

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Reading for Pleasure](#), HC 1528

Tuesday 3 March 2026

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Members present: Helen Hayes (Chair); Sureena Brackenridge; Dr Caroline Johnson; Darren Paffey; Rebecca Paul; Manuela Perteghella; Mark Swards; Peter Swallow; Chris Vince; Caroline Voaden.

Questions 38 - 75

Witnesses

[I](#): Jonathan Douglas, Chief Executive, National Literacy Trust; Annie Crombie, Co-Chief Executive, BookTrust; and Debbie Hicks, Creative Director, Reading Agency.

[II](#): Luke Taylor, Senior Researcher, Centre for Social Justice; Ellen Broomé, Chief Executive, British Dyslexia Association; Anjali Patel, Lead Advisory Teacher, Centre for Literacy in Primary Education; and Onyinye Iwu, children's author, illustrator and art teacher.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jonathan Douglas, Annie Crombie and Debbie Hicks.

Q38 **Chair:** I welcome everybody to this meeting of the Education Select Committee. This morning we are holding our second public oral evidence session in our inquiry on reading for pleasure. We are seeking to understand with this inquiry why we have seen such a decline in children reading for pleasure and, importantly, what can be done to reverse that trend and to get children back into reading.

We are really pleased to be holding this second evidence session in the same week as World Book Day. The Committee has lots of activities planned to help mark World Book Day and also to keep our inquiry in the public domain and encourage further interest and evidence from members of the public. You are very welcome to our session this morning.

I invite any members of the Committee who would like to make a declaration of interest to do so. I don't know if we have any interests.



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Sureena Brackenridge: Not necessarily for this panel, but for the later panel, I would just like to share that I am a member of the APPG for dyslexia.

Peter Swallow: As am I.

Q39 **Chair:** Thank you very much for that. I invite our witnesses in the first panel to introduce yourselves to us, please, starting with Jonathan Douglas.

Jonathan Douglas: I am the Chief Executive of the National Literacy Trust. We are a charity that exists to tackle disadvantage with literacy. We work in about 8,000 schools with the lowest levels of literacy and the highest levels of child poverty across the UK. We have 21 local teams working on the ground around the UK in towns, cities and communities where there are significant reading challenges. This year we are working with the Department for Education and other Government Departments on the National Year of Reading.

Annie Crombie: Hello everyone, lovely to be here. I am Annie Crombie; I am the Co-Chief Executive of BookTrust. BookTrust is 100 years old, just, and we were founded as a reading for pleasure charity to promote the habit of reading, which is still part of our charitable objects. We run large-scale reading programmes in secondary schools and for children in care. Our biggest work is in the early years, where we are best known for Bookstart, which is delivered in all 153 local authorities, and we reach around 1 million children and families a year in the early years through Bookstart.

Debbie Hicks: Hello everyone. I am the Creative Director and founder member of the UK reading charity, the Reading Agency. We deliver national evidence-based reading for pleasure programmes in communities, including the Summer Reading Challenge, which is our flagship programme. We work very closely with public libraries as well as schools and other partners. We are committed to delivering social and personal change through the proven power of reading, empowering access to its pleasure and benefits, building skills and learning, health and wellbeing and connected communities.

Our focus is very much on reaching those who need these benefits the most. That includes helping children and young people to develop confident reading identities and lifelong reading journeys that help them to live happy, healthy and thriving lives. We also support reading for adults, not only for their own benefit and enjoyment but also because positive adult reading role modelling is so important in families, communities and the classroom.

Q40 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We have heard that in recent years there has been a steep decline in children and young people reading for pleasure. Indeed, that is one of the main reasons why we are undertaking this inquiry. Could each of you set out for us what you see as



the main causes of that decline?

Jonathan Douglas: The decline is general but also very specific inasmuch as the particular groups we are seeing are being affected by the decline significantly. We run an annual survey and last year that included 114,000 children and young people looking at their reading habits and correlating them to attainment and other data.

The decline in reading for pleasure is particularly affecting, first of all, key stage 3 and 4 children. At key stage 2, 47% of children are reading for pleasure. When they get to key stage 4 it drops to 29%. The second characteristic is gender; 39% of girls read for pleasure, whereas only 25.7% of boys do, so there is a gender challenge. There is also, interestingly, a very specific geographic issue. At a regional level, 39.5% of children in London read for pleasure, whereas in Yorkshire it is only 28.6%. We are looking at a national challenge, but with very specific targets. That is why the Year of Reading campaign has particular targets around early years, children, teenage boys and families from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Why this is happening is complex. Reading for pleasure is obviously a volitional action. It is effective and important because you want to do it. Therefore, the inhibitors and the barriers to it are internal as well as external. The sense for many young people—and this comes through from our research—is that reading is more of a chore than a pleasure, which may reflect issues of pedagogy in schools, the portrayal of this as a skill they have to acquire and a test they have to pass rather than something they wish to do.

There is the issue of representation. We know that one of the key things in connecting with reading is seeing—there is a great quote in “Shadowlands”, “We read to know we are not alone”, which I think is very profound. The sad fact is that two out of five children struggle to find people like themselves in books. That is particularly true of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and children from racially minoritised communities. There are internal issues but there are also external issues, particularly around access to books and reading materials, and 70% of teachers express concern that children don’t have enough materials at home to sustain their reading activities. We know that one in 10 children just don’t have any books at home at all. The issue about access to books is incredibly important. Remember also one in seven primary schools don’t have a library.

Of course, the other factor in the decline, which is so well discussed, is the issue of the digital environment. While undeniably the digital environment offers multiple distractions and has had an impact on attention span, there are also elements of the digital environment that children find conducive to reading. A lot of BookTokers and a lot of the digital mechanisms and platforms actually support reading. We also know that particularly teenage boys—the least likely to be reading for pleasure—find digital reading, reading on a tablet and so forth, very



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attractive. It can potentially be a way into, as research shows, more traditional forms of reading as well. So it is not one single factor, it is a number of factors.

Annie Crombie: I agree with lots of what Jonathan has said and I will not repeat his points. What I would most like to add is specifically on the early years and the reasons why we think it is challenging for children and families in the early years to establish a reading habit. Of course in the early years that is so much about parental volition, engagement and confidence with reading.

Of course, we know that that is super important because if you establish a reading habit and you see yourself as a reader early on in the early years, we see that that continues. Not only do you then reap further benefits down the line in mental health and educational outcomes that accrue later, but you are also more likely to continue reading as you get older. Starting early is super important.

What we see there is not an entirely bleak picture. There are some things that are really encouraging. For example, we see strong levels of positivity about reading among parents, and 95% of parents think it is important to read with their child, and know that it is important to start early. We see that really strongly in our research. We also see that when parents do read with their child, they find it a positive experience. Most parents say that they enjoy reading to their child when they do it, and children do also, and they say that they think that their child enjoys reading.

All of that is really positive, but where we see the challenge and the decline is around the regularity of reading activity. We think that the number of children who have a daily reading is about 50% and has declined over the last period. There is some complexity in the data around covid, which obviously for families played such an important role in what their routines were like and what happened in family life. We also see that even children reading frequently is declining. That is not a daily reading routine but maybe reading four times a week or so, enough that it would feel like a regular part of their life and a habit.

We see that probably one in four children are not getting a reasonable frequency of reading and when children start school that tapers off further. It holds up relatively well until about ages three and four and then we see it declining. I think we will probably come on to that a little bit more, but I suppose in very brief summary there is certainly something about access to books but there is a lot here about the broader factors of family life. They want to do it but they are time poor.

That is particularly so with families who struggle to establish a regular routine, which of course is more the case for families whose work patterns are complex. They may work shift work or have complex split families with different carers involved. That also makes it harder to establish a routine with the things that are really important, such as



regular rituals around bedtime stories or reading as a regular thing, which we tend to see structurally are more prevalent in families on lower incomes and with greater challenges. That is why we see slightly lower levels of reading activity among families on lower incomes. It is a range of factors. There is a lot to do with parental confidence, but also to do with time. I think I will leave it there for now and pass on to Debbie.

Debbie Hicks: I totally agree with my colleagues. We are facing a really complex set of challenges and they are challenges that cannot be solved by one section of the reading ecosystem on its own. It is not something schools alone can tackle. It needs a whole reading ecosystem to work together to tackle these challenges. As we have heard, there are classroom and curriculum pressures that are part of the picture, alongside teachers' own confidence and skills in supporting reading for pleasure in the classroom.

As we also have heard, there are significant pressures on children's leisure time. Our research with parents and children indicates the impact of after-school tiredness, pressures around homework, demands of extracurricular activity, as well as the distractions of TV, video games and using digital devices. As Annie said, family reading is in decline. Families are not reading as much together. Parents tell us that they face a range of challenges to that, but one of those key challenges is that adult reading is also in decline.

The Reading Agency's annual state of the nation research clearly shows that adults themselves are reading less; just over half of UK adults now read for pleasure. That is a drop from 58% in 2015. Time and motivation are key factors, but we must not forget that skills and confidence are also relevant. One in six adults don't read well and don't feel confident in reading with their children. This means that children are not getting the formative family reading experiences that are so important to their development, and they are not seeing adults modelling those positive reading behaviours. We know from research that one in five children say that if they saw adults reading that would encourage them to read more.

It is really important, as well as all of the other things that we have heard, that we consider adult reading as part of the equation if we are to break that cycle and ensure that children have positive reading role models in schools and families. We probably also need to think about definitions of reading and the fact that they are changing and probably need to evolve the questions we ask about reading behaviours to fully understand the trends. It is a complex issue with a range of challenges and it needs an integrated response.

- Q41 **Chris Vince:** Jonathan, you touched on this briefly, but could you drill down a bit more on particular groups of children where this is a larger challenge? That is for the whole panel as well. I am particularly interested in young carers, and I think that young carers finding the time to be able to read for pleasure would be a particular challenge. Do you think there



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are any other groups—and I will put two questions together to save a bit of time—and also why has there been a decline in those groups? Some of them might be obvious, but just out of interest.

Jonathan Douglas: The sharpest decline is associated with age, and we know that the digital lives of teenagers are an important factor associated with that. As I said earlier, we know that gender is a key thing. The research shows quite clearly that there is nothing innate about the experience of reading for girls that is different to boys. However, from birth girls are more likely to be bought books as presents and to be taken to the library, so the gendering of reading as an activity happens almost unconsciously at quite an early stage.

The issue of regional variation seems also to be linked to assets within those communities. The cultural assets of London are obviously significantly high. Drilling down into specific groups, exactly as you say, such as young carers, you can see the way in which those factors interact. There are young people whose lives are stretched—as Annie and Debbie were saying, the time associated. The average amount of free time for an adult has diminished by 25% over the past five years. All of us are time poor at the moment, and that is biting into it for people who are particularly stretched.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the foundation of all reading is speech, language and communication. What happens in the earliest years, exactly as Annie says, is completely vital. That is absolutely bound up in the experience of books, but it is also bound up in other things. High levels of cortisol in the first few years inhibit early language development, so there is the stress experienced by families in high levels of poverty. All sorts of factors combine to create the patterns that we are seeing.

Annie Crombie: Another group, for example, where we see lower levels of reading is children in particularly vulnerable family backgrounds, so children in care, children in kinship care, children on the edge of care. That is the kind of area where you can see that there will be multiple different factors that make it hard to establish regular reading, so the dysregulated nature of the child's emotional state or the family experience contributes to that.

Then of course the other thing that we see clearly is that reading is such a—I think it is quite easy sometimes to assume that families know how to do it. I am sure you don't because that is why you are all looking into this so carefully. That it is an obvious thing. I think we can sometimes miss how deeply—Frank Cottrell-Boyce, the Children's Laureate, calls it "invisible privilege", but the way in which it is core cultural capital. It is really embedded in your family experience.

We see that clearly in the research about intergenerational reading habits. If you were read to as a child, you are much more likely to read to your children. You understand, you are likely to start earlier. We see



those kinds of things, which then means that groups who have had disrupted family circumstances are again likely to suffer from a lack of intergenerational tradition and passing on the reading habit.

Debbie Hicks: There is another really important group that we must not forget about. That is the group of children who face specific reading challenges, who may have SEND needs, and for them reading is not a pleasure. It can be a really difficult and demoralising experience. When we are considering reading for pleasure interventions, we must think about how we can include those children in mainstream activities so that they don't feel that they are a group on their own, that they can enjoy reading along with their peers and have the positive reading experiences that are about joy, not just learning to do the decoding.

Q42 **Chris Vince:** That leads on quite nicely to my next question, which is about shared reading and whether there are similar trends in the decline of shared reading, particularly in early years. You touched a little bit, Debbie, on what the causes are of that. Is there anything the panel wants to add to that?

Annie Crombie: There is, but I think we should start with the recognition that shared reading is seen as desirable. It is seen as a positive thing and families enjoy it when they do it. The unpicking of the causes around that are complex, as we have said, but I also think they take us into the territory of the people who introduce families who don't read to reading. That is the health visitors, early years childcare workers, librarians and such like in the community early years system who introduce families, the opportunities that there are to do that, and some of the ways in which perhaps over the past couple of decades we have seen some of those systems be less strong than they were.

Q43 **Chris Vince:** To follow up on that. I will declare an interest that I am a fairly new father. Obviously I have had health visitors and they do come and talk to you about a lot of different things that seem obvious, but you are like, "Oh, I didn't think of that". Reading was not necessarily talked about, so is that something that you would like to see?

Annie Crombie: Absolutely. We know that 90%—so I fear you may have been in the 10%—of health visitors do introduce a family to reading with Bookstart Baby. They will give a new family with a newborn baby a book and when it works well, and when the health visitor is confident and able to do that, they will model reading. They will say, "You can read to this child, this baby. Even if they don't respond, these are the things that will be happening in their brain."

Chris Vince: I do by the way, don't worry.

Annie Crombie: I am very pleased to hear it. But they do that, and we are pretty confident that that happens in around 90% of cases. The degree of confidence with which the health visitor does that, whether they actually open the book and show how to do it and help to build some



of that confidence, will be more variable. Those are the things that are key and that can happen at the six-week check. Sometimes that happens and sometimes it does not happen until a year.

Chair: Thank you. I am always happy to model that everybody needs some parenting advice, and we are happy to receive it on the Committee. I will bring in Caroline Johnson and then I will go to Sureena.

Q44 Dr Johnson: Thank you very much. I want to ask about two specific groups that may or may not be reading as much. The first is people who live in rural areas, perhaps a bit further from libraries and shops and such like, and also those in the coronavirus gap, so children who were in reception when the coronavirus pandemic hit. They are coming to year 6 now predominantly. There were children who spent time at home with parents who were not working and had lots more time than normal to read to them. There were also children who were in households where things were much more chaotic as a result of not being at school, so some of them were delayed in the onset of their reading and have struggled. Do you have any particular comments on either of those groups?

Jonathan Douglas: On the rural issues, as I said at the beginning, the National Literacy Trust works in 21 places in depth around the country. What is fascinating about those places is we have been working in those communities for over a decade now, and reading for pleasure levels, even though those are the most deprived wards in the country, are 20% higher than the national pattern. They include Camborne and Redruth in Cornwall and some of the market town areas in Suffolk. We have been looking quite tightly at what—the challenges in those areas are not unique to those areas.

As Annie and Debbie have said, what we are looking at is a system issue at community level. It is the extent to which there is joined-up and consistent and coherent provision and support for families and children, the extent to which the relationship between health and education is strong, the relationship between the levels of cultural provision and so forth is strong. Those factors play out in different ways, but they are the same factors in Cornwall and Suffolk as in Bradford and Stoke-on-Trent and are amenable to solution. That is the thing, they are not intractable. The co-ordination and that creation—it takes a village to raise a reading child. It is absolutely not impossible to crack it.

On the cohort born and experiencing early language development during the pandemic, the key thing there is that the pandemic exacerbated the effect of socioeconomic disadvantage. The mediating impact of access to public libraries, when public libraries were largely inaccessible for families, the mediating impact of early years provision, which levels the playing field system, was removed and, therefore, the socioeconomic gap grew.



A lot of the work that has been going on has been very targeted at children who will have experienced the home learning environment, which is the key factor in all of this. The idea is what you do with a child at home, not who you are. That is four times more impactful than the impact of even high-quality education on the early development of a child. Supporting the children for whom the whole learning environment in those early years was weak has been absolutely vital, so a lot of our work in remedial support has been directed at children from those socioeconomic groups.

Debbie Hicks: I was just going to add that, in a practical context, we have found, through our work with the Summer Reading Challenge, that systematic outreach through cross-authority models and working with specialist partners—so connecting libraries with partners such as education, HAF, children's services and public health—has really enabled community interventions like the Summer Reading Challenge to reach into areas of disadvantage and low attainment, and created new readers by attracting them into the library and into community activity. Using that cross-authority model has enabled us to reach over 150,000 new children and families in areas of low attainment and disadvantage of various kinds. It has seen new families coming into community activity and into reading activity that may not have been involved in it before.

The other thing I will add is that we have seen that this has been particularly effective where libraries have given automatic library membership as part of the sign-up to the Summer Reading Challenge. That means providing a library card in schools as part of their Summer Reading Challenge enrolment. That has seen a huge increase in numbers of children coming into libraries and taking part in community activity who may not have done that before. That is the sort of broad approach that has reached some of those groups that you are talking about.

Q45 Sureena Brackenridge: Let's further consider the reverse with decline in reading for pleasure. Based on your experience and evidence that you can draw on, what works to help stimulate and motivate children to read for pleasure?

Jonathan Douglas: We have learnt several lessons drawing on the communities that I am talking about. The first is that quick fixes do not work. This is a long-term system issue. We have been working in those places for a decade. It is sustained activities. What we are doing is changing behaviour and motivation, not just addressing an attainment issue.

The second thing we have learnt is that it is not the job of any one agency. We have adopted a kind of tripartite model, working with local schools, colleges, nursery settings, and libraries vitally, but also with the community and voluntary sector, including the faith community in places like Bradford, which has a key role to play in parenting behaviour. Also, with the local business community, the role of employers, the role of



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brands, is so important for exciting and reaching families and determining what reading is for kids.

That is also important in getting into the motivation issue. Working with the Premier League on reading is a way of engaging young boys. Working with McDonald's on family reading activity is a way of associating it with that extraordinary moment when you have your Happy Meal, not just going into the library. The role of brands and partnerships, the role of sustained impact is incredibly important and so is addressing the issue of access in practical ways. That is why things like the Libraries for Primaries project, which we are working on at the moment, is crucially important, how we can ensure that access to books is not a postcode lottery but is an entitlement and the reading platform is there for all children.

Annie Crombie: There are two elements to this that I think we need to think about separately when we are considering the solution. The first bit is: what motivates families, what engages families who are not engaged, what can start a positive intergenerational loop and help families to embed reading into their lives? There we see multiple things that, as Jonathan says, need to come together and not a single fix, any of them. It is things like making reading feel more fun. Reading books in a way can be a blueprint for play. The books that work best for children in the early years often involve interactive dialogue; they might have a mirror, bits that move, flaps that create surprise. All of these things create a wonderful, joyful, interactive experience.

Families like reading when they see children responding positively to reading. With a really young child, you can get hand shaking or a face light up. That is the most incredible positive drug that gets them wanting to do it again and again. You see parents getting hooked on reading because they want that experience of a child smiling or laughing, so those kinds of things have to be part of reading for it to happen.

Where it is more challenging and then to sustain it, and embed it again and again, we need things like books that are about real life so that there are points of reference outside of the book for the things that are inside the book. If you think about "We're Going on a Bear Hunt" and "swishy swashy" through the long grass, there are loads and loads of opportunities in there for the book to come to life outside of the reading experience. That kind of thing creates onward points of references and brings the family back to the book. It makes them feel like the book and reading is part of their life. There is all of that kind of stuff.

The other thing that we know is super important is that for families to start and feel they can continue to build their confidence, they need to be introduced to it by a practitioner, a professional, another adult who can persuade them to give it a go, can show them that it works like that. In Bookstart, we see around 15% more families are likely to establish a reading routine where a practitioner models it and brings it to life or gives



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them a leg up. It is about how we support all of the partners that we possibly can, coming back to Jonathan's point about multiple different people needing to be involved for us to get the best possible chance at this.

There are so many different touch points where it is possible—health visitors, GPs and so on—even before we get into the more traditional reading, education, library space. It is all of those being activated to give the best possible chance for families to have the moment where they see that it can give them a positive experience.

Debbie Hicks: As my colleagues have said, there are some blue skies. We have examples like the Summer Reading Challenge, which consistently buck the trend. We see half a million boys and girls reading over the summer and returning to school in the autumn as more confident readers. What we have drawn from that evidence base of over 30 years of good practice is a "what works for children" reading model, a reading for pleasure pedagogy. This includes a number of key ingredients.

First, we find it is important not to get hung up on how children are accessing reading but rather to focus on the enjoyment and achievement a successful reading experience delivers, whatever the format and whatever the chosen content. Choice is absolutely vital. Without choice, reading loses its sparkle and becomes a chore, more like homework. Choice has to be at the heart of a reading for pleasure experience. Meaningful choice requires access to a broad range of content supported by expert signposting and curation, and libraries are amazing community reading assets in that sense.

We also find that using "the hook, not the book" into reading is a really successful strategy. Including interest pathways, such as sport, music, STEM can offer familiar entry points for reluctant readers. This year's Summer Reading Challenge theme, for example, is Read to the Beat. It has a music theme and that is the starting point for all of the activation.

As Annie said, representation and accessibility are key. Reading is a window on the world, but it is also a mirror. Children have to see themselves and their lives in the books that they are reading, and that content has to be accessible. For example, we always include books for children with dyslexia on our book lists, and that is really welcomed.

We also feel that activation is really important. Meaningful recognition of achievement, the motivation of positive reading role models, the encouragement of book chat and enrichment activities absolutely build communities of readers. It is important to celebrate small steps. A magazine, a sports report, a comic all count in building a reading journey but, as Annie said, most importantly, reading has to be fun because enjoyment is key to becoming a reader for life. The Reading Agency's research shows that adults who enjoyed reading as a child are twice as



likely to be regular readers as adults. It is a major building block on which to build.

Chair: Thank you very much. We have quite a few topics that we want to get your thoughts on. I realise there is a lot to say but if we are going to get through everything, we will have to be a little bit briefer in saying it, if that is okay.

Q46 **Caroline Voaden:** We have talked a lot about reading in the early years. I would like to look at secondary school because, Jonathan, I think you said that there is a noticeable dip when children go to secondary school. Perhaps you could talk a little bit about what best practice looks like in secondary schools to address the change and how does it differ from best practice for younger children?

Jonathan Douglas: On what happens in schools, the big change between primary and secondary is that reading is everybody's business all the time in a primary school. When you get to the secondary school, it may be the school librarian's job and the English department's job, but they are quite "literature" and perhaps might not be.

I think the building of a reading community in a secondary school that mirrors that of a primary school is a challenge. Absolutely, without a doubt, the best person to do that is the school librarian. They have the ability to work across the whole school community and can take it out of being a subject area. That should be backed up by a pedagogy that is around how each subject area teaches literacy, so that literacy and reading becomes the business of the entire school and not simply an hour at lunchtime if you choose to go to the library or something about Charles Dickens.

Annie Crombie: I agree with all of that and I will not add anything for the sake of time.

Debbie Hicks: I will add that building the foundations in primary is really important to moving into secondary, so that even if those distractions of secondary school take a child away from reading, it may be something that they come back to later.

Building connections between schools and communities is really important there. We did a three-year project with NLT that supported children in Islington over the transition between primary and secondary, connecting school and community. We found we were able to maintain reading levels, whereas nationally they were dropping. Also, our experience from the Summer Reading Challenge shows that if you give teenagers a reading leadership role, such as volunteering in the Summer Reading Challenge, that helps to keep the motivation going.

Q47 **Chair:** Can I probe a little bit more on secondary? As part of the curriculum assessment reforms, the Government have announced that there will be a new screening test for reading around year 8. Do you have



any thoughts about the link between competency in reading as a skill and reading for pleasure, whether there is a cohort of children who don't manage to secure the skill properly by year 6, who are perhaps currently being slightly forgotten by the time they get to secondary, at which point reading just becomes a difficult thing and we have lost the battle on reading for pleasure?

Jonathan Douglas: Absolutely. When you talk to adults who have low levels of literacy, the thing that they will all talk about is the moment when they developed the skills to mask that, and that is normally at the top of primary. The year 8 reading focus is welcome, inasmuch as it is saying that reading is the business of the secondary school community and not done and dusted by the age of 11. The key thing in the reading for pleasure conversation is that because reading for pleasure is a volitional act, it rests on your self-confidence as a reader. This needs to be not just something you can do but something you feel comfortable and confident in doing. The key thing for the year 8 reading check is it builds pupils' confidence rather than undermines it.

Annie Crombie: I think we need to keep a really close eye on that. We know that choice is so important. Therefore, children feeling they are choosing to be a reader is a key part of developing a reading identity. There is a risk around things that force and compel or punish or have negative consequences within a school system. That is what we need to be mindful of and remember that once the functional literacy is there, the longer-term, deeper benefits come from reading for pleasure and from seeing yourself as a reader and wanting to read. That is an important thing to bear in mind.

Q48 **Caroline Voaden:** To very quickly follow up on that, do you think that the development of the English curriculum has had any effect? We hear that children in primary school are having to learn what a fronted adverbial is and, the way that literature exams are, there is less about loving the book and more about—

Annie Crombie: We have to remember time and the curriculum. In the same way that daily life is busy and there are many other things to focus on, so is that limited time. The more complex one makes the curriculum—we see this in primary schools as well—and the more complexity there is around things like fronted adverbials, the less time there is to focus on enjoying a book.

Jonathan Douglas: The conceptual divorce of reading for pleasure from literacy is a damaging thing for children. The two things need to be experienced together.

Q49 **Dr Johnson:** I am interested in the fronted adverbial and the interests of what is in the national curriculum, because some schools are teaching the fronted adverbial because it is in the state curriculum. However, independent schools are not necessarily teaching what a fronted adverbial is. It is perfectly possible to go right through to your GCSEs and



get a 9 in your English and English literature without having ever learnt what a fronted adverbial is, so why is there a focus on teaching them at all? What is the point of it? What is useful about learning it?

Chair: That might be a question for the previous Government that wrote that into the national curriculum that schools are obliged to teach. That was the big change in the curriculum to have much more grammar content and put children in a situation where they were being taught grammar that their parents would not even necessarily recognise or understand. That came during those reforms.

Jonathan Douglas: The knowledge about language is a very important facet culturally, academically and for metacognition. To understand language and the way language works is really important. Pendulums can swing too far one way to get to the right place sometimes, and I think it is the landing that is—

Annie Crombie: Where we are now we need to be thinking about, particularly in early learning to read, the balance between time spent on phonics teaching and time left for enjoying reading, storytelling in classrooms. It is supporting parents not just to do the phonics homework but also the reading for fun, to keep that reading habit going when a child starts school, if they have had one embedded previously, and not to think now the child is learning to read it is just all about “Zig and Zog” and that is the only content that needs to be in our reading. I think that is probably where we slightly caricature with the fronted adverbial, but there is still the issue around the balance between phonics and reading for fun.

Debbie Hicks: I suppose it depends on which way you go into it, whether you teach the grammar first and then the reading comes after, or whether the grammar comes as a result of the reading. We know that reading for pleasure supports the development of literacy skills. You have to have the interest and the passion to pick up the technical aspects.

Chair: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Q50 **Mark Sowards:** Drilling down now into the major initiatives designed to encourage reading, you have already referenced it but the Department for Education launched the National Year of Reading this year. We are two months in. That is 16%—or 17%, if you round up—done. What are the objectives of the National Year of Reading? How can we make sure that it is a success? This is open to anyone.

Jonathan Douglas: The objective of the National Year of Reading is to redefine reading for contemporary society, to engage the whole nation in the action of reading but particularly focused on the people who are not reading at the moment. There are three pillars of activity. The first is social marketing, getting the message across, utilising brands, social media and influencers to get the message across that reading is relevant, exciting and something that you want to be associated with regardless of



your background. The second element is very much around what is happening in schools, the kind of conversations we are having at the moment, and how teachers can be supported in the promotion of reading. The third element is the activation of communities.

So far on the campaign element we have seen huge traction in social media, which is great. Schools have entered into it in the most fantastic way: 5,000 schools have registered for free CPD around reading for pleasure. That is over a quarter of schools in the country are already taking part in it. There was a first online event for children for the National Year of Reading a couple of weeks ago and 580,000 children, over half a million children, took part. We are anticipating that the event on World Book Day will engage over 1 million children.

There is a strong sense that the National Year of Reading is happening in schools, happening in the social space but also in communities. The Reading Agency is co-ordinating an amazing programme across libraries. The BookTrust is doing fantastic things across the early years sector. We have also asked local authorities to register their strategic interest and commitment to the aims of the Year of Reading. Of English authorities, 90, so going on for two thirds, have already registered their strategic commitment to the Year of Reading, and 16,000 community volunteers have been recruited so far as well. Two months in, the foundation has been laid.

Q51 Mark Sowards: Brilliant. Before I bring in Annie and Debbie, and feel free to answer this follow-up question too, the previous National Years of Reading took place in 1998 and 2008. How effective were they and have we learned any lessons from them to make sure that this one has long-term impact?

Jonathan Douglas: That is a brilliant question. The first Year of Reading was in 1998, and it was launched to complement the literacy strategy announcement that David Blunkett announced. The idea was very much that it was a social campaign around social engagement with reading, and it was a phenomenal celebration. The second one was at the tail end of the strategy period, and some groups had not responded to the literacy and the primary and secondary strategies and so they were isolated. Again, as with the first Year of Reading, it was basically a social activity but with much more of a social marketing focus on the target groups.

This year we want to not simply look at social marketing but at the system around reading, making sure that local authorities and schools begin to change. Everything you have heard from each of us has been around the fact that people's reading activities take place in a cultural, academic and social construct. Through the Year of Reading we want to change those constructs. We cannot do it all in one year—we can lay the foundations in one year—but we can begin to initiate those bigger system changes.



Mark Sewards: Thank you very much. I will bring in Annie and Debbie for any additional comments.

Annie Crombie: I will not add all that much, but I think that the general halo effect of a particular all-system focus on reading is most welcome. All the things that we are trying to do rely on reading not being within a particular narrow swim lane of activity, about it being outside of its literacy straitjacket, if I can dramatise a little bit. It needs to be held and understood by multiple different partners for early years reading to be embedded, for example.

That is really welcome, but I think that the sustainability of it and of that sort of focus is key. Campaigns have a certain amount of value in raising the overall dialogue and debate around reading, but the real thing that matters is that longer-term, slower-burn embedding of activity within communities and networks, which will be the key to any kind of longer-term success and making the investment worthwhile.

Debbie Hicks: I think we are in a different place now. Jonathan, Annie and I have all done the other two Years of Reading, and we are now much more able to work together as a reading ecosystem. The National Year of Reading is providing an important opportunity to connect us all around shared aims and priority groups, which I think is a move on from previous Years of Reading. I reinforce Annie's point. To be successful we need to build on the best practice of what we know works. We cannot create anything new this year because the resource is not sufficient. There are good resources there, but the best way to invest that resource is to invest it in the amplification of best practice and programmes that we know work and have the capacity to be amplified and grown. We are looking forward to seeing how the legacy of the year can build on that, how we can build programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge as part of the legacy of the National Year of Reading.

Q52 **Darren Paffey:** Staying with the idea of big reading initiatives, we are all looking forward to World Book Day this Thursday. The Chair of the Committee is leading a debate on this in Parliament. The Summer Reading Challenge is always a big hit in my constituency and beyond. I am interested in how effective these kinds of initiatives can be in developing the lasting enjoyment of reading among children.

Annie Crombie: They have to be built on something. There has to be something for them to activate. That is the key thing and then they can have a valuable role. The Children's Laureate would be another example. The Children's Laureate can create a real sense of buzz and excitement, a little bit of stardust. There is something about reading and reading aloud—there is the showmanship, the special occasion and that is a factor. It makes partners working on the ground day to day in libraries or who are associated with reading see it as part of their daily job. It makes them feel that they are part of something bigger, that there is something special there. That is great, but you have to have those networks,



understanding people working on the ground with families, understanding what the broader benefits of reading are and why it matters so much, for those things to have that kind of impact.

Jonathan Douglas: A quarter of children on free school meals say that the first book they owned came as a result of World Book Day £1 book tokens. These moments have immense value in themselves, but as has been said, their strategic value is if they are embedded in what the school is doing and in a wider infrastructure of reading activity.

Debbie Hicks: Programmes such as World Book Night and the Summer Reading Challenge are not necessarily just one-off events. Summer Reading Challenge takes place over three months each year. It is scaffolded by engagement points such as the Winter Mini Challenge as a follow-on. It connects schools in the summer and the autumn term and those benefits extend well into the school years.

It happens at scale. We run 20,000 library events over the summer period, attracting 600,000 attendees. That is delivering an impact on children's reading enjoyment and attainment. They come back year after year. It is having a major impact on library loans. We see that from book loans over that summer period when 18% of library book loans over the year result from the Summer Reading Challenge. It engenders 100,000 new library members who continue to be library members and continue to use the library. I would say that they are not one-off events. They are part of an annual and ongoing programme of reading for pleasure activity.

Q53 **Darren Paffey:** Some academics have suggested that extrinsic factors, rewards, challenges, that kind of thing are not always effective at developing long-term enjoyment of reading. As a former academic I can say that sometimes we are right and sometimes we are completely wrong. What is your response to what they are suggesting? How do you ensure that, for example, the Summer Reading Challenge genuinely motivates children to enjoy reading?

Debbie Hicks: Where there are barriers and challenges to reading, it is unrealistic to think that intrinsic motivation will be the sole solution to tackling that decline. Meaningful activation and acknowledgement are the key to supporting less confident readers to engage, and also more confident readers to stretch. It is about the fun, setting personalised goals, making reading enjoyable and achievable. Our evidence really does show that extrinsic motivation has a place in supporting reading engagement. Our annual survey and independent studies show that Summer Reading Challenge incentives, such as the medals and the certificates, are not just valued for themselves but are also key mechanisms supporting children to become readers, giving them a sense of accomplishment.

They are also part of a much wider activation package that includes choice and agency, responsive adult engagement and enrichment



activities. For many children who take part, we see that those extrinsic motivators lead to intrinsic motivation. I absolutely feel that there is a proven place for extrinsic motivators in supporting reading for pleasure, especially for more reluctant readers.

Darren Paffey: That is helpful. Thank you.

Q54 **Chair:** I have a brief question about World Book Day. World Book Day is great fun. It is a wonderful national moment, but it also places quite a responsibility on parents and families. Some families have greater resources and ability to source a costume and enable their child to participate. Can any of you comment on the extent of there being a disadvantage issue from the kind of responsibility that it places on families. the one in 10 families that do not have a book at home at all, for example, to enable their children to participate in what is undoubtedly a great annual moment?

Jonathan Douglas: Many schools are highly sensitive to that and are taking away the narrative around dressing up on World Book Day, proactively dealing with that narrative.

Annie Crombie: We see that too. A lot of schools are introducing costume swaps or making items to dress up with in a school art lesson. There are ways around it. It is, as you say, important because otherwise it risks exacerbating factors that we know about, stresses on home life that are getting in the way of reading being embedded in the first place.

Jonathan Douglas: The whole point is that reading for pleasure is a driver of social mobility. Children reading for pleasure by age 15 is a strong determinant of their ultimate attainment, their socioeconomic background. Therefore, anything that takes away from it being not simply a driver of social mobility but actually an anti-poverty strategy is undermining the power of reading for pleasure.

Chair: Thank you. That is helpful.

Q55 **Manuela Perteghella:** I want to talk a little bit more about the role of the Children's Laureate, which Annie mentioned. What has been the impact of the post of the Children's Laureate in encouraging different groups of children to read for pleasure?

Annie Crombie: The Children's Laureate role is managed by BookTrust but on behalf of the wider sector so my colleagues may want to add to what I say about the design of it.

How the Children's Laureate works is the post is held for two years and each laureate chooses a particular focus. Cressida Cowell focused on libraries being moved on through the work on Libraries for Primaries and that has maintained its resonance in the system. Frank Cottrell-Boyce is currently focused on early shared reading and on the community partners



who come together in different parts of the country to create a kind of a community storytelling ecosystem.

To answer your question more directly, what all the laureates have in common is that they bring some of that stardust. They all bring a particular focus. They act to open doors and they unite people from diverse sectors. Frank Cottrell-Boyce is going to speak at the National Association of Virtual School Heads in a few days and talk to them about the role that reading can play for children from the most vulnerable backgrounds and why it can be so helpful in helping children to explore and understand their identity. He can bring that bit of his celebrity and different way of looking at the world and communicate to a different audience. It is through that kind of activity that we can see the Children's Laureate having one of its greatest impacts.

Debbie Hicks: Anything that provides a positive adult reading role model for children has to be a good thing. It brings profile and advocacy and sets a really good example.

Q56 **Manuela Perteghella:** Has there been any independent evaluation of the impact of this role of the Children's Laureate?

Annie Crombie: Of the role of the Children's Laureate? No. The role is supported by publishing and the wider sector. There is evaluation of ambassadorial roles generally, which I think helps us to see how role models and people from different backgrounds can help when they, together with other things, help the focus of their attention to resonate with different groups but Children's Laureate programme has not been separately evaluated.

Q57 **Manuela Perteghella:** We don't know if there are outcomes from the Children's Laureate programme in reading groups or because of strategies that teachers have adopted, for example, within their school or a new library set up in a school? Do we not know that?

Annie Crombie: We do for individual Children's Laureates. For example while Cressida Cowell was Children's Laureate she set up a number of libraries in different schools. Exactly to your point, we then saw that model and the key things that she was campaigning for within her laureateship be taken on. We could map them. However, because the focus of each laureate is so specific, we have to look at specific outcomes laureate by laureate.

Q58 **Manuela Perteghella:** Thank you for clarifying. My last question is to the whole panel. What are your main recommendations to the Government as to what actions they could take to reverse the decline of reading for pleasure?

Jonathan Douglas: I think what we have all been saying is that there is a need to amplify, make coherent and elevate the good things that are going on and that is what the Year of Reading is about. My call is that the



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Year of Reading is turned into a decade of reading to sustain the foundations that are being laid, the partnerships that are being created this year, and to sustain momentum.

The second thing I would suggest is that within the next three years we will have put a library in every primary school that previously did not have one through the Libraries for Primaries initiative. It needs to be extended, and also needs to be extended to secondary schools, because a similar number of secondary schools do not have libraries. As in the primary space, the programme needs to include training for librarians. Both elements need to be sustained. My second recommendation is for a universal commitment to providing school libraries.

My third recommendation is to establish reading action zones. We know that the distribution of reading patterns in the country is not equal. In some places—for example, there are communities in Middlesbrough where 40% of the adult population is functionally illiterate—we need to drive deeper and work in different ways. I feel it is very important to bring all the resources we can to those kinds of communities.

Annie Crombie: I will focus on the early years because I think that is an important area for the Government to focus on and is where they can make so much difference to long-term reading for pleasure. The Government could put reading at the heart of their vision for early childhood.

I think reading is seen too narrowly with too much of a school-readiness focus in the early years to put children on the path to literacy. Of course that is important, and we have been talking about that today, but reading is so much broader than that. The relational benefits of reading—for instance, empathy, mental health and so on—will only be realised if reading is more broadly embedded across the early years. That is what the Bookstart programme does. I think that the Government could leverage that more, as well as other initiatives that are built on it, as part of their cross-government, multi-agency approach to early years services. That is where I would put my greatest focus.

Debbie Hicks: We would advocate for a more joined-up approach in policy, funding and practice across Government Departments so that we better connect the dots between schools, families and communities to create a holistic reading journey. We would recommend support for linked adult reading interventions to address root causes of inequality but also to strengthen reading role models for children in classrooms and in families. Finally, we would advocate for investment in best-practice interventions to add capacity to schools, to make sure that there is work in the community that adds richness to the offer. Programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge complement the schools' offers, but are non-statutory and vulnerable to diminishing library budgets. Investment in programmes such as that would be a game changer in universalising those programmes and making sure more children had access to them.



- Q59 **Chair:** Thank you very much. I thank all of you for coming to give your evidence today. It has been a fascinating session. We have been short on time—we always are short on time—so if there is anything that you feel that you did not manage to convey to us, or anything that you think afterwards that you wish you had said, please do feel free to write to the Committee, and we would welcome that. For now, thank you very much for your evidence.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Luke Taylor, Ellen Broomé, Anjali Patel and Onyinye Iwu.

- Q60 **Chair:** Welcome back to the second panel of the Education Select Committee's oral evidence session on reading for pleasure this morning. I invite our second set of witnesses to introduce yourselves.

Onyinye Iwu: Thank you. I am Onyinye Iwu. I am a black British author and illustrator, working with several publishers, creating diverse books. I am also a secondary school art teacher and design technology teacher. I also run specific courses and electives on writing and illustrating comic strips with key stage 3 students. I am working with other groups of authors and illustrators on promoting author visits to schools, especially those that have not had author visits before, because we think that is really important.

Anjali Patel: I am Anjali Patel. I am the Lead Advisory Teacher at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, CLPE. We are a literacy charity and an English association. We support primary school teachers and leaders to develop effective, engaging and evidence-based language and literacy provision. Our core value is that it is every child's right to be literate, and to be literate you need to have access to high-quality texts and book-sharing experiences with interested adults and peers. We work with hundreds of primary schools, and serve thousands of member teachers.

We are able to research and explore what we know works in early years and primary school classrooms. We have associate schools across the country working in educationally vulnerable and disadvantaged communities with children, who may be working in areas of adult illiteracy, coastal and rural schools, which I heard about earlier. We have mainly mainstream schools, but we do work with some schools offering alternative provision and SEND. Over the 50 years of the life of the charity, we have designed a book-based English curriculum that supports children to read and write for pleasure, and puts reading for pleasure at the heart of the curriculum and that is my main area.

Luke Taylor: I am a Senior Researcher at the think-tank the Centre for Social Justice. My main focus of work is on our Lost Boys project, which we have been doing for the last few years and within which we have looked at reading and what we can do there.



Ellen Broomé: I am the Chief Executive of the British Dyslexia Association. We are the national charity working to make sure that children, young people and adults with dyslexia are able to thrive.

Q61 **Chair:** Thank you very much indeed. We have heard a lot of evidence about the decline in reading for pleasure among children and young people. What is your assessment of the current state of reading for pleasure in the specific groups of children that you focus on in your work?

Ellen Broomé: Thank you so much. I am delighted to be giving evidence to the inquiry. I think it is important and, as a self-declared lover of reading, I want to make one central point. If we are really serious about reading for pleasure and the importance of reading for pleasure for children and young people, we really must work harder at addressing the barriers faced by dyslexic children.

For very many dyslexic children, reading is not enjoyable. It is difficult, exhausting and something that they avoid. That is what children and families and the teachers who teach them tell us every day. Reading for pleasure depends on confidence, fluency and enjoyment, but for many it is really hard. They spend a lot of time decoding words on a page and not really enjoying the content. As a result of that, too many dyslexic children and young people disengage from reading quite early on, and they have quite a heavy backpack of educational failure or feelings of failure and embarrassment and stigma around their reading. We need to try to address that. I am happy to expand on that and I am sure there will be opportunities for that later on.

Luke Taylor: So a few things—I think a lot of them were discussed previously—and certainly parenting is quite high up there. If we can get parents reading to their children every day, it has a massive impact. We can see that in the data on how far behind or ahead kids are and whether they are read to regularly. I would also highlight smartphones and technology as major inhibitors. I know they are a tool as well, but for example in my own life, when I had a flip phone, I read more. When I got Netflix, I read less. We also know from some of our data that 814,000 kids aged three to five now have social media accounts and 25% of kids between the ages of five and seven have their own smartphones. We cannot ignore that technology has seeped into the lives of everyone without it being regulated.

I could also speak about older people. Without it being modelled too well, we know that one of best buffers for kids being good with their own use of technology is how their parents show them what good use is. We all probably go on our devices far too much. There are a couple of other things that may be slightly more specific to boys, although those things affect both boys and girls.

One factor for boys is that it is quite hard to see men reading nowadays and I think there are two big reasons for that. One is that we know there are 2.5 million children in the UK who do not have a father figure at



home, so it is quite hard for them to see their father reading at home. We also know that the teaching workforce is highly gendered. In primary schools, 15% of teachers are men. In secondary schools, one third of teachers are men so the percentage does go up but it is not very high. If boys do not see men reading, they might not perceive that to be an activity that they want to do or something that is masculine. I will come with solutions later, but that obviously has to play into it.

I will mention two other things quickly. The previous panel spoke about special educational needs, things such as speech, language and communication, and how those can play into making reading harder. Through our research, we found that 60% of special educational needs kids are boys. Likewise, 70% of those with EHCPs are boys, so it is likely that part of the reason why boys are less likely to read is because they are much more likely to be in those categories in the first place.

Finally, as the previous panel mentioned, reading is a quite gendered activity, even from a young age. If we want to deal with why boys are reading less, I think if we can make it feel more open to masculine traits, more of a thing that is boy-friendly, that should go quite a long way. Potentially, we have gone too far the other way and boys do not feel like reading for pleasure is a space that is for them.

Anjali Patel: First, just thinking about being a reader, and children and adults who are literate and identify as being readers, people need to have competency, confidence to apply their knowledge and their skills to the process, but they also have to be willing to practise because it is difficult and it is fairly new in brain development. People need to practise and refine, they need to develop the skills, and I think if we work backwards to reader identity, they need to see the benefit and recognise the value. To do that, they need the pleasure of it, they need to enjoy reading, which is what we are talking about today. To do that, they need to be proficient, they need reading to be less of a struggle and they need that ability. To get there, people need motivation, and we are talking about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

You also need connection. At CLPE, we know that because we have our literacy library, a teacher reference library at the centre of our building where we can make recommendations to teachers or online. We also know that children are affected as readers by social and environmental factors, but also by educational policy. If we want to teach children to read confidently and volitionally, it requires teachers to know about, build on and develop a wide range of experiences. Teachers need to build on children's own experiences and understand them and they need to show them the knowledge required to be a reader, the behaviours, as well as the skills and strategies of course, but crucially they need to build those positive attitudes towards reading.

This is the moment to just ask ourselves if what we are doing is working and why we have a crisis in reading for pleasure. In schools we need to



teach children to read and not just know how to do it but to know why they are doing it and wanting to do it. We need to ask ourselves how the teaching and assessment of reading, based on what teachers are told to do, what is in place for them, the policy and the curriculum, affect our most educationally vulnerable children who may not have had what we would think of as the foundational experiences of being a reader from birth. People do not start to learn to read in reception through a phonics programme; they start to learn to read from birth, as we know. The most literate children and adults will have had a journey from birth that has enabled them to read and we have a responsibility to make sure every single child should access that.

Our job is to be thinking about the curriculum, the balanced approach to teaching reading that allows those attitudes, the knowledge, the skills and the behaviours to develop alongside one element of reading, which has been skewed towards the skills. Calling skills foundational negates everything else that we would consider to be foundational for readers.

Onyinye Iwu: As a teacher, I see a struggle, especially between key stage 3 and 4, in students engaging with reading. Over the years, many pedagogical initiatives have been embedded within the curriculum throughout the day. One that I have seen in several schools is DEAR, which is Drop Everything and Read, and students are encouraged to bring a book every day from the library or from home to read, but I see struggles every day, students thinking, "This is boring. Why do I have to do this?"

I agree 100% with the idea of reading being quite gendered at the moment. Boys specifically feel alienated and it is very obvious that there is no effort to go and get a book. A lot of students do not enter the library, even if they do have a library in school, so we need to think about making that change. What will incentivise you to go there?

Coming from my background and looking at representation, I came from a low-income background, and representation was not there in books for me. However, because I needed that escape, I needed to read, and reading opened up a lot of opportunities, not just academically but it also gave me the opportunity to see different worlds. We are talking about mirrors and windows. I think that is really important, because for a lot of students who do not have access to books at home or maybe local libraries, and for whom reading is not enforced as part of the general family culture, you see a sort of uselessness of reading. It is like, "Oh, why do I have to read? I just have to do my GCSEs and that's it."

It is really important, specifically when it comes to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to try to encourage the idea of reading for pleasure. A lot of communities do not encourage children to read for pleasure. They focus on textbooks. You have to study for your exams. You do not have to read for pleasure, because that is not going to get you a job. Coming from a migrant background, I know that is the thing



that you consistently hear. That needs to change intrinsically in families, as well as in schools.

I completely agree with Luke about social media. I told my students that I was coming here and I asked them, "Why do you guys not read?" A lot of them were like, "Miss, but we have TikTok. What is the point?" That is it. You have TikTok, you have Netflix, you have the film coming out; why would you read the book? The answer is about understanding what will draw the students to reading.

I am also an illustrator and author. I think part of the problem is a lack of diversity in the production of books. One of the most important things is the lack of marketing. There are so many diverse books out there, but they do not reach the people who they need to reach. There are plentiful stories showing mirrors into maybe disadvantaged backgrounds, but students do not know about them, so they are like, "Oh, I can't relate to all these things. They have nothing to do with me." The stories are out there but unfortunately they are not reaching the right students.

Q62 Chair: Could you just say a little bit—and we will need to be mindful of time again this morning—about how in your experience as an author and illustrator the world of children's books has changed over the last couple of decades?

Onyinye Iwu: I believe that we have definitely made a big jump forward when it comes to diverse books, characters, stories and realities. However, the thing that I consistently see is that we are highlighting the same authors in shops and to an extent even within schools and libraries, because that is what we are comfortable with. I know that the curriculum has changed over the years and some schools can choose some of the books that they show their students, although maybe not when it comes to GCSE, but there is a little bit more leeway.

However, I think that we need a little bit more structure when it comes to making sure that there is support for creators of diverse books that can maintain careers to do this. If we do not have the creators to create this work, we will not be able to have the books and the students will not be able to see them. When I am talking about diversity, I am not talking about just racial diversity. I am talking about class, I am talking about gender and just making sure that we are creating windows to every experience out there, which I think at the moment is not happening.

I am sitting here as an author/illustrator, as well as a secondary school teacher who works full time and having the time to be able to do everything is extremely difficult. There are so many people like me in my situation who want to create diverse stories, but find it difficult to support themselves financially. Things need to be put in place to make sure that we can do this. I do not have the kind of privileged background that would allow me to just be a creative because the publishing industry does not pay that much. I need to make sure that I am able to sustain myself financially. So how do I do that? To have that diversity, especially when it



comes to people from maybe less privileged backgrounds, we need to put financial support behind it.

Q63 Chris Vince: Onyinye, we are talking about representation and you mentioned that sometimes the representation is out there but we are just not aware of it, which is interesting and something I had not considered. Can you, the panel in general, touch upon whether there are still some groups who are underrepresented in literature, which I am sure there are, and which particular groups of children they are? This is particularly important. I think you have already touched upon low-income families, which is absolutely really important. What kind of impact does lack of representation have?

Onyinye Iwu: I obviously talk as a black woman, but I would see it from the point of view of any ethnic minorities, and boys too. I have two sons and I know that my aim is to create books for them, because I see that a lot of the characters and a lot of the stories maybe do not carry the reality of life for boys. Over time, people have stayed away from race and now a lot more of the characters are animals. When you focus on animals, it means that you are removing real-life characters and what happens today in somebody's life.

It is very important, especially for ethnic minorities, for readers to see themselves, to feel like they can be part of the conversation, part of literature and part of art, because that makes a person feel that they are part of the society. For a lot of us, especially growing up, we have a bit of a segregated element, in our minds that when you read you do not really read about yourself, Peckham is not part of the conversation, that type of thing. It is important that everybody can see themselves and also that everybody can see everybody else. If we are really trying to create a multicultural society, we need to be accepting that we need to know everybody's experiences.

Chris Vince: I liked your phrase, windows and mirrors.

Ellen Broomé: I want to add to that on behalf of children with special educational needs and disabilities. I don't think they are well represented in children's or young people's books. It is hard for them to see themselves in books, which is part of creating a reader identity—who am I? Can I be a reader even if I have this disability or that particular condition? It is important to think about disability inclusion.

Anjali Patel: CLPE produces an annual survey called Reflecting Realities. We are working on our ninth one now. That is where we ask publishers to send us any books that they publish that feature racially minoritised characters or characters of colour. In the first year of that, which I think was 2017, whereas there are 10,000 or so books published for children every year, only 4% of the books published in 2017 featured a racially minoritised character. I am saying racially minoritised because when you are marginalised or erased, you are minoritised. Only 1% of the titles—and this was eight years ago—featured a racially minoritised protagonist



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or main character. That really matters because when we are talking about connection, you need to have connection to the reading material. You need to see yourselves. Dr Rudine Sims Bishop wrote a wonderful essay, "Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors". You need to be able to see out. It is a social justice issue, especially at the moment, to see yourself. You need to see yourself as part of what you are doing.

There has been a steady rise in diversity. We work closely with publishers to make sure that there is increased output and volume. We also want to make sure that they are high quality representations. If you haven't read Onyinye's books, let me tell you that they are amazing. I particularly loved "The Best Jollof Rice Ever!" Representation has improved year on year to about 30% so it is not quite yet where we are at in the child population. Also, there was a really worrying drop the year before last to 17%. It has since increased again to 24% but it hasn't got back to where it was.

A lot of that is anecdotal. We are hearing from creators of colour. We work with BookTrust, making sure that we can highlight and spotlight up-and-coming authors, poets and illustrators, as well as thinking about internship. That is how we work so that we get people who can work within the publishing industry. In 2021, the fifth survey, there was quite a lot of output with picture books and things like that. We look at non-fiction and middle grade.

In 2021, we increased the number of black British characters and figures, which was wonderful, so we have that British narrative, but only 4% of the main cast characters in the fifth survey were of south Asian heritage. Numbers of east Asian heritage characters are also falling behind. We have seen those incremental gains in the numbers of main characters. We are using the census data, which is a bit reductionist but we need that for comparison. The highest proportion of presence now is Asian and black. However, quite a few of the characters at the moment are coded as black rather than black Caribbean, black African, which is flattening the black experience.

We are constantly having that dialogue and we use the data to be able to talk to it, but primarily our aim of doing this is so that we can have more books from which to choose and recommend to teachers so that they can increase and make more representative their book stock and the books that are at the centre of the curriculum. You can feasibly get through the national curriculum and the texts that are advised and recommended types of texts, fairy tales, whatever it might be, get to key stage 4 without seeing yourself at all represented, not only in the book stock but in the curriculum, until you meet perhaps problematic and stereotyped characters, or you could be marginalised in traditional tales. That is why we do what we do. People have to be at the centre of what you are reading.



- Q64 **Darren Paffey:** I think that the question I was planning to ask has been answered. It was really just to get your sense of the state of ethnic representation in children's books and the inclusion of diversity and so on. To a large extent, you have covered that.

Briefly to Onyinye and Anjali in particular, from your work, what do you think needs to happen in future to keep it on the right trajectory? What are your thoughts on the curriculum and assessment review where there has been a recognition that the English literature curriculum needs to look like modern Britain, not like the 1950s grammar school it had become before. What are your thoughts on that?

Onyinye Iwu: I noticed that even before the report came out and personally I felt that it was very reactive. A lot of things happened in 2020, everybody got excited for getting some diverse books out, and it boomed. Then suddenly it was back to normal. It is about reducing the reactivity and representing what is our society and what are our communities. As a creator, it is important that we support the creators. It is important that we recognise the fact that it is not just about having black characters. Like you said, it is about having authentic black characters, different cultures like African Caribbean, south Asian. It is important to make sure that we are able to create this without straining ourselves. I have seen so many people over the years start this career and then stop because they financially just could not. That is the first bit.

When it comes to the curriculum, there are so many schools that have the opportunities to introduce their students to more modern and diverse books. It is about getting into those schools and there are some initiatives like the Great British School Tour, where we are trying to get into schools as illustrators and authors and showcasing the work we do. Children who have author visits will be reading more and be more engaged in what they are doing. Diverse, yes, but generally also seeing what it looks like in real life and what it looks like on a page. More presence for creators in schools. It all starts with funding to make sure that we are able to do the things that we are trying to do.

- Q65 **Chair:** Is there a difference between what you are measuring in new output and new publications every year and the extent to which a diverse range of books is becoming embedded in the canon that is available to every child? There is a difference, right? What is being produced and who is being published is important, but it is also important what are the top 10 children's books that we all think of as the most amazing books for different ages, and whether there is diverse representation there. Sorry to ask a supplemental because we are struggling on time, so I do need to ask you to be brief.

Anjali Patel: As part of our curriculum, part of the reason we did this was we wanted to be able to put those books into the curriculum, to advise our schools to do that. We still find that with the time-stretched and beleaguered teaching community, often and totally understandably, certainly in primary sets where they are teaching 11 subjects, they need



to just teach what they know. It is about encouraging and supporting teachers to bring those texts at that level, from early years onwards, into the curriculum.

There is that canon and hierarchical element. There is that phrase in the current national curriculum that says "key text". What do we mean by that? What are we saying by that? What is implied? My dad is a child of the empire, I suppose, and read lots of books, but that canon was very much the English canon. If we look at classics as an example, it is perfectly possible to choose modern and contemporary classics. For example, from the early years: Anna McQuinn; Bethan Woollvin; moving up, SF Said's books "Varjak Paw", "Tyger," things like that; David Almond's "Skellig"; Catherine Johnson's work, a fantastic secondary author for young adults; Malorie Blackman is well known to everyone. It is possible to see those as canons and classics, but have those that do not include the racial or other stereotypes.

Part of the reason we are thinking about racially minoritised people is because it is across the sector of disadvantaged, socioeconomic disadvantaged disproportionately, boys and so on. If you are going to teach classics, you need to make sure there is enough engagement with positive and centred representations of characters, plot lines, lives and worlds, so that you can then look at a classic text, for example, "The Secret Garden", that has some problematic representation and what it stands for. You want your year 6 children to be able to unpick and critically engage with that.

You need enough to be able to do that before you get there, and right now one of the things we are keeping an eye on is there has been an unprecedented drop in representation in picture books. That has never happened in the life of the survey. It is difficult to find books that are not animal characters as main characters for young children, and that is a problem for our earliest readers.

Q66 Darren Paffey: Where does the responsibility lie for ensuring that children have access to books where they see themselves represented, where there is a range of backgrounds and experiences, be that ethnicity, heritage, boys seeing themselves represented in positive characters, that will be attractive to them? Is that about creators creating more? Onyinye, you mentioned marketing; is it about marketing more? Is it about libraries stocking them, school leaders promoting them, parents buying them? What are the best levers to seeing change in this?

Luke Taylor: I will have a very quick stab. Probably the two or three main places that we have already touched on are the role of parents and the way we frame it towards parents, especially in the early years, be it parenting advice or a parenting course. All parents will say, "This is my kid, I know better". Framing it around "here is some advice for how to help your child succeed", because obviously every parent wants their child to succeed.



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If we look at the teaching workforce and the books that are promoted when it is classroom-based learning, can those be tailored to things that might be more typically male interests, for example war, sci-fi, fantasy, comedy, those kinds of things that might be more coded that way? One that I would love to see picked up slightly is the role of men in wider society. One of the big things that we need to push for is volunteering. We know that men are less likely to volunteer but having positive male role models within schools—and there are good examples of this in schools across the UK; school readers are in thousands of schools.

We work with a small charity called Lads Need Dads, who work with boys who do not have dads at home. They have worked in about 29 schools in the east of England, bringing in men from the community who sit for one hour a week, over 12 weeks, with a boy who is struggling for whatever reason and does not have their dad at home, and just read to them for an hour. They will do a range of other things as well in emotional literacy, but building the relationship there where they can then highlight things like, "What are you interested in?".

I was told one story of an Irish Traveller boy who never read, did not like reading. The first time he met the mentor he was shadow boxing around the room. The mentor realised he obviously likes boxing, so, "Will you read next week if I bring Muhammad Ali's autobiography?". The boy agreed and they did and he loved it, and they had a good 11 weeks. It is partly building that relationship but also finding their interests. Teachers and volunteers more widely have to be more proactive in saying if certain groups, particularly in this sense boys, are not reading, what might be things that boys are more likely to read.

Ellen Broomé: I would like to think about expanding the definition of reading. That is important. Reading cannot and should not be limited to books alone, and that picks up some other things that the panel has discussed. We want them to read other media, online articles, magazines, comics, audio books. These are all valid formats for reading and can help break down some of those barriers around accessibility for dyslexic readers. I am thinking about dyslexia having a strong hereditary component, so you may well have a family where the parents or carers may struggle with their confidence around reading. We need to think more widely about what constitutes reading. That would help break down the representation issues and also some of the accessibility issues that dyslexic children in particular face.

Anjali Patel: You need to be literate. You want to be able to access, enjoy and make meaning from a wide range of texts. We would not want to advocate for some texts are just gateways into other texts. Literate adults will, as I imagine all of us in this room will, read a wide range of different kinds of texts. You need to see yourself in a wide range of texts.

Chair: Sorry, we need to keep focused. The question was about whose responsibility is it and what should the Government do.



Anjali Patel: Everyone's. It can come through the recommendations and experts.

Onyinye Iwu: Publishers hold a significant responsibility in this. Beyond the marketing distribution that I spoke about, it is about the end to tokenism when it comes to representation. We do not need just one book about the experience of these children. It is important to make sure that there is choice, as we spoke about in the previous panel. It is important that there is choice. A lot of times where it comes to diverse creators, it is like if one person does a book about shoes, no more books about shoes now, that is enough, when we do need more choice so that children have ownership of what they are reading.

The issue is schools and libraries are so under-funded. I do not want to place the responsibility on them because there is only so much that they can do, but it is important that they are able to make sure that they give students, children and the community access to diverse literature. There needs to be financial investment from the Government. As a teacher, I have purchased books to share with my students out of my own money, because maybe my school is not able to fund that specific part. It is important that we do that as well as financially supporting with the Government.

Q67 **Peter Swallow:** You have already outlined in helpful detail some of the reasons why boys are less likely to read for pleasure than girls. I want to ask specifically about the connection between the gap in reading for pleasure and also in reading attainment. What is the connection between those two things, if there is a connection?

Luke Taylor: I am probably not the expert on what the connection is. When thinking about the other correlations we see for reading for pleasure, there are a few that are of interest. They might not be causal but they do link with a range of things, particularly when we look at screen time in the early years. According to the WHO, there is no screen time under the age of two and an hour maximum from two to four, and we know that 90% of kids, almost all of them, are exceeding that. We know that within that boys are quite a lot higher than girls. It does seem that boys are being pushed towards screens more. This is from parents when they were surveyed.

When we looked at older boys, because we know that the 15 to 16-year-old age bracket were the least likely to read, there is a lot to be said around physical activity. That plays a role within that. About 15% of boys get the recommended guideline of physical activity they should be getting a week. It is not strictly linked to the link between reading for pleasure and attainment, but there is a whole range of other things linked to reading for pleasure that if we settled on them, we might get positive results from the others too.

Q68 **Peter Swallow:** Ellen, I know you mentioned confidence being important in your opening remarks. Is there anything you could add there on that



connection?

Ellen Broomé: I would talk about unidentified need. That is important. It applies to girls, boys, to all children. If you have children who are not supported or identified and have additional needs—for example in the case of dyslexia, if children are not identified, they might be seen as under-performing, not paying attention, disengaged. They are not taught appropriately and that will severely affect confidence and, importantly, affects mental wellbeing; 70% of dyslexic young people say that it makes them feel bad about themselves.

What is interesting is that we see it in attainment, and those are intrinsically linked. If you enjoy something, you are much more likely to be good at it. If you struggle with something, you will you avoid trying to do it. For example, we see that there are consequences in not being identified, and obviously this is just dyslexia, but it applies to a lot of unidentified need and SEND. Around 40% of dyslexic pupils passed GCSE English and maths, compared to 70% of non-dyslexic peers. That is a 30% gap point and is exactly the same as key stage 2 expected levels of reading, maths and English. Those are intrinsically linked.

If you are not enjoying reading—and reading is a foundational skill to be able to access the whole curriculum, not just for pleasure, although that is very important, but also for being able to attain. There are some key barriers in place, and some of that might affect boys more, but we can also see disadvantaged are key aspects. For example, dyslexia is a diagnosis that has no medical pathway. There is no free diagnosis of dyslexia, so it is only really available to parents who have a certain income. We can see that 90% of children with dyslexia in higher income households are diagnosed, compared to 43% in lower income households.

Girls are less likely to be identified. Children with additional language are less likely to be identified. Children in more disadvantaged schools are less likely to be identified. If you are not identified, that will shape your experience of school, your pleasure for reading and in attending school and engaging with topics in school. It is important that it is not ascribed to a lack of interest. It is a lack of accessible pathway.

Q69 **Peter Swallow:** That is really important and we see the crisis that is affecting all of our young people, but in particular that the statistics are very alarming for boys. To go back to what we can do to encourage more boys to read for pleasure, Luke, you have already outlined some possible measures. Is there anything else you want to add?

Luke Taylor: Starting from some of our focus groups, one of the things that was most interesting was when young people, particularly the young boys we were talking to, were asked “What do you want to be when you grow up?” it was always either an influencer or a sportsman. If it was a sportsman, it was a footballer. When we are talking about interests, if we



can get more autobiographies of footballers into schools, that would be a great start.

We know that the way that boys work in education is they are much more vision aligned. Rather than just saying, "Do this because I am your teacher and you are my pupil", boys often need to know, "Why am I doing this, what is the point, what am I going to get from this?" If we can do that with reading, that helps. We have talked about the engendered problem with reading, that it is the way it is. One teacher I know has a group called Prose Before Bros. It is a little bit on the nose, and a little bit male coded, but perhaps that is the kind of thing we need.

I mentioned physical activity. Within that, there are good schemes like the daily mile or more PE in schools that are obvious solutions to cultivate an environment where boys are more likely to regulate themselves and read after. The other thing I would add is outdoor learning is a key thing that is missed, particularly within primary schools. There is an academic called Gemma Goldenberg who has done some research on this and found that boys are three times more likely to stay on task when they are doing exactly the same classes, exactly the same teachers, but they are just outdoors. It was in central London, so you do not need to be in nice countryside, rolling hills.

If we can change the environment where boys are more likely to regulate themselves, that might be more conducive to an environment where they are willing to sit down and have the patience required to read.

Q70 Peter Swallow: Your think-tank has particularly highlighted reading mentors in schools as one intervention. Have you found that that helps reading for pleasure as well as reading attainment?

Luke Taylor: I do not have hard data on it but anecdotally, yes. Part of that is they can see that there is a man who is reading to them, therefore they see this as an activity they can get involved in. I would also add that there is a whole range of benefits to reading. One of the key things they do within those sessions is the one to one. They always start with a bit of a check in. They will give the child the language for how you are feeling, and they can use the emotional language and develop emotional literacy. Yes, that is good for reading, but that has much wider implications that we need to maximise.

Q71 Peter Swallow: Where I would slightly push back on some of the fantastic contributions we have heard today is on the idea that having a diverse range of reading material, including reading material that speaks to the identities of white working-class boys and their aspirations, is the goal element in and of itself. Reading is about seeing yourself in the literature, as we talked about, but it is also about opening yourself up to different perspectives and the feelings of somebody very different from yourself and seeing the world from their perspectives.

Where I would like to ask you to maybe bring it wider is how can we use



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a boy picking up a book about a footballer and getting into reading, to make sure that he is also, as part of his reading journey, enjoying reading books about a girl from a very different racial background? How do we make sure that it is not just narrowly about that one thing but how we are using the pathway in to then widen perspectives?

Luke Taylor: I totally agree that one of the best things about reading is the reason it develops empathy is because it allows you to put yourself in the mind and eyes of someone else and see the world through their perspective. The challenge we have is that 25% of boys enjoy reading for pleasure. That means that three quarters do not. As much as I agree, our first port of call has to be how do we get boys reading, and that then has to be what are they interested in. Once we get them reading, I agree we can widen that and we have talked a lot about representation and a diverse range of characters and storylines. The first port has to be what they are interested in now. Let us get them reading books and then they will go wider.

Anjali Patel: From early years and primary school perspectives, the first thing is to remind ourselves that there are more differences within groups of boys and groups of girls, than between boys and girls. That is pretty well established from research. The gender gap is smaller than the disadvantaged gap when it comes to GCSE. It is also important to not reinforce any kind of stereotypes, as we talked about with the gendered, especially the early formative experiences.

For example, boys are reluctant or weak readers and labelled quite early on, or they are more into non-fiction than they would be stories. What we find is quite simply, one of the main approaches, is reading aloud for all children. Reading aloud is literally an active process. You are not just imagining a character; you are in that world being that character. There is some interesting brain research around what happens when you are listening to a book read aloud to you. You are literally running when that character is running in your mind.

That is an important active learning experience. Obviously, all of this relies on the teacher's knowledge of the child. Texts with strong human themes engage boys, but all children. Active and social, there are collaborative approaches and one thing we have noticed with our teachers when we are asking them to measure engagement is that sense of agency and responsibility, the collaborative work, the active work, the way that might evolve through performance reading and negotiation. Enacting and dramatic approaches are super effective, constantly making the connections between their social and home lives, their popular culture lives, and the lives and texts in school.

Chair: I am sorry, we have three more questions and about seven minutes, so I have to ask you to be super brief. You can write to us afterwards if there is detail you are not able to convey. We need to be super brief at this point.



Onyinye Iwu: When it comes to recommendations for boys, one thing is the role of visual aids. Older picture books, graphic novels, comic books, we know they work. They have worked over the years for boys—comic books and superheroes, even when it comes to changing the storylines but making sure that we are giving them a different way of reading. We know that they are visual and love social media, scrolling, all of that stuff. When I started this elective, I have seen the shift and now pretty much most of the elective is key stage 3, year 7 to 9, boys doing action, drawing and so on. One of them was so engaged that he printed his own book and was sharing across the school, and it was like “Miss, have you seen this year 8 boy’s book?”. They are all so excited because it is about them and it has the drawings, little stick men. They love it.

It is about looking at what they like, as you said. They love visual stuff. It is important to push them on to all the picture books and graphic novels, speaking to the publishers about that, but also the teachers and librarians to focus on getting more of that for the boys.

Q72 Sureena Brackenridge: Ellen, I would like to thank you for sharing the real experiences of too many children and young people who have dyslexia. You spoke about feelings of fear and failure and a stigma, and how reading can be such an uncomfortable, exhausting experience. How can schools be more inclusive in their practice to support children and young people with dyslexia, as well as other SEND?

Ellen Broomé: Thank you, Sureena. Schools have a vital role in shaping children’s relationship with reading. We talk about the family, and that is important, but schools are really important. They can either reinforce an idea around where reading is difficult and exclusive for some, or something where there is an inclusive reading culture, where every child can be a reader. On what they can do differently, we see good examples, across the country, of schools offering a wide range of formats. There are some great schools who do this well. There are plenty of amazing schools out there and I am happy to give some recommendations to the Committee if you want to do some visits.

They have assistive technology embedded as a matter of course from key stage 2 at least. They ensure their teaching staff, teaching support staff and reading volunteers, who often teach children how to read, are trained to support children with reading difficulties, to spot signs and intervene properly. They are also moving away from the narrow definition of reading as decoding text. It is about enjoying the content, reading age-appropriate stuff. Something that is attractive to a 14-year-old, is not going to be the same as something attractive to an eight-year-old. If your reading is slow and cumbersome, you still need to access age-appropriate stuff when you are 14. If that is through an audio book, graphic novel or a comic strip, it does not matter, because it is about all the other things that you learn: complex syntax, complex character developments, richer vocabulary, technical language, all things that children and young people need.



I come back to it, but it is important that we think of reading as not only about books. Reading is much wider. It is for all of you; it is for all of us. We need to take that into schools. I would also be keen to talk about some of the things that would make a big difference on a system level, not just in schools because although the schools can do some great stuff, they need to be supported by the right structures and processes. We need better identification of reading difficulties. The phonic tests at the end of year 1 are not working. Too many children are taught to that test, pass it, but it turns out they cannot fluently and competently read and comprehend after that. It impinges. It needs to become more of a guide to intervention for teachers rather than a benchmark to how well your school is doing. I would like to see some progress on that.

I would also encourage the Committee to look at the year 8 reading test that has been proposed. That is far too late. If you have come to year 8 and you are struggling with your reading, you have missed many years of schooling and many years of potentially enjoying reading and accessing the curriculum in full. There is also some fantastic stuff in the SEND White Paper that is welcome and will make a big difference to children with dyslexia. There are also some things that I would encourage the Committee to look at in the curriculum and assessment review, and the response to that. Some of that goes against the grain of what children with SEND need to enjoy schooling. It retains a very inflexible and rigid system for curriculum teaching, which narrows their representation and all the other things, but also means that children will not shine and will not be putting their best foot forward.

Q73 Sureena Brackenridge: On that final point, it would be helpful if you could write in with some additional information for the Committee, specifically around the curriculum and assessment review?

Ellen Broomé: Absolutely, very happy to follow up on that.

Q74 Darren Paffey: Ellen, just quickly linking into something you said earlier about comics, graphic novels, e-books, e-readers and so on, there are differences of opinion. Some have produced evidence that they may not bring the same benefits to children as reading a traditional book. What are your thoughts on that? Where is the balance? Where is the point of ensuring that they get into it in a way that is most enjoyable, but that they do not miss out on the long-term benefits of reading traditional books as a sweet spot?

Ellen Broomé: It depends on the child and the age they are at. Luke's point about get them in and then introduce is probably quite a good one. I was thinking that as a teacher myself. If you can get someone interested in a comic book that speaks to them because there is a character that they like or the language is decodable for them, maybe next time you stick an audio book on so you can hear the sentence structure that is more complex or the plot development is more complex.



It is about getting them in early, but there is also something about if your early experiences of reading are not so challenging, and you constantly have access to the content that you want that is enjoyable, there will be less of a barrier to the reading itself. At the moment it is so effortful that you only do it when you really have to. If it was slightly less effortful and we tried harder and intervened earlier, and you were supported earlier to be a confident and fluent reader, we would see fewer barriers further down the line. I take your point, but it has to be a judgment that teachers and professionals make about children and young people's access to reading for pleasure but also reading for attainment. They are intrinsically linked.

Darren Paffey: That exposure to multiple formats.

Ellen Broomé: Absolutely, and they all teach different language as well. We sometimes do not talk about gaming, and gaming is something that a lot of children and young people really like. You can learn a lot from that, which may not appear in your traditional "Jane Eyre", Jane Austen or Charles Dickens but is quite useful for modern life. A key way is thinking about technology for children and young people. They think it is fun and modern, so utilising things that you have around technology is important to hook them in.

Chair: We are so short of time and I will go to Sureena for the final question.

Q75 **Sureena Brackenridge:** What is your final recommendation for national Government to encourage children who come from largely disadvantaged backgrounds, lower income households to read for pleasure?

Anjali Patel: We can definitely give recommendations in response to the CAR and I am happy to send that on later. Fundamentally, we need to make sure that the national curriculum, from a school perspective, is rich, inclusive and cohesive. What has happened over the last 10 to 15 years—and we have seen this through the teacher training that we do—is that it has become a disparate curriculum. Reading and writing and oracy are separate, and we need it to be cohesive. We tried to simplify it, as always happened with reading, to make it more accessible perhaps, and to make it more accessible to teachers as well, but we need to make sure that whatever we do to design a curriculum, it is not placing a higher status on skills but is about how we explore comprehension alongside the skills, knowledge and behaviours. There are key approaches that work, that I am happy to send on.

Chair: Please, we are just looking for quick answers because we are over time.

Anjali Patel: We definitely are disappointed in the primary sector in English associations and the primary associations at what has been—we do not want too much change for teachers, that is not what we are hearing from teachers.



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Chair: I need to move us on, I am afraid.

Onyinye Iwu: It is funding school libraries, funding libraries outside of school to make sure there is access for the children and the parents. Make sure that there is contact with creators in schools, author and illustrator visits, so that there is the link with the books and then engagement. It is sustaining community initiatives that are already there and happening all the time but being de-funded. It is important to make sure that we are looking at grassroots literacy movements that are connected to the families and communities that are not supported. They are already doing the work; all we need to do is support them.

Luke Taylor: Go really hard on volunteering. If you can get a volunteering workforce who can come in and do the one-to-one relational, get their interests off them, particularly if you can buck the trend and try to find the same or more men, that would go a long way.

Ellen Broomé: I echo some of the stuff around school libraries. Ensuring access to a wide range of materials and formats is key, and schools are a key place to do that. There is also assistive tech. Alongside, we need to train and support our teachers, headteachers and school staff to make sure that they have money, funding and capacity to teach and access to the full set of formats.

Chair: Thank you very much. I am sorry, we have been constrained on time today. It is always the case. If there are additional things that you were not able to get across in the time that we had, please do write to the Committee afterwards. We would welcome that. Thank you very much for coming in to give your evidence today.