labour-intensive buddy sessions (1)
- To raise the profile of reading as a creative process in own right (1)
4.2 Refining the definition

These initial findings were then discussed at senior level, to identify commonality, building a definition step by step.

This report recommends the following shared definition:

*Reader Development in libraries means the statutory provision of activity that celebrates and expands reader choices, increases confidence and enjoyment of reading and promotes learning, literacy and wellbeing for all ages through reading.*

4.3 Current Initiatives

Each library authority was asked how many events and promotions they held in the last year (the 2013/14 financial year) on Reader Development. Some caution should be exercised with these figures given the different understandings of Reader Development and the responses vary depending on whether the respondent was able to include figures for promotions or just those for events:

- Five respondents were able to provide specific figures for both events and promotions. The average number of events and promotions held amongst these respondents was 1,159. However the number of events and promotions varied considerably from 200 in one authority to 2,315 in another
- Five respondents gave specific numbers for events only. The average number of events held was 73, ranging from five in one authority to 182 in another

Six respondents were also able to give audience numbers for events and promotions. This came to an average of 19,871. However, these figures should be treated with extreme caution given that they will include estimates of people who drop in and see promotions as opposed to those who book onto events. In addition, they are likely to include considerable duplication as many individuals will visit more than one event.

Respondents were presented with a list of Reader Development initiatives and asked whether they currently deliver these in their libraries or whether they used to deliver them but no longer do. The majority of initiatives were currently being delivered by all the library authorities interviewed. The three exceptions were literacy work, supporting local and national writers and authors, and mood-boosting books
Other Reader Development initiatives included: children’s activities, such as Young Writers and Rhyme Time; the Six Book Challenge; health related activities; a quarterly events brochure; an Arts Award (which involves researching an artist); literary festivals; dementia groups; creative writing; writers group; Book in a Bag; Reading Passport.

Most Reader Development initiatives were aimed at the general adult or child population. However, three respondents mentioned highly specific targeted initiatives. This included a specific scheme to support foster children by working with the carer to inspire a love of reading. Other targeted initiatives included a group for people with visual impairments or aimed at those in an isolated area.

4.4 Expenditure

Understanding the detail of expenditure given over to Reader Development in the region has been worryingly hard to establish, although a strong estimate, supported by all library authorities, is that the region spends less than 4% of total library expenditure on Reader Development, and all authorities state a decline in funding over the last five years.

Difficulties in establishing budgets stems in part from variation in understanding of Reader Development as a ‘budget line’, despite the Universal Reading Offer, and therefore there is a frequently unclear financial picture. Individual librarian respondents were in most cases not budget holders, and made elementary mistakes, e.g. assuming Summer Reading Challenge expenditure was income, or being unable to list Literature Works Grassroots funding, even though their region had received funding in 2013/14.

This lack of budget clarity makes advocacy for regional Reader Development difficult to do from a position of strong information.

All library authorities were asked about the level of resources they had available for Reader Development. Differences in resource availability amongst authorities may reflect different definitions of Reader Development, in addition to other factors such as demographic differences, funding success and local authority cuts.

Respondents were first asked about the percentage of their library service funding which is currently invested in Reader Development. While each authority’s response depended on how they defined Reader Development, all respondents were asked not to include the book fund in the percentage. The majority of authorities felt that less than 4% of their funding was spent on Reader Development.

What is clear is that extra resource for Reader Development is an increasing challenge that will need new approaches.
4.5 Income

Respondents were also asked to provide information on where they currently receive Reader Development funding from, and where they received their funding from in 2010. The most common funding source mentioned for Reader Development for both years was the local authority. The study also revealed a considerable increase in the use of Arts Council and Literature Works funding, although the former only started its library fund twelve months ago.

As above, there was a lack of accuracy in the information provided by individual librarian respondents - for example, the belief that Summer Reading Challenge material was paid for by The Reading Agency, as opposed to the materials being an expense to their own budgets.

In order to explore changes over time, respondents were asked whether the funding for Reader Development had gone up or down since 2010. Of the 13 respondents who were able to provide this information, nine reported a decline in funding since 2010, while two stated that the funding had increased and two felt that it had stayed the same. Four of the respondents cited local authority cuts as a key explanation for why funding had fallen.

Seven of the nine respondents who reported a decline in funding provided further details on the impact that this had had on their service. Key themes that emerged included:

- A reduction in the number of books stocked
- Reduction in Reader Development initiatives due to reduced time or money
- Efforts to look for alternative funding for initiatives, such as the Summer Reading Challenge

Other impacts included: losing Reader Development staff; not buying specialist collections; reduced incentives for the Summer Reading Challenge and reduced time for Reader Development.

One of the two respondents who reported an increase in funding explained that they now had more time to spend developing Reader Development activities as a result. However the remaining respondent reported a reduced focus on its Orange Book Prize promotions as a result of a decline in core funding and an increased reliance on external funds, with the latter focusing on particular places or people.

It is clear that new income streams need to be found in the future.
4.6 Staffing and Infrastructure

In addition respondents were asked how many staff worked on Reader Development based on full time equivalents (FTE) currently and how many did in 2010. Drawing comparisons between the authorities is problematic due to the different definitions of Reader Development and this is likely to have affected their reporting. In addition, while some respondents included figures for frontline staff where they were involved in Reader Development activities others only included dedicated Reader Development staff.

Figures show that staff resources in Reader Development have declined overall since 2010. The key points to note are:

- The average number of employees per authority who currently work on Reader Development is currently 1.9 FTE
- The average number of employees per authority in 2010 who worked on Reader Development was 2.5 FTE
- Of the ten authorities that provided figures for both years, six reported a decline in staffing levels in Reader Development, while three reported an increase, and one reported that it had stayed the same
- In terms of comparisons across authorities, the authority with the largest reported staff numbers currently employs 4.6FTE in Reader Development, while the authority with the lowest employs just 0.1FTE

All but one respondent felt that their library service did not have sufficient Reader Development resources. Of these 13 respondents, 12 felt that they needed more staff time, eight that they required more funding overall, four that they required more stock and one that there was a need for more space.

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5 The latter respondent reported being the only person in their authority who spent any time on Reading Development. However, they added that this figure depends on how Reading Development is defined.
4.7 Digital

The library authorities were also asked some specific questions about their use of digital technology - primarily referring to resources they personally update. All of the 14 library authorities reported using digital technology in one form or another for Reader Development. Thirteen of the 14 respondents provided details about the digital technology they used.

The most common forms of digital technology used were the library website followed by Twitter and Facebook. Less common forms of technology used included blogs and pinterest. While only two respondents reported using Libraries West’s digital facilities, it should be noted that the consortium only covers five library authorities.

The South West Reading Passport website serves all authorities - as does www.literatureworks.org.

Respondents were asked whether there were any benefits from using digital technology within the library service:

- It helped to promote and provide information about the library services and events
- It was quicker, easier and cheaper to share information through using digital technology
- It was a way of engaging people who would not normally visit a library
- It was helping libraries link readers with authors
- It increased publisher satisfaction
- It improved understanding of what people are currently reading

Although respondents indicated that they could do more with digital technology, limitations included:

- Needing someone who knows how to use social media to target people
- Being labour intensive
- A limited number of followers
- Difficulty in discerning a direct impact
4.8 Impact & Evaluation

All respondents were asked how the Reader Development activity they currently provide had impacted on readers. Respondents identified a variety of impacts with the most common one being an expansion in the type of books participants have read.

Other impacts identified included:

- Helping participants get to know other people and build friendships and networks
- Encouraging participants to use library services more
- Helping people recover from mental illness
- Improving reading ability
- Providing inspiration
- Motivating readers to write for themselves
- Widening people’s reading choices
- Understanding the benefits of Reader Development
- Increasing reading for pleasure
- Readers networking and connecting with one another
- Increasing monitoring numbers such as people visiting the library
- Increasing customer satisfaction

Respondents also recommended the effectiveness of individual initiatives:

- The Summer Reading Challenge
- Reading groups
- Reading Passport
- Book Start
- Books on Prescription
- Author events with well known authors
- Events with an unusual or innovative approach
- Activities grown from local initiatives
- Book festivals
- Read/Write South West

All authorities reported having undertaken evaluation activities related to their Reader Development initiatives. However, the evaluation activities specified usually consisted of methods for collecting feedback rather than full-scale project evaluations.
Feedback methods included:

- Evaluation forms
- Comment cards
- Monitoring of bookings and library loans
- Online surveys
- Follow-up calls to request feedback from readers
- Recorded verbal feedback

All but one of the respondents indicated that they had used the evidence taken from the evaluation. The main ways in which they had used this information were as follows:

- To identify what works well and what doesn’t
- Reviewing participant demographics
- Capturing email addresses of readers
- To provide feedback to councillors and library staff
- Informing funding applications
- To review advertising and publicity methods, such as Twitter and press releases

There is an inconsistency of approach to evaluation across the South West which will continue to make a regional picture difficult to monitor.

4.9 The Universal Reading Offer

All respondents were asked what impact the Universal Reading Offer had made on their library service. The most common response was that it gave structure as authorities planned their events and initiatives around the universal offer’s calendar.

Other impacts of the universal offer included:

- Support for the advocacy work of the authorities
- Raising the profile of Reader Development initiatives, such as Books on Prescription
- Providing a consistent approach across authorities
- Helped the authorities link into national offers and initiatives

While respondents were generally positive about the Universal Offers, there was concern that it takes up too much time and impacts on the ability of authorities to work locally. Furthermore, some of the authorities felt that the Universal Reading Offer had made no impact on their activities and one, while acknowledging its potential use as an advocacy tool, also felt the impact on their authority had been little. One of the five respondents felt they were doing all the initiatives anyway, while another was keen to be as responsive as possible to local need.
4.10 Recommendations from Libraries

Individual library recommendations, from our research, suggested:

- Sharing resources amongst library authorities: to share materials such as posters and collections of books; to work together and train library staff regionally; bulk buying resources; and having a shared fund into which everyone contributes
- Sharing expertise amongst library authorities: to share ideas; knowledge; skills; and best practice
- Having a coordinated approach: to focus on what libraries would like to achieve and whether it is something readers genuinely want
- Improving the use of digital technology in libraries: to further exploit the use of social media in libraries
- Engaging with those readers who are not confident
- Improving and developing evaluations
- Having a strategy for those library authorities who are doing the same thing locally
- Providing more resources and raising funds
- Developing more regional initiatives

4.11 Recommendations from partners

We surveyed key national and regional external partners and had a surprising and disappointing low response.

From the limited response, some perceive that it is currently more practical to work with South West libraries on a local, rather than regional level but that this is not a sustainable model for increasing future investment, and they would welcome a regional as well as a local approach.

There is an acknowledgement that Read South West is a dedicated and experienced grouping. However as the central Reader Development forum, it appears to lack authority for decision making and budget control, and is largely a consortium that ‘reports back’ rather than a dynamic forward momentum collective. It has little in the way of external identity, and has no budget of its own. It lacks administrative and fundraising capacity. Therefore, external partners wishing to make an impact must address senior management directly through SCL SW.

Organising and fundraising for regional projects can be very difficult, with a lack of clearly defined Reader Development staff in each library, and difficulty in finding a single member of staff, unless at a very senior level, with any regional Reader Development overview. This frequently means an over-complication of projects as contact can be carried on with multiple staff members in one region or library. Delegation is frequently difficult to understand at local level for external partners, and staff at the delivery level for events are often ‘buffered’ by several layers of management, even for simple requests - which can result in project complications when revisions are requested late in a project timetable.
To external organisations, Reader Development work and structures seem incredibly complicated: SCL SW, SWRLS, Read South West, ASCEL are groupings that make sense internally but lack a common public contact. Thus, it can be very hard for external agencies to reach a regional focus in operations without pursuing the most senior grouping and then working their “way back down” into delivery or taking a similarly tortuous route in the opposite direction.

One external organisation expressed anxiety at the likely growth of competitive approaches to the Arts Council England library funding stream, as opposed to strategically targeting areas that may have the biggest shared impact long-term, and the prioritising of projects in other art forms rather than Reader Development which is undeniably under-resourced.

While interviews with librarians for this research concluded that there was no shared definition of Reader Development, external partners perceived both a difference between each authority that could hamper development and at the same time, much common ground in terms of definition.

A shared direction would be greatly useful to external partners in terms of fundraising and description.
Distilling the message

5.1 Summary

Overall, research indicates the following:

- Reader Development is seen as key and critical and much good work across the region is being done.
- Funding from many sources has been invested in the South West and raised the profile regionally and nationally.
- Libraries work well together as a region and wish to do more strategically and at a local delivery level.
- Working collaboratively is desired; there are a number of strong possibilities for collaboration not yet fully pursued.
- Authorities have adopted a shared definition of Reader Development, which will make capturing Reader Development work easier.
- There is a reduction in dedicated Reader Development staff but an involvement of more branch and community staff at a local delivery level. There are opportunities to develop staff and enhance their skills.
- The time is right to review the existing regional group of Reader Development staff.
- The time is right to suggest a standard way of collecting data, sharing data and evaluating impact.
- There are more fixed costs and less flexibility in budgets, meaning that it is difficult to isolate costs and budgets spent on Reader Development work. This could affect fundraising regionally and makes painting a regional picture challenging.
- New structures and internal changes make liaising with external partners challenging to both sides.
- More could be done to exploit local and national partnerships. In Literature Works, the regional library service has a ready-made fundraising and funding partner for Reader Development that could be used to greater effect. Equally Literature Works can promote and advocate as a partner for libraries throughout the region.
- Reader Development as a statutory and core purpose of libraries is acknowledged by the majority of authorities and more could be done to promote this as part of the core service.
- The overwhelming majority of available regional Reader Development discretionary spend is allocated to the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Arts Council funding streams are very welcome and have achieved a great deal, and more regional approaches could be made in a coordinated way.
- The rise of social media and external websites poses challenges to coordinate promotion of activities and make the best use of new ways to reach new customers.
Conclusions

6.1 Adopting a new structure

To provide a vehicle for change, in June 2015 SCL SW adopted the following infrastructure:

- Read South West will be managed by a new partnership executive to better connect the region’s Reader Development ambitions

- The original Read South West grouping will be retained as the Reader Development networking and task and finish membership. When this grouping meets, a member of the Read South West executive will be present, and members of this grouping will form part of the executive

- Read South West will be tasked to create a region wide evaluation and recording system

- The shared regional definition of Reader Development will be: “Reader Development in libraries means the statutory provision of activity that celebrates and expands reader choices, increases confidence and enjoyment of reading and promotes learning, literacy and wellbeing for all ages through reading”
6.2 The new structure

**TIER ONE**

Overseen by SCL, a new Read South West with executive level regional strategy group that institutes and receives projects: SCL SW, SWRLS, ACE SW, Literature Works, with tier two representatives from the membership RSW grouping and ASCEL. This body reports to SCL SW.

External agencies report only to the executive.

- SCL SW to commission work, investigate bids and identify priorities.
- SW Reading Development Executive (new Read South West management tier) to act as a lead strategy group.

**TIER TWO**

Advisory and delivery partners. ASCEL and Read South West local authority members with cross reporting process agreed.
Notes

Reader Development strategies nationally

In order to provide a contextual backdrop for this research, a review of Reader Development strategies and policies was undertaken to explore both their structure and content. The Reader Development strategies and policies identified for the review included:

- Libraries NI, Reader and Reader Development Policy, 2014
- Reader Development Strategy (Revised May 2011) Moray Libraries Service
- West Lothian Reader Development Strategy 2010
- Reader Development Policy, Dorset County Council
- Tameside Reader Development Strategy 2009-11
- Brighton and Hove Reader Strategy, 2009
- Neath Port Talbot Reader Development Strategy 2008
- Devon Library & Information Services Reader Development Policy, 2004
- East Midlands Regional Reader Development Strategy 2003
- Knowsley Library Service – Reader Development Policy

In addition, the following Reader Development related documents:

- Reader Development Evaluation Framework, Centre for the Public Library and Information in Society, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield 2004
- Factsheet: Reader Development Websites, produced by Islington Central Reference Library

Reader Development strategies vary in both length and focus. However, in the main they cover a number of key aspects including:

- A rationale for and aims of the strategy as well as any links to local Library Plans and regional Reader Development strategies
- A definition of Reader Development
- A local action plan for delivery of the strategy
- A section on the monitoring of achievements, successes and areas for improvement
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