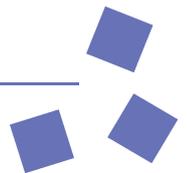


The future of reading: A public value project

Report of findings



Prepared for Arts Council England by Creative Research

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Arts Council has been working since 2005 to develop a public value framework to underpin its activities. The first stage in the Arts Council's public value journey was the arts debate, findings from which have started to influence the Arts Council's activities at the highest level and have led to a new mission statement and set of outcomes, which form the basis for the Arts Council's plan for 2008–2011.

As part of its long term public value programme, the Arts Council Literature team is seeking to engage members of the public in a debate about the role and value of reading. The findings and recommendations of this research will be one of the inputs to the development of a programme to promote reading by the Arts Council and its partners (the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Reading Agency) aimed at raising the profile of reading as a creative activity and strengthening its position within national, regional and local policy agendas and the plans and activities of cultural agencies. It will also be a vision, setting out shared aspirations for the future of reading and galvanising a wide range of individuals and organisations, particularly libraries, to help make that vision a reality. In particular, the programme will inform the Government's current Library Service Modernisation Review which seeks to define the Government's vision for a modern, world-class public library service.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The overall aims of the research were to:

- Understand how members of the public perceive, experience and value reading and whether they see it as a creative activity
- Explore perceptions of and attitudes towards reading among non-readers, and understand the barriers to greater engagement
- Enable members of the public to help develop a vision for the future role of reading in society
- Generate ideas as to how the Arts Council, the MLA, The Reading Agency, libraries and other organisations can make that vision a reality.

To achieve these aims the Arts Council expected the research to address the following specific questions:

- How do people understand their experience of reading, and the role it plays in their lives? Is reading perceived as a creative activity? If so, to what extent, and how do people understand the creative process taking place when they read?
- Is reading valued as both an individual and social experience? How are the individual and social elements of the experience different, and how do they relate?
- What are the perceptions of reading among non-readers? What factors or life experiences influence feelings and decisions about reading? What are the barriers to engagement with reading as a creative activity? What might need to be different for more people to enjoy reading as a creative activity?
- What role could 'creative reading' play in the future, both for individuals and for society more broadly? How might this be shaped by new technologies?
- What role, if any, do people see for national and local government in promoting reading as a creative activity?
- What do people think the vision and priorities and commitments should be for agencies to work together to promote reading?
- What could individuals and organisations, particularly libraries, do to help meet public aspirations for reading?

1.3 Research method

The research set out to explore the views on these issues of a broad range of people grouped according to their attitudes to reading and the behaviour they displayed towards it. Four groups of readers were identified. A recruitment screener was developed, piloted and used to ensure participants met the criteria for a particular group

(this is provided in the appendices¹) but we have defined the groups in broad terms below:

- **Highly engaged readers:** They have a love of reading, always have at least one book 'on the go' and take their reading a step or more further by participating in book clubs/reading groups, reading or contributing to literary blogs or other material online, attending literary festivals
- **Regular readers:** They also enjoy reading and read regularly or fairly regularly. They may not have time to read as much as they might like
- **Occasional readers:** They quite enjoy reading but they do not read on a regular basis and might tend to read books that have come highly recommended or because they have time on their hands such as when on holiday
- **Unenthusiastic readers** (rather than non-readers): People who are able to read competently but don't enjoy it very much and don't choose to read books. Their preference may be to read newspapers or magazines.

People from different lifestages and social backgrounds were included in the research and about a fifth of those taking part were from minority ethnic backgrounds or of dual heritage. While there was a good mix of ages in three of the four groups, the highly engaged readers were weighted towards people aged over 40.

The research was based on reconvened workshops, with four two hour sessions (one with each of the above groups) initially, followed by two sessions lasting two hours about a week later. In these reconvened sessions, groups were paired up according to their level of engagement with reading so that the highly engaged and regular readers were brought together, as were the occasional and unenthusiastic readers. In this way, we were able to organise the groups in new ways and encourage different types of interaction. Ten people were originally recruited to each group and 36 of the 40 who attended the first session also attended the second.

¹ The appendices are in a separate volume also available on the Arts Council website

In the week's interval between the workshops, participants were provided with materials and instructions to enable them to conduct their own research and think further about the issues.

In addition, a single discussion session was held with an established book group to cover some of the key issues and in particular, to understand a little more about the social experience of reading.

The workshop sessions were held in the Aldershot and Sutton Coldfield areas in February and March 2009. Although held in urban settings, participants were drawn from local and more outlying towns and villages in order to include some people who lived in a more rural setting. The book group discussion was held in North London.

1.4 Workshops

The full discussion guides for the two workshops are included in the appendices, however, we have provided a summary of the different issues covered to give some context for the research findings. Participants had a lot to say and so many of the issues were covered quite naturally as one point led on to the next. It was not possible to cover every issue in depth however because of the time constraints.

1.4.1 In advance of the first workshop

Once somebody was recruited to take part in the research, they were asked to keep a 'reading diary' for the week or so leading up to the first workshop. They kept a record in this of what they read each day and the place where they read it. In doing so they were invited to think widely about what they were reading. In addition they were asked to think about and make notes on something they had read at some point in their lives that had made an impact on them.

1.4.2 First workshop

- Introductions and identification of something they have read in the last week that has stood out for them
- Participants are asked to sketch a picture of 'what reading means to me' or something similar (using words, diagrams, imaginative drawing). They explain

their efforts to the rest of the group. Examples of these drawings are included in the report

- How have they come to feel this way about reading – is there some factor or life experience that has influenced them in deciding how much they read, what they read, whether they enjoy reading?
- Where do they like to read and do they read particular types of material in particular places?
- What happens when they read? How do they engage with the material and what effect does it have on them? Does this happen with non-fiction as well as fiction?
- Do they think reading is a good thing that should be encouraged?
- How often and under what sort of circumstances does reading become a social experience (both informal and more formal) for them?
- For those who ‘read socially’, what are the particular benefits that they get out of reading as a social activity that they don’t get when reading alone?
- Participants are taken through various ‘social reading’ activities and they are each discussed in terms of their interest in them and the barriers that might stop them considering them
- Is reading a creative activity? Is it sometimes a creative activity but at other times not? When is it one or the other – what are the things that make it so? Is reading as a social activity more likely to be creative reading?
- How do they feel about a definition that says that reading as a creative activity is when people read as an experience rather than simply to get information? Is it something that they would like to do more of? If so, what is holding them back?
- How do resources such as libraries and the facilities they offer, new technology and book groups fit in with reading as an experience? Do they encourage it?

- How do they feel about calling this type of reading ‘creative reading’? What does the term mean to them? Is there another term that might work better?
Discussion of ‘reading for pleasure’ as an alternative as well as any other names that have been suggested.

1.4.3 ‘Homework tasks’

At the end of the session, participants were introduced to the tasks they were set for the following week that would enable them to familiarise themselves with what is on offer, see what is in the pipeline and think about what it all means for them. They were told that while they were not expected to do everything, we hoped they would do some of the tasks. These were:

- a visit to their local library to look at the services and resources on offer there
- reading the information they have been given about current initiatives to encourage reading, technological developments that may affect reading in the future, reading and book groups, ways of experiencing live performances of books and poetry
- exploration of the internet to look at new developments in relation to reading
- sampling opinion of friends and family
- continuing the reading diary with a focus on reading creatively.

1.4.4 Second workshop

This workshop was largely based around participants working together to generate ideas building on the earlier discussion and their ‘homework’.

- As a large group, each person is asked to describe one or two items from the homework that stood out for them
- The group is then split into three or four break-out groups. These are arranged so that each group is made up of a mix of reader types and each group contains at least one person who has visited a local library as part of their ‘homework’.

They are asked to come up with at least 20 ideas for things that might encourage people to read. As a group, they also have to identify their top five ideas

- Each group presents to everyone else. Individually, participants select and record their personal top five ideas from all those presented
- The context for the research is explained: The Arts Council, MLA and The Reading Agency are working together to create a campaign to raise the profile of reading as something that people can really enjoy. They now work again in their break-out groups to think about what kind of campaign might be needed to bring this about:
 - who would it be aimed at?
 - what sort of organisations would need to get involved to make it happen?
 - if all the events and activities that were part of the campaign were publicised under a common name, possibly with its own logo – what might that name be?
 - it might also have a slogan or strapline – something that might capture the public's imagination - what might this be?
- Each of the smaller groups presents their ideas to the full group.

1.5 Structure of the report

In the next section of the report we have drawn together some conclusions based upon our interpretation of the findings and suggested what they might mean for taking the programme forward. In the main body of the report, we have provided the detail of the findings. These are liberally illustrated by verbatim comments from participants in the research which are attributed to the reader group they represented. Where the comments are made during the second workshops, we cannot always be certain of the specific type of reader and these quotes are therefore attributed to 'more engaged' or 'less engaged' readers.

2 Conclusions and recommendations

2.1 Some overall conclusions

The research has provided a valuable context in which to think about how people might be encouraged to read more and to read more widely.

It has shown that, regardless of how much they personally enjoy spending time reading, people understand that reading brings benefits - they attach value to it. Many of these benefits relate to how they personally feel or how they view the world; reading offers relaxation, stimulation and broadening of the mind, new perspectives on one's own life and inspiration. Other benefits, identified in particular by less engaged readers, are more utilitarian such as the gaining of knowledge and self-development. Across the board, people want to see their children get pleasure from, and reap the educational benefits of, reading and many would like to have time to read more themselves. Indeed some of the women in particular, anticipate having more time to read in the future once they have fewer demands from their families.

Nobody involved in the research therefore objects to a programme aimed at encouraging reading and most welcome it. However, none of the less engaged readers feel that they are personally crying out for more opportunities to read or to have greater access to sources of material. They recognise that the motivation to read can only come from them and many are unsure how they can be persuaded to change their reading habits so that they choose to make time for reading over other pursuits. They are strongly resistant to any campaign tactics that might seek to dictate what they should read or constrain what they choose to read or that might be patronising in tone.

The challenges for any campaign to encourage people to read or read more are therefore:

- to make people aware of what is available and the range of choices they have
- to make access easy to those choices so that they can take advantage of them; this means not only offering support to those with reading skill issues but also providing access to materials which allow for them

- to give people a convincing reason to make more time for reading or to give new types of material a chance without making it sound as though it is for their own good.

The majority of participants agreed with the proposition that reading is a creative activity, in part because the discussion around the experience and benefits of reading led them to think about the different ways in which reading resulted in some change, be it in themselves, in the work itself or because there was some tangible outcome from the act of reading. It was when the proposition was taken a little further that they became less comfortable and it became clear that a campaign based around the idea and label of ‘creative reading’, is unlikely to motivate people to read.

The idea that there is some kind of dichotomy between reading for information and ‘creative reading’ or reading as an experience, is seen as false. Many people are reading for information or for entertainment derived from that information and identifying a similar ‘creative’ experience from what they are reading. To single out ‘creative reading’ in this way is therefore unhelpful and in suggesting that reading for information is somehow less worthy of encouragement is to devalue what many people read.

A case can certainly be made that the experience of reading should be promoted as something rewarding and enjoyable but ‘creative reading’ is not how it should be described because the term is alienating rather than appealing.

2.2 Some thoughts on taking the programme forward

2.2.1 The strategy

We suggest that any programme to encourage reading should take advantage of the overlaps between types of reading rather than make distinctions between them. It should recognise that:

- all reading in the conventional sense is valid (as well as other modes of interaction with narrative that people may not have tried)
- everyone gets something out of what they choose to read
- we share similar experiences regardless of what we read such as emotional rewards, new perspectives on our lives and inspiration.

It is striking from this research that what seems to bring people together in their reading is often the liking for a good story that ‘speaks to them’ in some way. It may be expressed in different forms and may be crafted to different levels but good stories about peoples’ lives are found not just in fiction but in autobiography, genealogy, newspapers and magazines and, as those with experience recognised, in computer games with a strong narrative.

The participants related the stories they read back to their own lives, starting a conversation in their heads which they might then choose to share with others, usually in a very informal way.

The research also found that people place a value on reading aloud, which supports the idea of the story as the unifying focus of a campaign. Largely seen in the context of reading to children, reading aloud is seen to be very important in lighting the spark of a desire to read. It is also seen as having links with the oral tradition rooted in all cultures that has become lost in many.

We propose that there are many advantages to making ‘great stories’ the art form at the centre of the programme rather than an abstract and poorly understood concept such as ‘creative reading’ or, in fact, any other descriptor involving reading

- it provides a ‘hook’ that everyone understands – neither worthy nor elitist, it has the potential to draw everyone in
- it can involve and encourage people who lack some reading skills by promoting audio books, telling one’s own stories, identifying new forms of narrative
- it can involve children through to old people – all have stories to tell and listen to and the stories that span generations are seen as some of the most fascinating.

2.2.2 The tactics

Stories offer a natural, unforced way to expose people to new types and sources of reading material. They represent a gift for programming, marketing and promotions especially through the use of celebrities and ‘heroes’

- telling their own stories (possibly working around the challenges of reading)

- telling other people's stories
- talking about the stories they love.

Messages can be about the joy of listening to/ telling/ making up /sharing /reading stories, not **just** reading and not **just** books.

The emphasis of the programme should be on fun, enjoyment and pleasure. While the research shows that people accept that reading also offers utilitarian benefits like self-development, these are unlikely to excite, motivate and open people's eyes to new ways of looking at what they read and how they might take it further. In promoting social reading (or should it be story sharing?) opportunities, both informal and more formal, the emphasis also needs to be on shared enjoyment – people are building on things they might do quite naturally rather than having to make a major effort.

Libraries, as the participants discovered, are a key local resource and are already offering much that supports the delivery of stories and facilitation of story telling through services such as the lending of stories in a wide range of formats, story telling activities, book groups, support for personal research and local societies. Much of the material displayed on library notice boards and websites focuses on favourite stories and invites participation in story making. The research has shown however that the public, including the most avid readers, has a dated and often inaccurate picture of the library service. There is a need for people to be made aware of what their local library offers and a need to ensure that every library can meet their expectations through its opening times, staff, environment, technology and range of titles. It should also sometimes exceed their expectations through its outreach services or the exciting range of new activities it offers; family events and author events are some of those proposed by participants.

While it might be felt that some of the ideas generated in the workshops to encourage people to read are not very innovative, some of the recurring themes and favourite ideas should, we suggest, give food for thought. These are:

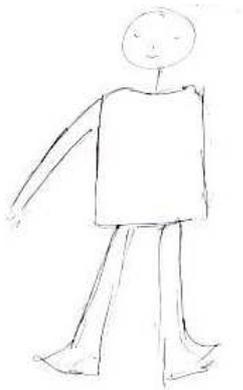
- the appeal and power that celebrities can wield
- the 'mainstreaming' of good stories in broadcast media rather than confining them to arts programming

- the creation of very accessible websites in terms of their look and feel, functionality and range of material
- incentivisation to read through special promotions, in part to make books more affordable but more to give people no excuse for not giving it a go
- ways of enabling people to dip into and trial materials before committing themselves
- the romance of book crossing and the pragmatism of book swapping
- talking about stories with family, friends, work mates as a rewarding and fun thing to do
- story-related events that people can join in with as much or as little as they like, possibly within the safe unit of the family
- stories in formats that fit in with peoples' busy lifestyles and reading skills – serialisation, short chapters, pictures and so on
- the harnessing of familiar technology like MP3, Nintendo and the internet.

3 How reading fits into peoples' lives

3.1 Introduction

Given that the research involved people with varying levels of engagement with reading, the attitudes underpinning their reading patterns predictably reflected these. At one end of the scale, as illustrated below, were the engaged readers who felt lost without a book while at the other were people who had neither the time nor motivation to read and found reading books utterly boring.



'It's that's important. It's just like losing an arm, it's a comfort blanket, it's escapism, it's a friend, it's having something wherever I go, train, waiting, whatever, odd days in the bag, it's just always there.' (Highly engaged reader)

'I think the idea of reading for me is not a stop start thing. It's just a constant because when you finish one book, you then go to the huge pile by the bed that you haven't read and think "what shall I read next?", so there's never not a book on the go...

... I have a fear of not having a book with me. I never not have a book in my bag because I do have this fear of being trapped on a train somewhere without anything to read.' (Book Group)



'That's me falling asleep reading a boring book, snoring!' (Unenthusiastic reader)

In this section, we begin by looking at how participants felt their attitudes towards reading were formed and then go on to map out the reading patterns of the more engaged and less engaged readers including the settings in which reading takes place.

3.2 Perceptions of how attitudes are formed

Childhood was seen as a crucial time for laying down foundations for reading and many among the older (40+) engaged readers in particular, looked back to it as the source of their love of reading. Many of the examples that people gave of reading materials that had made a great impact on them came from childhood. These were books whose impact had been to turn them into readers (Biggles, Amahl & the Night Visitors, Enid Blyton, The Silver Sword, The Eagle of the Ninth).

In looking back, these readers painted a picture of a time of far fewer distractions when reading was much valued as a pastime that was easily accessible to everyone. They had been actively encouraged to read by parents who read to them and who established a regular pattern of visits to the library. Inspirational teachers also played a role, sometimes by reading stories to the class

'The most fun I ever had at school I remember was, 'Three men in a boat' and I mean everybody, we weren't small children, we were probably 9 or 10 and it was being well read by a very good teacher, and just helpless, helpless, hysteria, everybody on the carpet holding their sides, weeping with laughter.' (Book Group)

'When I was much younger and I lived in the States, my fifth grade teacher, when I was about seven or eight, she would read books to us during our lunchtime. We'd sit there and eat our lunch at our desks and she'd read books and she read, 'The Hobbit' to us for a term and I was hooked. I always liked books anyway but she read 'The Hobbit' to us and it was just so amazing.' (Highly engaged reader)

A sibling who loved reading could also be a strong influence

'My sister actually, three/four years older, she just loved reading from a young age and I got fed up, I got bored with pestering her so I sort of joined in and we were together and I'd get my own books, this is from 5/6/7/8, so yeah, I picked it up from there and carried on.' (Highly engaged reader)

Fond childhood memories were evoked as participants recalled clandestine reading by torchlight

'I think because most of us who are a certain age, were brought up with books. Because we didn't have television or we only had two channels probably when it first started and you had no option but to read, you went up to bed and obviously you were supposed to have turned the light out but you're reading under the covers and the book was your obsession. You just swapped and shared with friends, you went to the library, and your parents encouraged you to read.' (Regular reader)

"The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' was probably one of the most affecting books that I read as a child. I remember lying in bed, I wasn't supposed to be reading and the bit when they killed the lion, I cried and cried and cried and then the author very cleverly says, "if you've been reading this, you've probably cried" and I thought, "how did he know that?"" (Book Group)

The acute sense of anticipation as they waited for the next book to come out was keenly felt

'Enid Blyton for me, when I was younger, I loved all the Famous Five and the Secret Seven, I couldn't wait for the next one to come out and it sort of grew from there.' (Highly engaged reader)

The nostalgia felt for these happy times found echoes in adulthood too. They often read and passed on these books to their own children or returned to them themselves when in need of reassurance

'I was talking about when I was a child. I read voraciously and I still retreat back to those books when I'm stressed or ... they're almost like my baseline, I go back to the 'Moomin Troll' books that were written by Tov Jansson or even 'My Friend Flicka' books which were set in Wyoming and I know this sounds silly, but I get an enormous comfort out of rereading them and probably will do forever ... They were so fundamental to me as a child, trying to make sense of the world, that they did make sense of the world for me in a way. There was another sort of family that was doing things in a different way and somehow you entered that as an alternative reality to your own. A really very profound thing.' (Book Group)

'I'm collecting the old books, that's history to them, maybe they'd like to read about how we lived as children.' (Highly engaged reader)

A few participants, including one of the occasional readers, looked back to their teenage years as the beginning of a liking for reading through the discovery of such books as Wilt, The Hobbit, Day of the Triffids, Huckleberry Finn and To Kill a Mocking Bird.

Members of the book club suggested that there is a key period when books can leave their mark because they play a role in helping define one's identity

'I think there's a period from about eight to 17, just the books you read then just sort of define you, somehow. It's harder work for a book to do that to me now, you know, it's got a bigger hurdle to leap basically. You know when people are asked for their greatest books, and they always love 'To Kill a Mockingbird' or something because it was the last important book they read when they were seventeen or something. Perhaps it is because it is those books that make the impression, not because they haven't read anything since, because those are the books that go in the deepest, it's at that point in their life.' (Book Group)

When asked about how they came to feel as they do about reading, the occasional and unenthusiastic readers offered few insights with several saying that they simply found it very boring. However various comments were made at different times about incidents in childhood that might have coloured their view. One unengaged reader referred to 'making a mess' of reading out loud at school and another described the 'stigma' at school of being someone who read books

'Saying that, coming back to this point about this geek and whatever, back when I was at school, if you was ever seen in the library and your mates were there of your age, that's what you'd be classed as... And you'd think 'I really would like to get my head down in a good book'. You're looking round, 'where's my mates?', you run in the library, grab a book, hoping they don't see you.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

The highly engaged readers knew of people who were not avid readers and they could identify similar issues

'My husband never used to read very much, he got in trouble when he was younger at school. He brought in, I think the class were told to bring in a book they were reading, and he was reading 'Silence of the Lambs' and he was only about 12. So his mother got a phone call, she thought he was reading a book about sheep. Ever since then, it didn't put him off reading but because he felt he was forced to read things that he didn't necessarily want to read, he always found it a bit of a hassle, a bit of a chore ...

...I think a lot of people who have struggled as well and maybe have been made a fool of by their peers, they find that's very hard then. You almost have a mental block where you think, "I wasn't very good at that, I can't do that now" and it brings back bad memories, so I think there's probably that issue as well.' (Highly engaged readers)

There was a recurring theme of resistance to being forced to read and to read particular books

'When I was younger I didn't like reading because I felt it was forced upon us when we were younger and I could have been playing rather than sitting and reading. My sister always did it and I found her so boring.'
(Occasional reader)

'Also children particularly, don't like the idea of having to read something and then thinking that they have to do it to death and analyse it ... because it actually kills any joy.' (Book Group)

'I think it's just the preachy factor. When I was a 12 year old, my mum really wanted me to read some Rudyard Kipling, and she really wanted me to read 'Kim' and I still have not read 'Kim' because that recoil against being told what to read, even though I was in fact, a voracious reader. I missed out on quite a few books that were pushed too hard, because I just wouldn't go there and that was my own loss, but I think it just means that I'm ever so careful with my own kids, just trying to do something that isn't too preachy, because you will alienate even the most devoted reader, if it smells like they're being told what to do.' (Book Group)

This was echoed in the responses to the research carried out by participants with their friends and family. The daughter of a participant stated in response to the question, what got in the way of her reading more?

'School books stop you from reading books of your own choice'.

Despite not having a great liking for reading (and sometimes an antipathy to it), a number of the less engaged readers with families spoke at length of the importance of encouraging children to read. They showed pride when their children had developed a love of reading and some concern when they had not

'My youngest daughter, she's 12, and she loves reading, she spends hours and hours reading. My 14 year old absolutely hates it and I've gone through authors, I've gone through types of books, can't get her to read anything... I've tried absolutely everything, even, 'you can have another half an hour before you turn your lights off' at bedtime to try and get her ... not interested. She'll read a TV magazine and that's about it so I'm struggling with her and I think it really is invaluable, people need to read.'
(Occasional reader)

Some of these parents are reading to and with their children and listening to them read, and some take them to the library. Indeed, a couple of women pointed to their own interest in reading as having been sparked by such experiences

'Since my daughter started school, she's seven now, I've probably, because we've been going to libraries more and like tonight, we read a book about Roald Dahl and I've learned about him, that he was Norwegian

... and she's doing a project on the Great Tower of London and I read the book after, so I think I've got more interested in things that I wouldn't normally have picked up, through her. Because I've had to have an interest in her school work, well I want to as well, so it's probably encouraged me because we're going to the library more and things.' (Occasional reader)

'I think it was reading to my children because I wasn't a keen reader when I was younger. I think it was reading to my children and they were so enthusiastic, I caught the bug and from that, I just obviously went from whatever books I was reading them to more grown up!' (Highly engaged reader)

3.3 Reading patterns of the more engaged reader

The more engaged readers were, by definition, expected to be avid readers and indeed, looking at their reading diaries over the week before and the week following the first workshop, it was evident that nearly everyone had read at least two books in that time and several had dipped into more. Some would be reading more than one book at a time while others read serially. The book group members followed a similar pattern and commented that they felt uncomfortable if their pattern of continuous reading was interrupted for some reason.

The book choices of the engaged readers encompassed both fiction and factual material and a few had chosen to pick up and read again the book that they identified as one that had made a great impact on them (Amahl and the Night Visitors, the Hobbit and Catcher in the Rye). A list of the books that formed part of their reading repertoire over the course of the fortnight of the research shows the importance of factual books. Travel books figured highly, either as preparation for going on a trip or deciding where to go, as did autobiographies.

Fiction	Factual
Revolutionary Road, 1984, My Beautiful Laundrette, Warlock, Purple Hibiscus, The Story of Lucy Gault, Knights of the Black and White, The Expected One, The Boleyn Inheritance, Friend of the Devil, Amahl and the Night Visitors, Barefoot Soldier, Zero Option, Bird Song, The Hobbit, The Birthing House, Sandstorm, The Horse Boy, The Kite Runner,	Head over Heels in the Dales, The Other Side of the Dale, Conversations with Mummies, Following the Equator with Sir Peter Ustinov, Around the World in 80 days (Palin), Going Green, James May's 20th Century, The Two of Us: My Life with John Thaw, Stephen Fry in America, The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception, A Fighter's Heart, City Boy, Long Walk to

<p>Hunt for Red October, No Time for Goodbye, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time, Silas Marner, The Crucible, Key of Light, Key of Knowledge & others by Nora Roberts, Catcher in the Rye, Diary of Adrian Mole, PS. I Love You, Daddy's Girl, Scarlet Feather, The Bear and the Dragon, The Virgin's Lover, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Innocent Graves, The Spear, Closed Circle, Cold is the Grave, Porterhouse Blue, Confessions of a Shopaholic, Sophie Staying Single</p>	<p>Freedom, What Not to Wear, A Brief History of the Magna Carta, The Republic (Plato), Girls Aloud autobiography, various Lonely Planets & Rough Guides</p>
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In preparing their reading diaries, participants were asked not to include material they read as part of their work but to include other things they might dip into. A number of people included various manuals, recipes, patterns and instructions that related to things they were doing at this time. One woman was going to take part in a training course for a charity and was immersing herself in material relating to this.

Newspapers (local and national) and online news websites were consulted, often on a daily basis, as well as various magazines. One woman was following a book, 'The Horse Boy', that had been serialised in the Daily Mail. Other information was sought from the internet and the medium was also used for some social networking, such as viewing the blog of a son who was on his gap year travels.

Included in the two more engaged groups were a number of parents and grandparents who included their reading to children and grandchildren.

The reading diary exercise also showed how people liked to reread their favourite books from time to time, a trait that seemed to be shared by both participants and their children.

3.4 Reading patterns of the less engaged reader

The occasional readers, by definition, were not expected to read fiction or factual books except occasionally and the unenthusiastic readers were selected because they did not

read any books or other materials except newspapers and magazines. The reading of these groups was therefore dominated by newspapers (local and national) and magazines (TV soaps, celebrity, fashion, hobbies and interests). Specific titles mentioned were AutoTrader, Top Gear, Bella, OK, FHM and Which.

In identifying something that they had read in the past week that had stood out for them, the same stories were mentioned on several occasions; Jade Goody, the death of Wendy Richards and David Cameron’s son, the attack on the cricket team in Pakistan. Other stories mentioned were often those that gave rise to anger at an apparent injustice or pity for the plight of the victim.

Like the engaged readers, these groups had also read manuals, recipe books, patterns, instructions, and information about their hobbies and interests, and a couple of people talked about keeping their mind active with crosswords, Sudoku and puzzles.

Again, among these participants, a small number were consulting travel books in preparation for trips and there was some accessing of online news and information. Novels and autobiographies were mentioned by a very few who seemed to dip into them over the course of the fortnight (perhaps twice a week) rather than reading them in a sustained way. The titles of these are shown below.

Fiction	Factual
Other People’s Children, Let’s Meet on Platform 8	Cheryl Cole’s autobiography, Julie Walter’s autobiography

A small number had read to their children or grandchildren over the fortnight.

3.5 Settings for reading

The reading diaries of the more engaged groups demonstrated their ability to read in a variety of settings; on the way to and from work (usually on a train), at work in their lunchtime, at the doctors’ surgery and in the bath. Some seemed to take any opportunity to read

‘If I’m that desperate, I’ll read at the ironing board. If I really can’t it put it down, I’ll quickly iron something and then ... in the kitchen when I’m cooking, if I really can’t put something down.’ (Highly engaged reader)

Members of the book group made the point that they always liked to have a book with them in case they had an opportunity to read. For them, books were 'company' and they felt lost without one. More engaged readers spoke of reading for hours at a time and one of reading through the night on occasions

"I think the sofa and bed are long term reads because you're lying down. I've been on the sofa for four, five hours reading a book." (Regular reader)

Some of the women, in particular, spoke of needing to shut themselves away from the other people in order to snatch some time for themselves to read. This might mean locking the bathroom door on the rest of the family or escaping to a room at the top of the house

'I just sort of shut myself away, I shut myself in the lounge, get the book out and then lying on the sofa, it's just escapism. That's my world for the period of time I'm reading that book, it's just my world. If the front door goes, no, they can come back later!' (Highly engaged reader)

'It's very difficult for me to read when I've got the kids awake or in the room, trying to pay attention to the kids and I know if I get too into a book that my eldest is "Mummy, Mummy", so that's why I do tend to have my bath in the evening and that's when I do my reading, then I'm closed up. They know Mummy's having a bath and not to come in, not to knock on the door unless it's an emergency. It's just nice to get away from the reality of everything.' (Highly engaged reader)

For them, reading is almost an indulgence to be enjoyed when they can, sometimes rather guiltily

'I use reading as a treat. In fact, I'm terrible, I would rather read than do housework ...

... Same here...

... But I have to say to myself, "if I do so and so ... just two chapters, chores, then I'll go", then of course you find, "Oh that's two hours I've spent reading a book", and I've just gone totally ... tuned out...

... You shut yourself away from the world, don't you, at that time?' (Highly engaged readers)

Outdoor locations were also much favoured for relaxed reading; the garden, patio, conservatory, poolside.

A number among the more engaged readers had careers that involved travel and staying away from home. Books then took on a role of companion and distraction from the world around them

'On the train, I find that's a bit irritating, especially going up to London and you don't really want the other people around there with you as such, you want a little corner ... so you switch off and I find then that I need something quite engaging to read if I'm on the train, something that makes me think, so all the noises and all the sniffles and things around you have been eliminated and then you're just in a little corner.' (Regular reader)

'We were just saying, if you're eating out, then it's a book rather than a paper and why is that? It's the convenience because you can have it in your handbag but it's also, I suspect, just that it does have that quality, the capacity to sort of ... take you into an absorbing world where you are then not so aware of your surroundings which might not be particularly interesting.' (Book Group)

The less engaged readers seemed to be much more prescribed in when and where they read. Hence, one would read the previous day's newspaper at the breakfast table, a couple of others read the newspaper in bed, another in his lunch break at work. They often spoke of spending short periods reading while fitting it in with other activities. The women also needed to find the space and time to read when they were not called upon by other people

'I usually take the papers to bed with me, it's like everything's done, my jobs are done, kids are in bed, take the paper or magazines, but normally the paper because I do like to read about what's going on.' (Occasional reader)

'That's me on holiday relaxing and that's when I read, it's my time, it's relaxing, it's free time I've got. I tend to read a lot on holiday, can't ever find time at home, two children, running them around. So to me, reading is when I've got time and it's relaxing.' (Occasional reader)

Reading in bed before falling asleep was important for many participants regardless of how much and what they read. As we have seen, they could now indulge themselves in reading and for many, it was a way of winding down in order to fall asleep. Some might turn to a book if they woke in the night to distract them from what was keeping them awake

'I'm lying in my bed which is my favourite place to read 'cause I'm relaxing and in the bubble here. I'm drifting off into the story because it's escapism, pure escapism and that's what I like.' (Highly engaged reader)

'I can't go to sleep unless I read first, it makes me sound rather weird but I like a good psychological thriller, the more intense it is, the more my mind has to work and I think it just wears me out, it's just a ... it stops me thinking about work. Otherwise, I'd take work into my dreams and I start thinking about it at two in the morning, "oh I haven't done this". So it stops all that, it's like a, "that's finished, that day has gone, you now need to rest", so it just shuts my brain down.' (Regular reader)

Holiday time was important for many across the highly engaged, regular and occasional reader groups. Without the distractions of the internet and work and perhaps when the children are kept amused, they have more time to read at length. Holiday reads varied from the very light-hearted to the more challenging

"Fiction for me is holiday, I wouldn't tend to read the newspaper or go on the internet when I'm on holiday, I literally leave the world alone." (Regular reader)

'I was going to say it's sometimes down to the location as well, if you're on holiday, you might choose different sorts of books ...

... Definitely...

... Especially Dickens, where you've got time to sit and concentrate for long periods of time, rather than snatching five minutes here or there.' (Book Group)

Another type of reading that was identified by a number of participants was reading to gain quick information as part of another activity. This might mean looking at a menu to buy a takeaway or reading the programme in the interval of a pop concert or play, or at a sports event. It might involve reading information panels on a visit to somewhere like a stately home, museum or gallery.

4 The experience of individual reading and its perceived benefits

4.1 The experience of reading and its benefits

Everyone, regardless of how much or what they read, recognised that reading had benefits, even if they themselves experienced few of them. Everyone felt that people should be encouraged to read or to read more although the less engaged put more emphasis on the educational value of reading and the importance of encouraging children to read.

We outline below the main benefits that were derived from reading.

- Relaxation and escapism

The theme of reading as something that takes you away from your everyday life was one that was replayed frequently in the workshops, especially by the more engaged readers. A number of participants talked of wanting to switch off from work where they often had to read in a very focused way. The members of the reading group mainly, though not exclusively, read fiction for this reason within the group

'I'd choose fiction to read when I'm not at work, partly because it depends what you're doing during the day...

... Yes, if you spend all your time reading factual things ...

... It's nice to turn to something different, something that takes you to a completely different world...

... We choose fiction for pleasure. It's very much associated with pleasure and the indulgence of getting lost.' (Book Group)

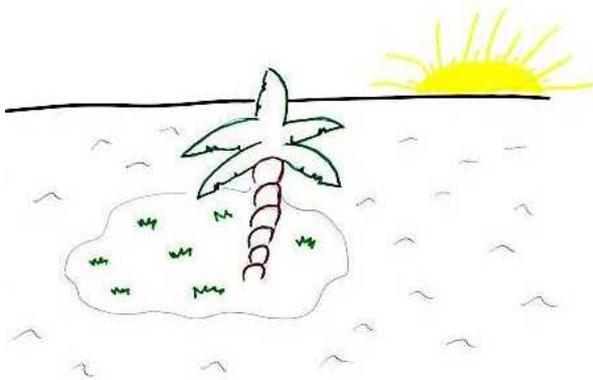
'A bit like you, a lot of the stuff that I do at work is reading, a lot of it is computer stuff that's generated from the night before, so I have to read through it, I have to print it off and I have to file it and ... it's all very real. It's all about people and it's all very real but sometimes I want to get away from what I would call that as boredom and get into a fictional, different sort of mode of thinking. (Regular reader)

In this context, a 'good read' was one that was engaging and absorbing and sometimes, enhanced their mood

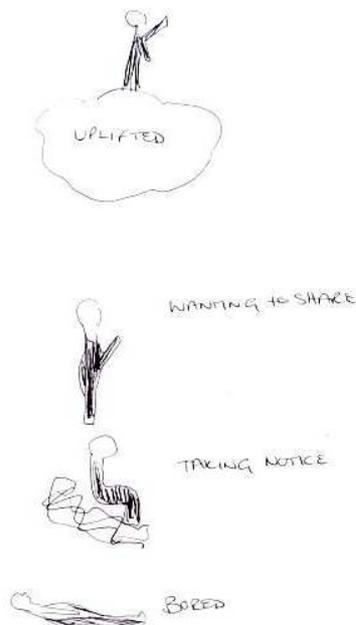
'There's nothing like a good story, that's basically why a lot of us read books, we want to hear a good tale, a good yarn...

... escapism.' (Regular reader)

A good read, it's not in that sense of a jolly good yarn but it is in the sense that it's engaging me and making me laugh. (Book Group)



'I like reading all kinds of novels but I like reading archaeological, historical thriller type, horror type novels as well as like fantasy adventure and stuff, so it's all pretty much escapism.' (Highly engaged reader)



'I've done four little people, at the bottom there's somebody lying down and it's just pure boredom, until you pick up a book and you start to take notice of the content of the book, as you move on you want to share what you've read in the book, perhaps with somebody else, so "have you ever read that, it's brilliant for a holiday, it's lightweight, it's good fun reading?" And then, at the end of it, somebody on a cloud because they feel very uplifted by what they've read.' (Regular reader)

This desire to enter into an alternative world was not confined to the book lovers. Some of the unenthusiastic readers also looked to magazines to provide this

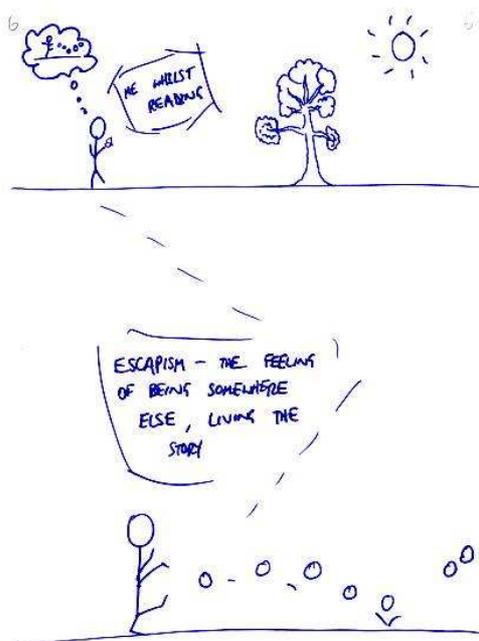
'Because the thing with books, you have to actually really understand it, the morals of the stories, whereas magazines it's just about pure drama, what's going on in everyday life and what's going to entertain you, to break your lifestyle. I've had a hectic week this week and coming home and watching soaps and reading about it just gives me that bit of buzz. I might be sad but it makes my life happy.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

The ability to relax and escape when reading was tied in with becoming totally absorbed in the material. Participants described how they became part of what they were reading through imagining elements of the narrative, be it how a place or character looked, sounded or smelt

'When I do read, I read more autobiographies than novels really, I certainly used to, I think of that person. It's a famous person generally, I read it in their voice – not out loud! Then it certainly helps, it sounds a bit daft but I do imagine that person's voice, I have to do that.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

'I think if you're reading about holiday destinations, you visualise the place, you try and think of yourself in that place, especially if you read about somewhere you've not been before. I tend to sometimes do that.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

'I love reading biographies and hearing about their life and I suppose I can use my own imagination. I'm on their yacht and I'm at their party and all that sort of thing.' (Regular reader)



'I just really focused in on the escapism that reading tends to give me and I kind of, in picture format tried to give the impression of this is me here in the background. And in the foreground, when I'm reading, this is kind of me re-enacting the story to what I'm reading at the time, trying to re-live the scenery, landscape, sights, smells, all that sort of thing. So I actually picture myself being in the story itself ... so I just put the feeling of being somewhere else or living the story.' (Regular reader)

So vivid are many people's own visualisation of the world depicted in a book that the disappointment of the film of the book was mentioned on several occasions

'I'm terrible for, a lot of films, they've turned books into films because, when I'm reading a book, I'll visualise it one way and then they say the

film's coming out, "how exciting" and I see the film and that's not how I saw it at all.' (Highly engaged reader)

We have noted above the returning to childhood books as a form of escapism from the stress of the present day. It is not just that this represents an escape to more reassuring and certain times but often the subject matter itself is pure escapism

'I like reading William, I've got all the William books, Just William, Richmal Crompton and that's real escapism and it's really stepping back in time... There's cars, there's traffic, there's noise here - there was nothing then - there were no cars, there was the odd van that came up the road and it's just ... it's a fabulous era.' (Regular reader)

One of the book group members was a primary school teacher and the ability to escape to a different world was the essential point she tried to convey to her pupils about the joys of reading

'I always say to the children, it just takes you to totally different places anywhere, places that you'd never even think of. Because often the imaginative world is not a realistic world and you don't have to even get out of your armchair, it just takes you somewhere else. And you meet so many different characters and interesting people who are essentially based in your life because that's what makes them readable. The fact that there is reality attached to them or some sort of experiential thing that they can talk to, it just transports them, takes them away completely.' (Book Group)

- Stimulating the mind

Being absorbed in a story was not just about relaxing; it could also trigger new thoughts and the need to think through what one has been reading. The most obvious genre for this were thrillers and detective stories where the reader is trying to understand what is going on and who is responsible, before the author reveals it. Other types of story also set off trains of thought that prolonged the experience of reading

'The Flowers in the Attic', a trilogy and I read this years ago and I couldn't, I just couldn't help but think, "could that really have happened?" and it kept going on and on in my mind and I couldn't put them down and everyone at the time was also reading them. It sort of opened up conversations about, "how could that happen?"' (Regular reader)

'It sort of feeds the thoughts that you've been having otherwise, so I think for example, 'Cold Mountain', which was one of our most recent books, it got me thinking about self sufficiency and about Scottish crofting, about what in fact do grits taste like. There's a whole series of random thoughts

you have which partly are created by the book and sort of steered by the book over subsequent weeks. You just find yourself ... yeah, it's like the conversation with yourself that you have.' (Book Group)

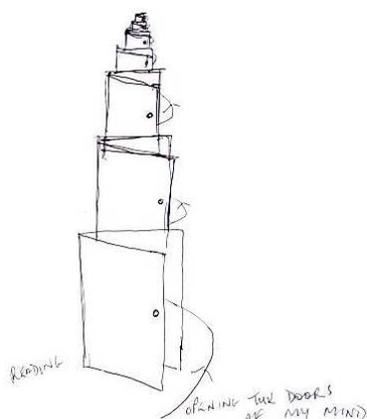
Another book group member described the satisfaction gained from the defining moment in a detective story when you understood what was going on.

- Broadening horizons

The content of what was read was often such that it introduced and opened participants' minds to new situations. It provided knowledge and new ways of looking at things they had maybe never considered before



'This is my brain, I'm taking in all the information and I'm always reading, I'll read anything. And it's made from when I was at school, the world was quite small and it's really, really made the world so much bigger in lots of ways.' (Regular reader)



'You've got headlines and then when you read, the doors open, the more you read, you go deeper and deeper and you know, reading, actually you get the full story, so you're going through all the doors, whereas the headline is just a headline ... that's the beauty of reading, you get down to, you know, it opens the doors.' (Regular reader)

Many of the specific examples of taking a fresh look at an issue were from books that were based on fact or personal experience and gave insights into peoples' lives. Several people spoke of how what they had read had helped them to gain a better understanding of other people and their motivations, or of the world in general

'It was a book called 'Born on a Blue Day' and it's actually part written by an autistic boy. He's a young adult and he's one of these rare autistic people that can communicate with people as well. So he described how his feelings were, just in general life, and how he pictured numbers, how he worked out why he was brilliant and things and he saw numbers and he saw words and colours ... and associated things like that. It just sort of opened up more to me, the misconceptions people have about autism.' (Regular reader)

'One of the books that you said about what has affected you, was one called 'Alive', the Uruguayan rugby team who crashed on the Andes in the early 70s. And when you read that and you think, there's no other way of putting it, they either died or they ate their friends and you just think ... how can you even get your head round it, how desperate were they? So that was just such a thought provoking book, it made you really soul search, that was an extraordinary book.' (Highly engaged reader)

'It wasn't religion, I'm not going to go into religion about it but it just gave me a taster into other people's thoughts and beliefs.' (Occasional reader)

'I don't really read autobiographies but somebody, it was my son and he sent off for it from the internet, Stephen Fry. I didn't really like the man, I didn't know anything about it, just didn't like him on the television. I think he's lovely, if you read his autobiography, he's been in prison, he'd got such a privileged life, he was in prison, everything like that and he's turned his life around and I think he is a decent bloke, so it's changed my view on him.' (Occasional reader)

- Empathy and emotional connection

An emotional connection often occurred with the material that was being read and this applied as much to factual material such as autobiographies and stories in newspapers and magazines, as it did to fiction. In some cases, people related what they read back to their own lives and the stories could have great poignancy for them

'I've cried lots over the Jade Goody stories. I lost my mum to cancer so everything she's going through, I went through with my mum, and yeah, I had to stop reading.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'That poem I read in the magazine [Alzheimer's Society magazine], it was fantastic, it was about forgetfulness and it was funny as well as being to the point. And yes, it did upset you because you could see where he was coming from but on the other hand, you had to laugh about it as well so it was really good, really, really good.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I suppose most recently, was Cameron losing that child because it strikes a chord with us because we lost our son-in-law in a tragic accident this year. Anything that brings back memories, it's very close to us.' (Occasional reader)

“It has really just affected me to see a girl who is the same age as me going through something so horrific and making me think, how would I cope?” (Regular reader)

Sometimes such reading could provide new insights and understanding that helped them think about their own behaviour or views

‘One of the Billy Connolly biographies, she points out a few things that he does that aren’t necessarily - that he’s worked on to calm himself, tone himself down and I was thinking, “oh yeah, maybe I should do that” ...! So that specifically, was non fiction but there’s been a couple of novels as well that I’ve read, “oh, does she know me?”! or “God, that sounds just like my dad”, things like that, where you can relate.’ (Highly engaged reader)

- Appreciating one’s own good fortune

Gaining insights into other people’s lives could also lead to an appreciation of one’s own life and one’s own good fortune

‘I think psychologically, books can be – say, if you’re feeling a bit down and you read books about how tough other people have had it, it can actually make you feel, “I’m not that bad”.’ (Regular reader)



‘I’ve just finished Cheryl Cole’s autobiography and she started from scratch and had nothing to what she’s become now. I just feel I appreciate what I’ve got by working and not having a celebrity lifestyle, working from the age of 16 to where I am now and I think it’s just appreciating what you have rather than trying to focus on what you potentially could have in the future.’ (Occasional reader)

‘I’ve read those ones between the 1920s and 50s, what life used to be like and what we take for granted every day like the NHS... We found out that in the potato famine my grandparents were tinkers and they’ve come over with bare feet and I think to myself, “look what I’ve got and look where I would have been”, the poor house. My mum lost her dad when she was four but they didn’t have the DHSS, they didn’t have hand outs, the church helped you out and her granny brought them up but my life could have been so different.’ (Occasional reader)

- Inspiring

Many examples were cited of the ability of a book to inspire participants to take a new course of action. Travel books scored very highly here but there were also examples of people choosing a particular career path ('The Cruel Sea' and joining the forces) or deciding to raise funds for a specific issue

'I like travel books because you can close your eyes, well you can't close your eyes when you're reading obviously, but you can reflect when you've read something and you can put yourself into that country, sort of savour when you read ... and then when you go there, you feel you've slipped into the place a little bit because you've already got the background.'
(Regular reader)

'Getting lost, I mean 'Cold Mountain' was just, we just got lost, didn't we?

... It scored very well...

... It scored so highly on the good yarn and getting lost and it did make me just want to go and visit the Appalachians totally and the feeling that you hadn't been there before you'd read the book, it really did take me somewhere I had not been before I read it.' (Book Group)

'I think with non fiction it can have the same, because like, with respect to say travel, travel books, it can really excite you about going somewhere, a particular ... even somewhere that you're going to visit that's not necessarily exciting, but if you can find something that's "I'd like to do that while I'm there", then it can really excite you.' (Highly engaged reader)

The discussion prompted one keen reader to tell the group about a new concept in travel writing that had piqued her interest; it also appealed to others in the group

'There's a new series of books coming out, Dublin are doing it and some other big cities, about prose and poetry of that city and I thought that was a lovely thing to read while you're there, more meaningful.' (Highly engaged reader)

- Raising self-esteem

Another psychological benefit of reading, that of raising one's self-esteem, was suggested by a couple of participants who drew upon their own experience of teaching others to read. They were referring to the more basic skill of decoding letters and words but saw this as the way to unlock the other benefits that reading brings

'I spent three years at an adult education centre teaching adults who couldn't read and write and it took me 18 months to teach an adult how to

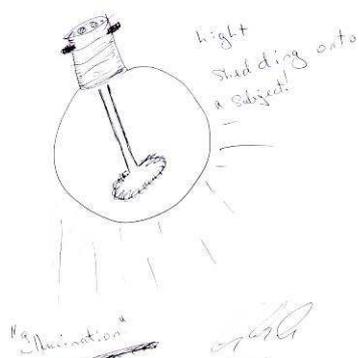
read a children's book. The look of joy on that chap's face when he knew he could go home and read those books to his own children who were five, six years old, he thought he'd won the football.' (Regular reader)

'I'd just like to say that, from a child's point of view, I think being able to read and feel that you're quite fluent at reading, definitely has a big impact on their self esteem, self concept and self worth. And then they can access all the other curricula and then that has that knock on effect of, "I can do this", that cycle of positive affirmation.' (Book Group)

The more utilitarian benefits associated with reading seemed to figure more highly among the men. Indeed, for the less engaged men, these were the main benefits. It was almost as though, in order for reading to be deemed worthwhile and to justify time being spent on it, it had to prove itself.

- Gaining knowledge and other utilitarian benefits

Reading could be about gaining and storing a reservoir of knowledge that one might apply immediately or call upon at a later date, or about triggering recall of some piece of information that was previously stored



'Turning the lights on and shedding light and illuminating things, that's how I see reading. It turns a light on, it makes things come back to you, if you can be bothered to read, especially instructions, it's fantastic.' (Occasional reader)

'I feel that reading is a bit like food for the brain ... when you watch television, it's all instant. You watch the news and blah blah blah and you remember flashes but you actually forget about the main content, because when you actually read something ... you tend to analyse it in your brain and it tends to stay in there.' (Regular reader)

'That's what I want to pass onto my son, the love of reading, but also it's when you're in conversation and you say "did you know ...?", "where did you know that from?", "I read it in a book once" and you do, you pick up and as you said, you learn ten things or ten new words from a book or snippets and they go in there and they just come up.' (Regular reader)

Another useful benefit and by-product of reading was adding to one's vocabulary by looking up the meaning of unfamiliar words in a dictionary

'I find also it can widen your whole vocabulary as well. Sometimes you almost get to that stage where you've got your book and you've got your dictionary next to you and you think, "oh, what's that word?" You look that word up and you can actually pick up ten words for every book you read or something. Before long, you've added so much percentage to your whole vocabulary...

... I'd go with that. I've got a decent dictionary and I do refer to it quite often when I come across a word and I don't know what it means.'
(Regular readers)

Other utilitarian benefits involved keeping up to date with the news, keeping your mind active, equipping you for the future or to join in a discussion

'I want to know what's going on, it's not because there's nothing else to do, I went out and bought the Sun paper to read.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'Say for instance, a sales job, you can be the sales executive and you've got to think of new ways to sell this product and because your imagination's just so ... wide, you can throw all these ideas in.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

'I'd still prefer to read more factual books, I get something out of that. If you have like a football argument or a discussion and you've read something that you know, I can put someone right because I know that I've read that fact, someone else will get the score wrong and I'll have to correct them...

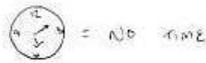
...So you like to feel you're on top of the information? ...

...Yeah, same thing with music, bands and whatever. If you're interested in a band, I like to know the history of that sort of band as well.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

4.2 Perceived barriers to individual reading

- Lack of time or interest

A lack of time was cited as a major obstacle by everyone in determining how much reading they could do and it stood out as the key barrier for the less engaged readers. Their sketches showing what reading meant to them often featured clocks and the fact they were too busy to read



As described in 3.5, people often had to hide themselves away to read or had to confine their reading to times when others were not making calls on them - reading was something for which time had to be set aside. This seemed in part to be because, unlike other leisure pursuits such as watching television, reading is an activity that requires your complete attention. It was also seen as something that you have to keep up or, as one or two less engaged readers put it, you could get 'out of the habit'

'You've got to make the time for reading but I think it's a discipline and you've got to make the time for it.' (Occasional reader)

Many anticipated having more time for reading as their children grew up and indeed, those who spent the most time reading and/or went in for more social reading, did seem to be those whose children had flown the nest.

Others claimed to have to read so much for work that they found it difficult to set aside time for their own reading or they were deterred from reading for their own pleasure. A teacher who had to keep up to date with material for the various subjects she was teaching, had been reading a factual story for about a year and had been unable to finish it (in part because she knew the ending would be very sad).

While a lack of time seemed to be an issue for the more engaged in stopping them reading more, for some of the unengaged, it often seemed to be an excuse – it was simply not how they wanted to spend their time. Many of the younger and middle-aged men in the unenthusiastic group were occupied with playing and following sport, cars and socialising. With so many other options on offer, reading anything other than a tabloid newspaper or car magazine was not on their agenda.

Even when someone had a personal interest in a topic, this was often insufficient to motivate them to read around it. Several of the unenthusiastic readers had been given

books about celebrities or sports personalities that they liked or whose sport they were interested in but they had been unable to even begin reading them

'The last book I had was the life of Lewis Hamilton that I got bought for Christmas. It's never even come out the box so I might as well just give it to charity or something because it's never going to get read.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

'I had an autobiography bought for me for Christmas, the Paul O'Grady one. It's just sitting there.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I play cricket, like I said, and I've got lots of books, Brian Lara, Viv Richards, I've got all of them books ...

Have you read them?

... No, they look very good next to the trophies and medals but ...

So do you buy these books?

... People obviously, assuming that that's what I want. But I can find great enjoyment in reading AutoTrader, I could sit and flick pages in that. I can look at cars I'd never buy, I would rather read that.' (Unenthusiastic readers)

- Fear of commitment

Related to the perceptions of a lack of time for reading, was something akin to a fear of being drawn into a book and not being able to put it down. In this way, the benefit of being able to lose oneself in what one is reading becomes a barrier. Whereas one could easily tear oneself away from a short article in a magazine or newspaper, it was felt that books had the power to take you over in some way

'In the newspapers, sometimes you might have just an article that's only about that much or that, you could read it quick, you don't forget it. But I think a story sometimes grips you, you think, "I can't put this book down".'
(Occasional reader)

'If I read a book, I like to read it, I can't pick it up, like, if I was working, I couldn't take my book to work and put it down because I'm one of these, I've got to ... what I do is no matter how tired I am, I can't leave that page and put that sticker in, I'll go to the next chapter, I'm like this [mimes falling asleep while reading].' (Occasional reader)

This fear found echoes among the highly engaged readers who described situations in which they had indeed, found it hard to break off from the book in which they were engrossed

'Sometimes you're so drawn into a book that you literally, you've got other things to do or something really important or I've come back from holiday and I've been trying to finish this book on the plane and ... got home jetlagged and just can't put it down, it draws you in so much.' (Highly engaged reader)

'With me, I don't like to leave the characters in a too unhappy place. [laughter] because when I was a child I always thought, "they're going to be stuck in this situation, I haven't taken them on" and that would be dreadful, so I'm sorry, it's just a habit from childhood.' (Book Group)

'I commute to Watford so I read during my commuting time which is great but when I get to Watford Junction, I have to get off the train so you often see me standing there on the platform trying to finish, come to a reasonable point rather than just throw the book in the bag and then go into work ...

... You need to come to a full stop...

... Yes, a sensible place to park.' (Book Group)

Only very few suggested that they had been put off reading by being disturbed or frightened by what they had read but some mentioned being unable to read certain types of material that they found too upsetting. This might apply both to books and stories in newspapers. One woman had become over concerned with a particular character in what she thought was an unhealthy way

'I must admit though, I did find that I became addicted to one particular writer and I was reading all the Ian Rankin stories. I became addicted to Rebus and it was awful because in my mind - we were talking earlier about knowing what his flat looked like, what he looked like, his attitudes, his feelings and I became totally engrossed in that. I had to have another book ... and then I had to wait for him to write the book. I felt like knocking on his door, "come on, you should be churning these out, I need to know what this guy is doing", this fictional character, I needed to find out what he was up to next. That was quite disturbing.' (Regular reader)

Others suggested that reading could have a detrimental effect if one took in inaccurate information and then acted upon it. Information about health and how to change one's lifestyle was cited as an example.

- Difficulty concentrating

Among the less engaged readers, there were clearly some issues relating to learning and possibly literacy. In contrast to those who feared being too drawn into a book, four of the unenthusiastic readers described problems they had with concentration and a

limited attention span which made it impossible for them to 'get in the zone' and become absorbed in what they were reading. It also made it difficult for them to retain information and therefore continue reading from where they left off

'I've got a short attention span I think and the lady that said you find it hard to put a book down, I find it hard to pick a book up!' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I've got such a short attention span. I can read magazines - you get a page on a Porsche, a page on a Ferrari, it's a different thing on every page, whereas a book, it's one long story and I just cannot get into it. I'll read a page or a chapter and I'll stop and think, "what was all that all about?" Other things are going through my head all the time.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

'When was the last time you read a book?...

... Primary school! I have bought a book, I've actually gone out and bought a book but it's never been read...

So why did you buy it?

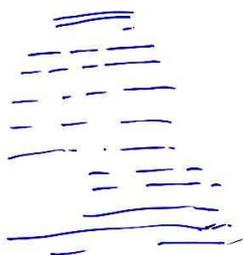
... I thought I'd read it, I read the introduction ...

So was it on a subject you were interested in?

... Yeah, it was on football but I just couldn't get into it, especially going back to it, remembering where I was. It's the same as watching films, I can't have no attention span to watching a film when you've got to follow the storyline.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

They saw themselves as lacking the motivation and patience to put in the effort to read a book through to the end

LETTERS IN CAPITAL
AND SENTENCES.



'What it says is, the letters have got to be in capitals for me because I'm always reading ... it's got to be in short paragraphs... I get bored... I've read a couple of good books. I haven't finished them because I never get to finish one, I'll start another one, I don't know why.'
(Occasional reader)

A few said they found reading rather soporific and not just at bedtime. They put it down to being tired generally but if they tried to make time for reading, it simply sent them to sleep

'When I've tried, I just fall asleep with a book in my face so I've just given it up.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

- The comfort zone

This was less a barrier to reading and more a resistance to reading new types of material. Several people, including a few of the more engaged readers, described how they needed to feel very quickly that a book was 'for them' – otherwise they would not persevere with it. Some preferred to stick to very specific types of reading material that they knew they would like, rejecting swathes of other material

'Autobiographies, I read Ian Fleming. It's interesting to read how he broke down the codes and then James Bond came from that, that's what gets you interested. You read someone's autobiography and you know the person. You've got that feeling to get into it but some of the fiction, no, I prefer something practical, something that you know something about to start off with and you can follow it up... something that interests me straightaway, that's the main thing.' (Occasional reader)

The obstacles to reading outlined here all add up to the fact that reading something like a book is seen as a major commitment, requiring a lot of effort and time. Moreover, the perception is that the effort is unlikely to be rewarded. The conclusion is therefore that it is better to stick with reading what one knows which, for the less engaged reader, is likely to be magazines and tabloid or middle of the road newspapers

'Because of my lifestyle, because I am very busy with different things I do in my life, I haven't got the time to sit down and read a book. Whereas a magazine, you can pick up and if I'm interrupted or I have to leave to do something else, I can come back and I haven't lost anything really. I just go to that page and continue, so that's how I find magazines much more relaxing than a book. I get frustrated starting a book and then going away for hours or whatever, come back and I've lost interest then.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'And it's something at work, I have half an hour, I can flick through a newspaper, I wouldn't sit and read a book for half an hour because someone will say, 'can you do this, can you do that?'. So you've only got five minutes so you can grab bits of news that you want but I wouldn't sit and read a book at lunchtime.' (Occasional reader)

'Whereas you can just pick up a magazine, a bit of escapism, half an hour and then get on. So that's me, haven't got time really to read.'
(Unenthusiastic reader)

Reading material such as these not only offer reading in digestible chunks which means they can be picked up and put down easily, but because of the variety of news, stories and features in a publication, they offer a more interesting read. Stories may unfold day after day and deliver continuous drama. Several younger less engaged readers made the point that they liked to read factual stories rather than fiction because they were 'real'

'I'm more interested in like true life stuff with articles like Jade Goody and the baby being dumped. I feel like that's, even though it's got nothing to do with me, I just feel like you get so involved in it and it's like a continuous story. Like Jade, you want to carry on following it through whereas I think sometimes with fiction, it's all pretend, it's not real.' (Occasional reader)

This point also came out in the survey carried out by participants among their friends and family. One of the friends of an unenthusiastic reader made the point that he had no desire to read any more than he did already because he had other things to do and he preferred to 'live my life in reality'.

There seems to be a striking contrast between the engaged readers who often prefer not to have pictures in a book so that they can savour the words and imagine the setting, characters or action of a book themselves (the reading group also professed a love of recipe books without pictures if the writer writes well) and the less engaged who seem to prefer to have the visualisation done for them in the form of images

'I think with a newspaper you get pictures you see ... whereas a novel, I think, there's no pictures, it's just pages and pages and pages so you're trying to say, 'when is it going to end, when is it going to end?''
(Occasional reader)

4.3 Views of friends and family

The participants talked to and recorded the responses of more than 90 friends and family as part of their 'homework' about the importance of reading for pleasure, whether they would like to read more, the barriers to doing so and what could be done to enable them to do more. The findings reinforced the views of the groups with the vast majority agreeing that reading for pleasure was important. Their reasons clustered into certain key themes which reinforced the views expressed in the workshops.

relaxing and stress relieving	<p><i>'helps with stress – can lose yourself in a story'</i></p> <p><i>'helps to relax, unwind'</i></p> <p><i>'medically, it is known to relieve stress'</i></p> <p><i>'helps you to unwind after a lousy day at work'</i></p>
escapism	<p><i>'it takes you to new places'</i></p> <p><i>'it is a way to escape the minutiae of daily life and to get lost in a wonderful story that excites and stretches the imagination'</i></p> <p><i>'novels also allow the reader to experience new situations without leaving the sofa'</i></p> <p><i>'you can get lost in a good book unlike TV which just talks at you'</i></p> <p><i>'a means to escape'</i></p> <p><i>'very important for great escapism and great entertainment'</i></p>
stimulating	<p><i>'keeps your brain/mind active'</i></p> <p><i>'expands/stimulates your imagination'</i></p> <p><i>'improves your thought processes, sense of appreciation of expression'</i></p> <p><i>'reading books keeps me alert'</i></p> <p><i>'it enhances the mind'</i></p> <p><i>'stretching the mind'</i></p> <p><i>'it gives you new ideals to help problem solving'</i></p>
broadening horizons	<p><i>'widens your horizons'</i></p> <p><i>'it gives you an insight into other peoples' lives'</i></p> <p><i>'able to learn and develop as an individual'</i></p>

gaining knowledge	<p><i>'learn new words'</i></p> <p><i>'you can improve your reading skills and knowledge skills'</i></p> <p><i>'continually developing language skills'</i></p> <p><i>'talking point for conversation'</i></p> <p><i>'information gained can be useful'</i></p>
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Most of those consulted said that they would like to read more for pleasure; the exceptions being some young people who felt constrained by books they had to read for their studies and others more generally who preferred to use their free time for other activities

*'There's better ways to enjoy yourself without reading a book. Reading is a conversation killer and why read a book when you can watch a film?'
(male, 46)*

The barriers to reading more were again, along similar lines

- a lack of time and other calls upon it (except for older people)
- lack of access to libraries either in terms of simply getting there or getting there at a time when it is open
- the cost of books
- various conditions such as sight impairment, fatigue, mobility (preventing them getting to the library) and dyslexia which made reading more challenging.

5 Social reading

5.1 Experience of reading as a social activity

The idea that reading could be something that was shared with other people was not one that came immediately to people. Obviously, the highly engaged readers were recruited because they had done something that could be described as ‘social reading’ but for them, as for other people, the experience of reading was much more an individual one.

When asked about ways in which people might share a reading experience, a wide range of situations were suggested. The most frequently mentioned across the groups probably involved reading to someone (often a child) or hearing a child read

‘Just reading with my daughter and my husband as well, because she has to read so much and write in the book. Then when my mum comes, ‘you can have your turn’, so Nan has a go. It’s nice though because it’s just sociable and you’re all learning and helping each other so I suppose that’s the only thing we do social all together.’ (Occasional reader)

Instances of reading to somebody in hospital or being read to by a partner were also described.

The picture of enjoyment gained by a family sharing in a book such as the Guinness Book of Records was vividly painted by this woman who was not herself a great reader

‘My daughter had the Guinness Book of Records book for Christmas and that was one that we all sat down, a bit like encyclopaedias, because you all have a go at reading it, “ooh look, have you seen this?”, “have they got so and so in there?” And then we’ll all get involved in just the one book there.’ (Occasional reader)

Similarly, this father, again not a reader himself, got a great deal out of encouraging his daughters in reading out loud as a family

‘What I used to do at home with my girls, where we’d get three copies of a book and basically I’d say, “we’ll each read a page and we’ll perform the parts that you see on that page”, and we’ll just continue and go round like that and whoever came to the house, they would have to read as well ... so in real terms, the children would then see the grown-ups reading and the grown-ups would also have to read, but they’d also have to perform... it encompasses everybody so that the reading becomes natural rather than it being a task’ (Unenthusiastic reader)

Other examples of sharing a reading experience did not involve reading the same work but simply sharing the same space and time while reading. Hence, situations like studying alongside a friend in the library or reading in the same room as a partner were suggested

“I don’t know whether you’d call it social but sometimes, every other week or something, I try and persuade my husband to sit and read with me, not reading the same thing or reading to each other but just reading ... it stops him from going upstairs onto the computer, it makes him come down. We sit together, we may not talk to each other for an hour or so because we’re deep in ... but we’re together and it’s a nice feeling.” (Regular reader)

Another area in which a number of examples were proffered was informal discussion of something that one was reading or had read. This might involve passing on articles or books for others to read and possibly then discussing them

‘I quite like reading aloud at times ... I find that quite a social thing as well because it could be something in a newspaper or something you’re reading in a book and there’ll be two or three people and you say, “listen to this everyone” and you read something out to them and then they’ve all shared that knowledge with you and then they can make a comment on it. Then it passes on from there, sometimes you can have half an hour of discussion just on one subject that you’ve read out.’ (Regular reader)

‘I’m just trying to think, at work, how many times I do read articles out to my office ... quite frequently actually, you don’t realise you’re doing it.’ (Regular reader)

Recommendations for ‘good reads’ might also be shared

‘I just tend to talk about books with my friends anyway and we don’t, it’s not, we have no sort of set up book group or anything but we do tend to talk about what we’re reading and I find that’s enough for me. I get recommendations from people at work, friends, we discuss what we’re reading with anyone so for me that fills that up, I don’t feel a need to ... Yeah, I’m happy with the recommendations I get off people and discussing with a group of friends and stuff so ...

... Yeah, the same, share books with friends and relatives, I don’t need to, that’s enough for me to be honest with you’. (Highly engaged reader)

Mostly this would be done on a very casual basis but a couple of participants spoke of being rather forceful if they felt someone should read a certain book

‘If I find a good book, I will be quite insistent with my parents or friends that they have to read this book, which can get me into trouble! There’s been

a couple of times where I've literally taken the book, put it in my mum's hand, "start reading that". (Highly engaged reader)

A couple of participants were aware of a more organised way of sharing books and had heard about the book crossing idea

'There is this new, apparent, I don't quite know what you'd call it actually, but it's whereby book lovers are meant to, once they've finished a book, leave it in quite a public place for another person to pick it up and read it.' (Regular reader)

Mention was also made of exchanging a book in a hotel or villa when on holiday.

Reading as a social activity also had a heritage dimension for a few people who spoke of passing books down the generations

'I've read them to the children and the children read them by themselves and in that capacity that children have, they read them again and then they read them again and they just roll them on, one after another.' (Book Group)

One man took it further in terms of mankind's heritage and passing down the generations of works of great note such the Domesday Book and the Bible. He also felt that the reading aloud of such works to a mass of people might be seen as a form of social reading

'What about when you go to church and you get people who stand up and read passages from the Bible, they're reading aloud to the rest of the congregation?' (Regular reader)

Another one-off idea for social reading was when a group was going to take part in an activity together and they all had to read and become familiar with information beforehand. This might include reading instructions and filling forms out (such as health and safety forms before going rock climbing).

In terms of more formal types of social reading activities, the highly engaged participants had a mix of experience; a few currently took part in or had taken part in book groups, a few had been to author readings of their work, others to literary festivals and others had contributed to author websites.

In addition, some of the members of other groups had taken part in some of these activities although it was the workshop session itself that prompted them to think about

them. Two occasional readers had contributed to online forums although their interest was in websites hosted by the authors of certain text books that they needed to read and understand for courses they were teaching or studying. Another occasional reader suddenly remembered that her daughters had taken part in a workshop at her local library run by Benjamin Zephaniah

'Yeah, he came in to the local library and my girls went there for the two day workshop he had and they absolutely loved it ... it was brilliant for the children, they really did enjoy it.' (Occasional reader)

5.1.1 Perceived benefits of social reading

As with reading as an individual pursuit, everyone could identify some potential benefits to be gained from social reading although the general preference was for more informal examples. Many of the benefits were almost by-products of the social process rather than enhancing the reading experience itself. Hence there was much discussion of sparking new social encounters and of shared reading becoming a launch pad for conversation that perhaps enables you to find common ground

'It can open new links... I read quite a lot in the canteen lunchtime at work and people who I've never spoken to, have worked in the office while I've worked on the shop floor, suddenly say, "are you enjoying that, I've read that one" and it can spark new talkings, new conversations.' (Regular reader)

'A discussion point, if you're with a group of friends, "I read this the other day", "have you read so and so?"' (Highly Engaged Reader)

Some talked of situations where knowing about the subject being discussed by a group of friends or workmates because one has read about it, enables you to make a contribution

"If I've missed a big football game, I can read a report and I know that everyone at work's going to be talking about such and such a game...

...So you could make a contribution and join in?...

...Yeah, was it a penalty, was he offside, that kind of stuff. You don't need to have seen the actual game sometimes." (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I think another kind of product of reading as well is adding to conversations, social situations as well whereby you may not actually have that particular hobby or activity but because you've read about it, you can kind of add to the conversation as well.' (Regular reader)

Much enjoyment was gained from sharing books and banter about them with a close group of friends

'I tend to go on holiday with a group of girlfriends and we all have like a pool of books, we take three or four books each with us and we all swap them round ... it's kind of a social thing, we all talk about what's happening in the book... It's fun... it sounds so sad because we're like, "where are you in the book, has she done this yet, has she done that?" ... it's something else for us to talk about.' (Occasional reader)

On a smaller scale, the sense of companionship to be gained from reading to and with another person was very much in evidence. This was a more intimate form of shared reading experience and gave the readers great satisfaction. The fact that the experience also sometimes led to children reading for themselves was especially pleasing

'He (aged 12) was ill not so long ago. I did read him a bit of something and it ended up with him then reading the rest of the book. But he loved being read to, something about the social sharing of reading to somebody and the lovely sort of comforting feeling that creates.' (Book Group)

"It kind of makes you feel like there's a meaning to you reading that book, if you're going to share it with somebody else." (Regular reader)

'I find reading to my son at night very relaxing, it gives me the opportunity to lose myself in it and you disappear into the world of funny voices and expression and you read about the little duck that doesn't swim and things like this and it's easy, I find it effortless.' (Regular reader)

'I think there's nothing better than reading with children, it's a great feeling, especially when you realise that after a little while, they're picking up the reading themselves. It's lovely to share a book and sit and snuggle up together.' (Regular reader)

Others spoke of how they found it very rewarding to pass on the joy of reading or a particular book to others and in general, there was a feeling that reading to a child was part of nurturing in him or her a love of reading

"The Hobbit', 'Harry Potter', you'd read them. My son read 'The Hobbit' before he went to, he'd just got into junior school. He didn't read it, my husband would do a chapter and then he'd read a page. He loves reading.' (Occasional reader)

Exchanging views and opinions about what one has read could, it was suggested, lead to new insights and expand one's own thinking and understanding

'It's hearing other people's opinions as well. We're all trapped in our own brains and then you hear somebody else talking about something that they've read and you think, "that's really interesting", another way of thinking about something.' (Regular reader)

'You're not talking to just that one person [on online forums], again, it's a social thing where you're combined together and you're talking together about the same thing. So I prefer that because it's again, you're learning from other people, you're sharing experiences with other people on something you might not have understood. Somebody else would clarify for you or the way you see something could be seen differently by someone else.' (Occasional reader)

If one is part of a group discussing a book or article, this might encourage you to read it yourself or open your mind to new interests

'And I think encouraging people as well, if there's a group of you talking about something you've read and there's an outsider who hasn't, they're going to feel a bit more encouraged to go and read it.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

5.2 Perceived barriers to social reading

There was widespread resistance to more formal types of social reading during the first workshops although many of the regular readers were enthused by the more informal types; asking in the library for recommendations, reading recommendations online (Amazon especially), swapping or passing on magazine articles or books, discussing what you have read and sharing recommendations. The less engaged readers were more cautious, preferring to stick to informal contacts that were part of everyday socialising such as talking to friends or family. They were less sure about discussing recommendations with library or book shop staff and see more formal activities as aimed at 'eggheads' or people with money and time to do them

'When I'm stuck, both my daughters, both got good educations, university educations, I can ask them ... they'll say, 'read this, read that'. It's quite good, I get a lot from them.' (Occasional reader)

'I wouldn't [want to do some formal social reading activity], I'd rather go for a game of football...

...I'm the same, I'd rather go down the pub or something...

...I'd rather weed the garden...

...I think informally we're doing it already, we're either reading an article, reading a book or we're reading the paper and we are discussing it

informally, so I suppose socially you are doing it that way but I wouldn't want to do it on a formal basis. I wouldn't want to have to sit down with likeminded people and, "let's talk about Jade Goody", or whatever.'
(Unenthusiastic readers)

A key barrier to more formal social reading was the very thing that got in the way of people reading more as individuals - time. Moreover, social reading was seen as making even more demands on their time than individual reading

'It's time when you're not actually then reading for pleasure, are you? You're going to the book fair when you could quite easily be slouched at the end of your sofa or in the garden with a bottle of beer and a book in your hand.' (Regular reader)

'I think a forum [online] would be better if you haven't got time to join a reading club...

... Because there's no pressure, there's no commitment that you have to turn up whereas in the forum you can do it whenever you want.'
(Occasional readers)

Social reading also represented a threat to the enjoyment of individual reading because it was seen as too serious and constraining and therefore likely to interfere with one's own take on a book

'I think reading's a very personal thing as well. If it floats your boat then read it. If it doesn't, it doesn't do it for you, so it's got to be personal to you.' (Occasional reader)

'I wouldn't see any particular value in it because you could give everyone here exactly the same book to read and everyone would come up with 10 different opinions. So everyone's opinion's going to be different so I wouldn't be interested in other peoples' opinions.' (Regular reader)

Several of the social reading formats such as book groups and book festivals were seen as hierarchical and intimidating for the novice, not something to be seen as an enjoyable way to spend one's time. The less engaged readers tended to see such activities as not for 'people like me' - book festivals, for example, were described by one man as

'Sounds very geeky and boring.' (Occasional reader)

It was interesting that some of the more engaged readers who had taken part in such activities expressed a similar viewpoint – they too had thought that book festivals were for 'boffins' or knew of book groups that were very regimented and restrictive

'They're worried that they're [book festivals] only populated by intellectuals I suppose, that they're going to be ... only one type of person, but it isn't.

Is that your perception?

Mmmm. Before I went along I used to think, "they'll all be boffins" but they're not. It puts people off, doesn't it?' (Highly engaged reader)

Similarly, while the concern of some participants was that one might feel obliged to buy books at a book festival, in fact, attendees reported that you might be given free books.

5.3 Book or reading groups

An increasing number of book groups have been set up in recent years and so we wanted to understand how participants felt about them. The addition of the members of an existing book group to the sample added another interesting dimension.

Most people seemed to have heard of book or reading groups and some knew of friends who took part, even if they did not do so themselves. Celebrities such as 'Richard and Judy' and Oprah Winfrey were known to head up industrial scale book groups and one highly engaged reader followed the Radio 4 book club assiduously, buying and reading the selected book before the programme was broadcast.

5.3.1 What participants got out of their book club

A small number of women in the highly engaged group belonged to a book club and one woman belonged to two. One of these comprised a group of professional women who took the task rather seriously while the other group needed to be cajoled into discussing the book they had possibly all read rather than 'gossiping'. The book group who took part in the research possibly fell somewhere in between. They too, were all professional women who read a variety of literary work though this was biased towards fiction, some in translation. Over the ten years of their existence they had selected autobiography, quasi-recipe books and sacred texts among more standard fare and though they might have tried to avoid 'Richard and Judy' choices, found that they often did not. Examples of their reading had included *Cold Mountain*, *A Suitable Boy*, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Shadow of the Wind*, *No Great Mischief*, *Independence Day*, *Winter in Madrid*, *Journey by Moonlight*, *The Blind Assassin*, *Qur'an*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Under the Glacier*, *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, *Suite Francaise*,

The Reader, Barack Obama: The Audacity of Hope, The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self.

For them however, the book group was first and foremost a social occasion and they commented that if they did not enjoy it as such, they would not wish to continue. It started as a way of meeting up with other women in the neighbourhood, most of whom at that time, had young children. The group enabled them to set aside time for what they loved to do (but had little time for) – read. It also gave them an opportunity to find out about what was happening in the local area in terms of facilities for families and schools. While much of the evening was spent talking about what they had read, a proportion of it was always devoted to catching up on news and developments

'It goes back to a time when my child was a lot younger and work was very pressured and I had very little time and I was ... very keen to get involved because I thought at least I would just make myself, organise my time, that I'd at least read a book a month, even if I didn't actually finish any other books, even if I only looked at a paper and that would be ... because reading's something I was really missing. That was brilliant, it was really useful. Now life's different, child's grown up, I have more time for reading and so I don't need that but that was very valuable.' (Book Group)

In addition to the benefit of setting aside valuable time for reading, the book group introduced them to books that they would not read otherwise and so offered them new experiences that they would not find in their individual reading

'That's what I like about a book group though, it does challenge you to read things that you wouldn't normally read...

... And hearing what other people say about it and they've always got a different perspective to the one you've got.' (Highly engaged readers)

'I think it introduces you to books you wouldn't normally read and I really enjoy that. I like that opportunity, that other people could suggest things that I wouldn't normally read, even if they are obscure.' (Book Group)

The sessions when they get together then revealed new ways of looking at the work, based on the different interpretations of the group members. This was the other rewarding aspect of the activity

'It was just extraordinary, how we all came at it from different... so it's things like that, you say "this is amazing" and somebody will say "did you think that by doing that, they meant so and so?", "oh, I didn't think of that".'

So it stretches you and it's just hugely enjoyable, everybody loves their books and it's an absolute joy.' (Highly engaged reader)

'And then actually to talk about it, is something else again, which of course, is why we do it, because its incredibly enriching to get the other peoples' views and to have those extraordinary illuminations of somebody perceiving a character or a sequence of events or whatever, in a completely different way as to how you, yourself, have perceived it. That's brilliant, that's irreplaceable and that's what you need the group for.' (Book Group)

One of the members of a book group in the highly engaged group described how they had turned their hand to creative writing in one of their sessions

'One of our books just before Christmas was 'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo and it happened to be Hampshire's Big Read so I phoned Hampshire and a lovely girl said, "I'll send you some information". Whilst on the site, there was something called 'A story in six words' which was extraordinary. Hemingway said it was his best story he'd ever done and his first one was, "Baby shoes for sale, never used"... it made us all think we can all do a story in six words. So next book group, we all did.' (Highly engaged reader)

The reading groups featured in the research had different approaches to obtaining their books. Two groups made use of a local library to secure multiple copies while the other waited until the book was out in paperback and then bought their own copies, sometimes as a bulk buy on Amazon.

5.3.2 Why some reject the idea

There were many preconceptions about book clubs, not all of which were accurate. Many simply found the idea overly prescriptive. Firstly one had to read a certain book, in a certain time, and attend the group

"It's a personal thing really, you choose a book and you want to read it in your own time. I can't imagine sitting here reading to all of you lot, it doesn't appeal to me." (Unenthusiastic reader)

'Dictating as well, because I've never belonged to one but I get the impression that everyone's got to read the same book and then talk about it afterwards, so you're dictating your reading.' (Regular reader)

'I did go to a book group a couple of times and I found that it wasn't for me. In fact I actually get the same amount of pleasure like you're saying, you end up with a group of friends and very often you end up talking about books and then of course you find it gets more and more heated and whatnot or somebody recommends this so ...

... You can share the books around can't you? Read at your own pace...

... Book groups just weren't for me.

Why not?

... I don't know, you'll probably scream at me, it's like too regimented, I like to do things in my own way, get from it what I want to get from it. I could understand you know, if you're keen, they're great but it just wasn't for me.' (Highly engaged readers)

It was assumed by some that you had to buy the chosen book even though it might be one that you will not enjoy

'I think a cost thing as well, the fact that you'd have to go out and buy a book and then it's easy to swap it, that's fine but let's say there's four or five of you in this group, you're only going to read that book once and once it's back on your shelf, you think £10 ... was it really worth it?' (Occasional reader)

Some felt that they would feel very self conscious about giving their views on a book or as this man assumed, reading out loud

'Yeah, well it's just like - sitting there reading to people, even if it's something I'm interested in, say for instance, cars, I just feel like I'd be so embarrassed. 'My name's Martin', stand up, get a book and just read out loud. There's the embarrassment factor.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

However, the main barrier to taking part in reading groups seemed simply to be that people were satisfied with reading by and for themselves. They simply did not see a need or feel a desire to share their thoughts on a book with other people and simply preferred to read for themselves. If it did happen that they got into discussion about something they had read, they wanted it to be on a casual and opportunistic basis rather than something that was planned

'I've never felt the need to discuss a book, I read a book for my benefit. I either like it, I get enjoyment out of reading it and then I pass it to my sister or anybody else I can think of ... it saves throwing it in the bin and books will come to me that way as well, but I've never really discussed it, I might say to my sister, "oh that's quite good, read it", I never discuss the plot.' (Occasional reader)

The appearance of reading groups in television soaps had not kindled any interest. Instead, it seemed that this confirmed what some suspected, the activity could be time consuming and rather competitive.

5.3.3 Blueprint for an effective book group

It was interesting that when they returned for the second workshop, two women in the highly engaged groups confessed that, despite previously rejecting the idea of book groups, their ‘homework’ reading had persuaded them that they might be worth reconsidering. This was largely based on the booklet from the East Midlands Library Service that describes the various forms that reading groups take in very straightforward language

‘Because previously, I’d ruled out the idea of joining a book club as something I wouldn’t be interested in and having read the information and the possible ideas that might be thrown around if you did join a book club, that really made me think that that might be something I’d be interested in doing in the future. So that probably had the most impact.’ (Regular reader)

‘Last week, I know I said I wasn’t interested in book clubs. I tried it once, got the feeling it was too regimented for me and you’ve got to make the effort to go out, but I’m afraid I got the inspiration from last week. So I’ve been looking on the website, seeing how to join and basically where I go from here.’ (Highly engaged reader)

Indeed, the book group involved in the research was also critical of other groups they knew that they perceived to be far too formal and rigid in how they worked. This might be in terms of deciding which book is chosen, how much in advance books are selected (for the coming year in the case of one group) and the format of the meeting. For example, in some groups, the ‘sponsor’ of a book has to ‘present’ it initially to the rest of the group

‘Can I say that first and foremost, what happens with, I’ve heard this from a few of my friends that are in other, different book clubs, is that they’re in a book club and suddenly every book that’s put forward is the book that they should have read when they were doing some literature course and they didn’t get round to but feel that they need to do that, and it just gets really bogged down with classics and difficult texts ... and they have to present it and all that sort of stuff, there doesn’t seem to be much joy or fun.’ (Book Group)

We asked them what they would suggest as a template for a successful book group and they described a fairly relaxed operation, albeit one with focus

- an ideal size of seven to 10 people, possibly made up of people with whom you already have something in common

- book choices are made informally rather than taking it in turns or by voting on a list of candidates (as they do in some groups). People put forward their ideas which they discuss, sometimes also looking at reviews online. They then discuss them and arrive at a decision as a group
- it is important to mix the repertoire so that it includes light as well as heavier reading
- choose two books (ie. two months) in advance
- no one has to present the book
- no one is obliged to finish the book or even read it at all if they do not have time
- show respect for each other's opinion – the group should be a 'safe place' in which to express one's thoughts
- it is important to keep the momentum of the discussion going – nobody should hog the floor
- there is no agenda for what is discussed and no requirement to contribute

'But to get over the "I don't want to join a book group because it might be embarrassing because I might have to talk about something or say something and someone might say, it's your turn to talk", none of that, there's no structure, no template and it's a bit of a free for all.' (Book Group)

5.4 Dialogue with the author

It was notable that many readers, regardless of their level of engagement with reading, had, at some point, avidly consumed the work of a particular author; this included even unenthusiastic or occasional readers who had since lost their appetite for reading

'I read an Oscar Wilde book years ago, something made me go out and buy the complete works of Oscar Wilde!... it was wittier than I expected it was ever going to be and I was in a long distance relationship, before the days of the internet and email and mobile phones. We wrote a lot to each other and I thought that possibly expanded my letter writing abilities, maybe they did, maybe they didn't.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I bought the Tom Sharpe book, it happened to be Wilt, and I thought it was wonderful, absolutely wonderful that I could read this book and get so much enjoyment out of it... I then went on and bought all of his books and I think that what influences me to read now, is I tend to find an author, I like Joanna Trollope as well, and I'll tend to buy the books from that author and I would say that's probably the first book that I read that I thought, "it's actually quite enjoyable, reading is" and as a child I didn't find it at all. Maybe it's finding the right author as opposed to the right story line.' (Occasional reader)

'I like Tom Sharpe and Porterhouse Blue and all the series of Blot On The Landscape and all of those, it's not everybody's thing, so you connect with that author on a mind level that somebody else just doesn't pick up on, perhaps.' (Regular reader)

However, it tended to be only the enthusiastic readers who had an interest in taking that relationship with an author further. Others seemed to shy away from the idea, with even the regular readers showing discomfort. They were content to keep the relationship at arms length. They had their own interpretation of the work and saw no benefit in entering a dialogue about the intentions of the author or providing the author with feedback on their own take on his/her work

'A reaction, you react to them, with the word in a line, a book or whatever. They can ignite something within you, whether it's creativity, passion, emotional, whatever, they can ... without ever meeting you, that's the thing and they don't just do it to you, they do it to everybody else or several other people and they might, as you say, do it in 10 different ways to the people round the table ... he's never met us individually but he can do that and it's quite a power they've got.' (Regular reader)

"The author knows if it's successful by the amount of people that buy it and read it, that's the first obvious position that he's in and then if you continue to read his series of books, then he knows he's on the right track." (Regular reader)

The main reasons for this reluctance seemed to be three-fold. Firstly, they suspected that it would be an intimidating experience because authors know what their work is about. As readers, they may ask stupid questions or make unsophisticated comments. Moreover, the author has a command of language that they cannot hope to match, hence another reason to keep quiet.

Lastly, the concern was voiced that meeting an author could 'burst' the bubble and undermine one's liking for his/her work

'I saw Ian Rankin on a television programme and he came across as so arrogant and I just thought, "no, you can't be the person that has built this dream almost", writing so exceptionally about this guy and getting it across to me in such fine detail. He came across as if everyone else was completely useless, he's fantastic. I thought, "you just spoilt that, you've really spoilt that". I thought he was somebody who really put a lot of thought into it and was passionate about it and he came across as totally the opposite.' (Regular reader)

In fact, a couple of members of the highly engaged group had experienced just such misgivings

'When I went to the readers' day, I was in heaven, but you were looking at Ian Rankin and you think, "that's not how I pictured you at all". He came across as arrogant and a few of us said, "oh, we're not going to read him again"!' (Highly engaged reader)

'The thing I get out of it is going to authors' events and actually seeing the authors that you've been reading. Sometimes it can put you off. You think, "I don't like you very much and yet I like your books" or the other way round, you can really get to like them and think you want to read more about them.' (Highly engaged reader)

Others had similarly found face to face encounters with authors rewarding, be they at book signings (David Attenborough, Wilbur Smith), readings by the author (Andy McNab, Michael Palin, John McCarthy) or meeting them at some other kind of event (Zoe Fairbairn, Ian Rankin, Alan Titchmarsh). In part, the reward seemed to come from meeting a celebrity and feeling a little closer to them as a real person

'I've also met Alan Titchmarsh informally and he's a lovely person and he writes good books but he's been in the media hasn't he, for so long now and he just, he's so gentle and pleasant...

... He makes everyone feel very special, doesn't he? Yes, he's a lovely chap.' (Highly engaged readers)

'We had an author come to our book group once purely by emailing her and saying that we were doing her book. It was Zoe Fairbairn and we were doing one of her first books. We just wanted a few comments from her and she said "whereabouts are you?" We said, "in Guildford" and she said, "I'll come along". It was really lovely, it was nice but that was a good few years ago. I don't think she'd be doing that now.' (Highly engaged reader)

A couple commented on how the meeting helped them appreciate the author's work more

'It's lovely hearing the authors reading their own works as well. You can read it and you think you've sort of read it in a fairly normal way and of course, when they read it, you find so much more meaning to it because it's their baby.' (Highly engaged reader)

'There's some up and coming authors there [book festival] which haven't hit the top 20 but it's nice to sort of meet them and then you see a book and you pick it up, "oh I remember that person, spoke to them", have a good read of it and it's just very nice. It takes you, it just develops you.' (Highly engaged reader)

'I went to an audience with Andy McNab and it was a closed - it was to his ex-regiment and he invited some guys along and he's quite secretive, doesn't like people to know who he is, and it was interesting that he was talking about books and there were people in the audience which were actually contacts of what he was describing and they would say, "ah, we were actually over there while you were", so you could actually see it wasn't fiction.' (Highly engaged reader)

A couple of other highly engaged readers were keen users of authors' websites and the forums found there. They clearly had no qualms about sharing their views and taking part in a dialogue with authors and, as with the face to face encounters, the benefits seemed to be a mix of the delight of engaging with someone who was a little 'special' and a better appreciation of their work

'It's just an interesting way of getting different peoples' points of view about certain books, there's certain authors who have websites with special forums and things, I'll go on there and discuss the latest book or older books, it's really interesting...

Any particular sites that you go onto?

... I go to an author called James Rawlings, I go to his and I've recently gone to the guy who wrote 'The Birthing House', Christopher Ransom, I've just recently registered with his as well.' (Highly engaged reader)

'Marley & Me ... and I wrote to the chap who did that, on his site and I got a lovely email back so ... that's really nice...

... You tend to get a lot of author feedback as well. They'll come onto the discussion forums every now and again, have a comment or two, so that's nice.' (Highly engaged readers)

6 Reading as a creative activity

6.1 Reading as a creative activity

Having discussed what happens when they read and what they get out of reading, we then led the groups on to think about reading as a creative activity and whether it could be reasonably described as such. It may be that if we had approached the discussion in a different way and asked them this question straight out, they might have been less supportive of the idea but in fact, in all groups, there was a large proportion who felt that reading was indeed a creative activity even though some forms of reading might be more creative than others.

We firstly look at when reading was thought to be creative and when it was less deserving of this label.

6.1.1 When reading is creative

The discussion around why reading could be described as creative revolved around the fact that it could bring about change in some way. This might be

- Change in you as the reader

You might be changed as a person because for that period for which you are reading, you are entering the world of the book, imagining the scene, the action, becoming one of the characters, creating your own take on the work

'Rosie Thomas has written this book called 'White' and it's about climbing Everest without oxygen and I was reading it and I found my breathing had changed. Because you think, "how can these people do this?" My breathing was getting more and more shallow.' (Highly engaged reader)

'When you're reading something, you go right into it and it's interesting, if there's no pictures there, you picture it yourself.' (Occasional reader)

'You're creating the scene, you're creating the characters, what they look like and what they're doing, what they're wearing, in your mind. (Highly engaged reader)

A piece of writing will also have an emotional impact on the reader, from fear to remorse to happiness and pleasure

'You get something out of it, there's a reward at the end, whether it be emotional, physical or ...

... enjoyable.’ (Regular readers)

Some of the benefits highlighted in section 4.1, also involve changes in the reader, some of which are longer lasting; he/she can achieve insights into other worlds, their views of somebody or something can be changed by a piece of writing, it can help them put their own life into perspective or they might act in a different way as a result

‘Surely when you read, you relate it to your life, your experiences, so you’re not sure what knock-on effects reading has, because the next day you could do something completely different to if you hadn’t have read that book, article. So sometimes it could be, you don’t know, it’s changed you.’ (Regular reader)

‘It can change your opinion on things, a closed mind on something and it can give you a different aspect on it, you think “actually ...”. You rethink something.’ (Regular reader)

‘I don’t have kids but for someone that has got kids and the Jade Goody story, does that make you appreciate what you have yourself, does that make you go out and think, “I’ll do more things with my kids if I’m not doing it already”?’ (Occasional reader)

- Change in the work

The rationale for reading as a creative activity also included the reader’s own effect on the work. First and foremost, the fact that everyone reads and interprets the piece in his/her own way means there is no definitive understanding of the work; everyone carries their own ‘version’ of the work in their heads

‘You get fresh takes and fresh perspectives on the characters, how possible this could have been or how much it was fantasy, in terms of psychology of characters or whatever, or how it resonates. No, I think there’s something quite creative about that, developing your thinking.’ (Book Group)

‘Your ‘Cold Mountain’ won’t be the same as my ‘Cold Mountain’...

... But we’re reading the same information...

... You’d see the Appalachians as different than I would see the Appalachians.’ (Book Group)

‘Not different no, but as I say, putting your own spin on it and your friend may have a totally different idea, but I just like, I’m quite happy going along with my own, what I made of it and then perhaps building on that as I go through the book.’ (Highly engaged reader)

'I think it's because you hear it differently, literally, when you hear it in your head, the way, if you were to read it aloud, which I suppose is making reference to the one we're currently reading ['The Reader']. The way you read, the way you voice a sentence, they're terribly specific to yourself before you start expanding it into what pictures are engendered in your mind. It's very personal.' (Book Group)

Quite often, the reader is not just reading with their inner voice. When reading aloud to children in particular, a number of participants spoke of almost putting on a performance

'If I read aloud to someone, it makes me creative then because I'll have different voices. You sort of put a different emphasis on what's happening in the story.' (Highly engaged reader)

Finally, with some forms of reading, it was noted that one might actually change them to suit one's needs such as if you are adapting a pattern or a recipe.

- Change in terms of some kind of 'product'

The assumption for many, especially but not exclusively among the less engaged readers, was that 'creative' meant that some kind of tangible output is created. Their first thought was often therefore to think about their children or grandchildren and how they might go on to draw or write a story after reading or being read to

'The only time I can see it being creative is when I read to my son but then he picks it up from there and runs with whatever story we've been reading. He's that person for the next couple of days or whatever, so that's the creative side of it coming out but actually reading to myself, I don't regard it as being creative.' (Highly engaged reader)

For them, the outputs might be very concrete such as a knitted item, bookcase or cake produced as a result of reading a pattern, instructions or a recipe

'I've just opened one [a recipe book] up today because I've invited someone for lunch tomorrow and I'm going to do Eggs Benedict, so that's creative, isn't it?' (Occasional reader)

'Being able to interpret plans, drawings, specifications and making something from it because at the end of the day you've actually created something, you can actually stand back and say, "ah, that's a piece of art".' (Highly engaged reader)

The output might be something in the future rather than the present. Reading might encourage you to 'have a go' at something or give you ideas for new projects. It might

provide information from which you learn, for example a language or how to save money, that you can then apply at a later date

'I perceive it to be something that's going to help me later on and in that sense, it's therefore creative for me.' (Occasional reader)

'I do definitely [agree that reading is creative] because the person that's written the book is the creating person and you are learning from that creative work by absorbing what they've written. It could be a text book or it could be fiction, either way if you want to know what's there, you are definitely being creative and taking it on board.' (Occasional reader)

It can also provoke discussion

'When you want to tell someone or talk about it, when it creates discussion.' (Regular reader)

6.1.2 When reading is not/less creative

Whether reading was seen as creative or not seemed to have less to do with the type of material that was being read than with how one was reading it. A number felt that if one was not really engaging with the piece, then one was not reading creatively. This included situations where one was simply scanning a piece of writing or when reading sent you to sleep

'I would consider it to not be creative because I can only do it when I'm relaxing so I find it quite a laid back and lazy pastime, I suppose. I don't perceive it to be creative at all.' (Occasional reader)

'It's got to be over 12 months, well over 12 months since I've read a book in bed ... and it was a switch off and relaxing. I wouldn't say it's creative.' (Occasional reader)

A member of the book group suggested that reading was not a creative activity when you did not have to think about what you were reading – *'merely digest it in that kind of box of chocolates kind of way'*. This implied that there was no positive change or gain involved, either emotional or tangible.

Some thought that 'creative' implied that the reading should be enjoyable and freely entered into. It was therefore not creative when it was forced, formal, unenjoyable, boring, illegal or immoral or irrelevant. Application forms or the small print in documents might come into this category.

However, there was a common feeling that reading as a creative activity was not confined to reading fiction; it could apply as readily to autobiography, travel or other factual material. Newspaper stories were just as likely to evoke an emotional response in the reader and factual material was probably more likely to lead to tangible outputs than fiction. For some, materials read in the workplace counted too

'If it's a report that's been issued or an email that's going round or something like that and it's then read by several people, if it engages and causes discussion, then it's created something and it depends then on your definition of 'creative'. I think that does help and as boring as the subject matter might be, if it creates discussion within a group of people, then it's creative.' (Regular reader)

It should be said that there were some across the groups who were not convinced about any form of reading as a creative activity, largely because they saw the author as the only one doing the creative work

'I wouldn't say it's creative, I would say the writing already is creative, same with the books, cookery books, it's already been created whether you cook or not.' (Occasional reader)

'I think the creative process has been done for me. If I read to my grandchildren yes, I'm leaping about all over the place so maybe that's creative but if I'm reading a novel or something like that, maybe in my imagination I'm obviously creating ...

...Images...

... Yes, so maybe from that point of view it is creative but I just feel it's been done for me.' (Highly engaged readers)

6.2 Response to the idea of creative reading 'as an experience rather than simply to get information'

Given how participants responded to the idea of reading as a creative activity, it was not a large step for them to see reading as an experience. They understood that reading was more than simply decoding symbols and often was a rewarding experience, in terms of one enjoying the process of reading and gaining something from it. What many found more difficult was a comparison with reading for information. While many understood what was meant by the proposition, they felt that the distinction that was being drawn between the two forms of reading was too contrived. There were several reasons for this.

Firstly, as we have seen, material that is read 'for information' can be seen as having creative outcomes and offering a rich reading experience, just as much as fiction

'So you're not talking about the relaxing thing, you're talking about the hobby craft that we're looking at and we're quite happy to read technical data then because it relates to something that's pleasurable for us.'
(Regular reader)

'We recently did the Barack Obama, 'Dreams from my father' ...

... We had quite a discussion about his relationships with the other bits of his family, in fact, we were filling in the gaps in a way with that book and with other biography. You talk about it, it seems to me, in the same way you'll talk about a fiction book, so I think it can be [read creatively], particularly if you're doing historical books.' (Book Group)

'What's 'creative'? I think that's what riles me about the use of the word, 'creative'...

... You can get really great ideas when you're reading non-fiction. I do when I'm reading for teaching, for example. You're reading something and you think, "oh yeah yeah yeah". It sparks off something else, then you think, "ooh yes, I could blah blah blah", that becomes creative.' (Book Group)

The feeling was also voiced that reading for information was an essential forerunner to the creative part of reading, one needs to take in the information first, before then doing something with it

'But isn't all reading creative? You're given a sentence, you start reading a book and you then, you're imagining, you're putting your views and your background and everything else onto the information you get. Some of the books, something I read recently and I got a couple of chapters in and thought, "this isn't a male, it's a female" and there was just that one sentence that suddenly defined the sex of the character. So you're thinking along one line and obviously you've created the view of the characters and everything else. All of a sudden you get a bit more information and you were wrong so, you shift in the blink of an eye.' (Book Group)

'I wish I could remember the stories my great aunt would tell us ... she was a great storyteller... I can remember her recipe, she used to make her own yoghurt in the days before ski yoghurt came along because she came from Armenia... there was always plain yoghurt sitting there in the kitchen. Those sorts of stories where you create the experience of being there, so it's kind of information and experience.' (Book Group)

For something that the less engaged had assumed was rather simple, the proposition seemed to mystify rather than clarify what reading was about and in doing so, failed to motivate them

“I think it sounds complicated. It seems too complicated rather than perhaps it is.” (Unenthusiastic reader)

6.3 Response to the term, ‘creative reading’

Even if many participants accepted the premise that reading can be a creative activity and that the experience of reading is important, the term, ‘creative reading’ was not viewed favourably by anyone. It was universally rejected as

- ‘highbrow, fancy and complicated’ (unenthusiastic readers)
- ‘arty farty’ (regular readers)
- ‘patronising’ and unhelpful (book group)

Because it was not immediately meaningful, it was seen as potentially alienating. The phrase also had immediate associations for some people with ‘creative writing’, another activity that was seen as ‘for other people’ or something that was endured at school. This led to a feeling that ‘creative reading’ was more about **education** than enjoyment and something that needed to be worked at

*‘I can understand encouraging reading but encouraging a certain type of reading. Again, it’s like being back **at school**.’ (Highly engaged reader)*

‘I don’t like ‘creative reading’. When I was at school I didn’t enjoy reading, only read as an adult and it used to be, “we’ve got creative writing”, “oh, I hate that, got to write a story now”. And it just brings back that, “oh, I don’t want to do this” and I had no pleasure from it at all as a child. I think reading for pleasure or leisure reading, something like that.’ (Occasional reader)

*“I’d leave the room. I’d be in the wrong **class**, wouldn’t I?...”*

...I wouldn’t know what to expect, where it was leading.” (Unenthusiastic readers)

“Highbrow...”

...It just doesn’t say anything to me, I can’t put it into a box, I can’t say what ‘creative reading’ means.” (Unenthusiastic readers)

'Creative, that's like saying 'must'...' (Occasional reader)

'Creative reading' in fact connoted many of the very things that it would doubtless wish to be distanced from, such as control, intellectualism, a chore. It was also more readily associated with more factual material as this was more likely to lead to a 'product' of some kind

'The book I'm reading at the moment - I'm reading for pleasure but I'm also reading that victim support manual which is creative reading because I've got to create something out of that.' (Highly engaged reader)

'Reading for pleasure' was offered as an alternative and this was certainly preferred by most participants including the unenthusiastic readers who saw it as simpler and more recognisable as an everyday expression

'It's [creative reading] fancy and complicated. I think I prefer 'reading for pleasure', not education.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

It spoke much more of reading as an experience and of enjoyment gained from reading. It was less about an end product but about the experience itself being rewarding. It also suggested an individual, personal pursuit which was the type of reading preferred by most of the participants

'I would expect something different from 'pleasure reading', I'd expect for something to come from 'creative reading' rather than 'reading for my own pleasure'...

Could that end result not just be you feeling you've got something out of it, that maybe you've engaged emotionally with the characters?

...That's just 'pleasure reading' then to me, if it's just for me, if I was just going to get enjoyment out of it.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

The occasional readers were of a similar view, preferring to put the emphasis on the pleasure angle. They suggested 'enjoyable, leisure, pleasure or comfort reading'

'Pleasure reading is better...

... A great big armchair, a nice cosy bed!' (Occasional readers)

At the other end of the spectrum of engagement, the highly engaged readers disagreed about the options, 'creative reading' and 'reading for pleasure', some seeing them as the same, others as different, but most opted for the latter

'I think they sound like different things...

... I don't, I think ...

... 'Reading for pleasure' is something that you do personally but creative reading is something that you probably pass the knowledge on...

... 'Creative reading' sounds like hard work!' (Highly engaged readers)

'I would feel alienated by that [creative reading]. I think reading for pleasure is two things. I read for my own pleasure or I read with my grandchildren - that gives me huge pleasure from seeing them being creative. But 'creative reading', I think, "ooh, hard work, not me, practical and involved".' (Highly engaged reader)

A couple of members of this group proposed 'reading as an experience' as a more flexible descriptor that could be applied to both fiction and factual material

"Reading as an experience', that covers everything you could possibly pick up because reading fiction, that's an experience in itself, reading non-fiction... every type of reading gives you some sort of experience, whether it's good or not.' (Highly engaged reader)

Regular readers suggested that the descriptor should convey development, gain, pleasure, an emotional response, the joy of reading and brought them all together in the phrase, 'read to live, live to read, read to grow'

'It's reading for a reaction, even if it's negative, even if you put the book down at the end and say, "that was rubbish". If someone had asked you why and you can come back with an answer, then you've got something out of it. I think if you can react mentally, emotionally, whatever, even if you cry at the end of the book, you know why you've cried at the end of the book and why it's touched you, again a reaction.' (Regular reader)

Finally, the book group interpreted reading creatively as engaging with the work rather than passively taking in information so that it becomes a rewarding experience

'We're saying it's creative in the way that everyone engages with a book in a slightly different way, we've got our own take on things, so I don't know, I don't think ... creative and reading are two words I'd put together in that way ...

... And it depends on the book and how much you're fed when you're reading, as to whether ... we would find it boring I think if we didn't have to engage and imagine and fill in a few gaps.' (Book Group)

7 Libraries and other resources

7.1 Introduction

In this section we focus on the role of libraries and technology in reading and the experiences and views of participants before they undertook some of the ‘homework’ tasks, and afterwards.

7.2 Libraries

- Before

At the first workshop, it was revealed that libraries were used by a small number in each of the groups. The most prolific user was a lady who belonged to two libraries

‘I couldn’t do without my library, wherever I am. I’ve got to belong to one, I get about 10/12 books a fortnight and will read non fiction as well as fiction. I like to go along to see what they’ve got on offer, so to speak. So somebody’s decided what the theme will be, then I’ll go and have a look and possibly pick up three or four books on that subject that I wouldn’t normally have touched so ... Somebody within the library has decided on I don’t know, Sharp, Bernard Cornwell, so you’d have him on the stand but you’d also have other authors that write about the same subject so picking up something like that, meeting new authors, reading new areas that you wouldn’t normally touch.’ (Highly engaged reader)

At the other end of the scale was the occasional reader who liked to ask for large print books when she went on holiday and the unenthusiastic reader who had thought she might be able to cope with a ‘quick read’ from her library until she discovered they were not the short books she thought

‘We’ve got a table in ours and it says, ‘Quick Reads’ and I’ve picked them up and thought, “ooh look, I might be able to read that” and they’re not quick reads! But I suppose they must want them back really, I’ve been tempted thinking, “perhaps I could read that” but ...

What do they mean by a quick read?

...that you get a week to read them in, that they’re popular, that they need to be back quickly rather than they’re a short story.” (Unenthusiastic reader)

For many, libraries were associated with children and learning to read or doing research for a school project. Some were also aware that libraries today offer a greater range of activities for children – singing sessions, story telling, workshops and so on.

The internet was thought to have removed some of need for libraries although an older man had used it for personal research on his family tree and it was recognised that libraries allowed more people to access computers and the internet

'I do think the internet's had a huge influence on me personally, I used to go to libraries as a child but I wouldn't sort of go to a library now to pick up a book. But if I've got it in front of me on my computer I am more likely to read it.' (Regular reader)

'They've moved on, especially talking about libraries with regards to kids, half term and that. They lay on activities, there's God knows how many different six feet tall people in costumes now in libraries, Barney, the Book Bear or whatever, they're definitely making a more conscious effort to pull in younger people. And I think with the internet as well, most libraries now have got computers in, access to the web and it's not, "come in, choose a book and go again". They're actively encouraging you to spend time in the building.' (Regular reader)

The unenthusiastic readers approached the subject of libraries rather wryly with jokes about whether or not they knew where to find one and how one person had not noticed that their local library had been demolished. Their views tended to be more negative based on preconceptions that libraries were neither interesting nor fun and that a prominent feature was being fined for not returning books. However, some of the more engaged readers shared this jaundiced view, often singling out particular libraries for their unhelpful staff or dreariness

'Guildford Library is very stale, it's quite inaccessible in a lot of ways and a lot of the people who work there won't look at you, they don't seem to want ...

... Not interactive, is it?' (Highly engaged reader)

Others confessed that they knew little about their library because they had never visited it. It was recognised that libraries help solve the problem of the cost of buying books, although a few commented that they liked to own the books they read

'Talking about time constraints earlier on, there's also financial constraints. If you're into movies, you can go to the cinema every week but you can go to the library, pick up a book and it's cost you nothing and it's something you can encourage for no price at all.' (Regular reader)

There was a fairly common feeling that libraries did not reach out to potential users to tell them what they had to offer, relying instead on people visiting to find out.

- After

A visit to the local library was one of the tasks that many participants opted to carry out. A few more would have liked to have done so but the opening times were such that they could not do so because they worked during the day

'I didn't actually make it to my library but I tried, the opening hours were absolutely atrocious, only during the day time and I'm at work all day.'
(Regular reader)

For the majority of those visiting, the experience was often a valuable, eye-opening one. Even those who knew their library well (though just to borrow books) or knew that libraries had been changing, were often delighted by the range of activities on offer. The introduction of activities that brought sound into the building (singing groups, jazz, for example) and the addition of services such as book delivery, were seen as welcome departures from the previously more inward-looking institution. Several participants identified the value of the library as a local resource, a centre of activities and a hub for local information; somewhere to pick up application forms for fun runs, find out about local societies, do genealogical research

'Yeah, it might be overstating it but I just thought, "gosh, I didn't realise how much libraries have come along".' (Regular reader)

'I also went with my eyes open this time, not to get books although I did pick up six or so. I saw about the Book Start and that it was free, I saw about all the different reading groups even from 18 months old, half an hour, up to an hour, weekly, monthly. I picked up leaflets about reading groups, how to start it up and there is a dedicated librarian that will help you set it all up. There's a regular reading group at Aldershot as well on a monthly basis, right the way through the year and they've got a really good range of books as well, I might dabble with it... I was really impressed with what they actually had to offer.' (Highly engaged reader)

'The library I went to was Walsall Library, which also has a museum, I didn't have a chance to look in there. They've got a reference library, a lending library, children's library plus the museum split over two floors. I was surprised to learn that they did. They've got a learning space, @Walsall.com. They sell stationery, regular book sales, they have magazine sales, you can read newspapers up to seven days in the past and previous if you want, they go down to the cellars apparently. They've got a Walsall young writers' group, I've got a phone number if anyone's interested, they sell CDs, DVDs, movies ...

It was different to what you'd expected?

Oh yeah, changed a lot since I've last been.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

'I went to the local library and I was surprised how much there was at the library, activities and things going on... so they do a book club at the library, then they've got voting about certain books that people have read, mother and toddler classes, there seemed to be people coming in that read the books to the toddlers and then they've got audio clubs running there as well, so I was surprised at how much was going on at the local library... I was very impressed for the children so yeah, I would actively encourage them to use it a lot more.' (Occasional reader)

In fact, two participants joined the library on their visit, others said they might return and yet others said they would be encouraging family members to visit even if they did not want to join themselves. One lady thought she might send her teenagers to the library to use the computer there while the family one was out of commission

'I went to the local library in Great Barr, it was really a small building but plenty to offer. As soon as I walked in, the display board had great reads of fiction, the other side was biography of famous people, they was doing something for 50 plus programme for the whole year ... plus they was doing a delivery service as well, there was a readers club as well. I was quite impressed. They had flexible learning as well, computers, internet, about 10 computers, quite reasonable size, plenty to offer. As I was there, I joined so I'll get my membership in about seven days.' (Occasional reader)

As expected there was certainly a lot for children but also for much younger children, and there was much for adults too. The market less successfully catered for seemed to be the teenagers

'The only area I was concerned for was the teenage area, it was a very small little corner for them whereas the younger children have got a larger section and it's very bright and colourful, there's a lot more made for the younger children. I imagine that's because of the reading groups they have for them but I think the teens need a bit more.' (Highly engaged reader)

An occasional reader sent her daughter to the library to look for graphic novels after finding out about them on the internet but they had a poor selection and these seemed to be mainly aimed at boys. She was disappointed that the librarian did not engage her daughter by offering to order some books or finding out what else might suit her.

In fact, reports on the libraries visited were not unanimously favourable and again, focused on the attitude of the staff and the quality of the environment

'I went to Farnham library and I must admit the first impression I got, I actually joined the library at the same time, was about the penalties and fines. So yes, Farnham library I agree, not overly friendly.' (Regular reader)

'Erdington library's quite old fashioned, I don't think it's that inspiring. It's got lots in there but the children's area is really good, very interactive and very bright and modern but the adult section's really dreary and like an old fashioned library. You have to look beyond that because there is a lot of stuff there but it could do with a ... I think to try and encourage younger people, it needs a bit of a modernisation.' (Occasional reader)

One highly engaged reader had compared the websites of the neighbouring library services of Surrey and Hampshire and had found that the latter painted a far more appealing picture of what was on offer

'I went to the library, one of the interesting things I thought was comparing Hampshire and Surrey websites, the libraries are just vastly different ... that was Surrey which just was very boring, didn't want you to look at all. This was Hampshire which straightaway says things like "free service for people in sheltered accommodation, residential and nursing home day centres", "join the library between 14th Feb and 9th March and claim your free book". It straightaway gets you in.' (Highly engaged reader)

7.3 New Technology

- Before

Across the groups, participants' experience of reading was largely confined to printed material. There was minimal awareness and use of e-books (Kindle/Sony) and only one unenthusiastic reader mentioned Nintendo in the context of offering access to 'hundreds of books'. Reading reviews on the Amazon website was the principal way in which the internet had a role to play.

Moreover there seemed to be little appetite for greater use especially with respect to e-books. Resistance was based on concerns about eyesight and the desire to read in a different format to that used at work all day

"You know when you've been at work all day and just staring at the computer, you get home and you have a headache and all sorts, I don't know." (Unenthusiastic reader)

Many valued the feel of a book and assumed that the e-book reader would be cold and impersonal. They were also concerned about losing what was a costly device.

Even audio-books were not much in evidence. Some liked them for family car journeys and one man spoke of how his sight impaired mother liked listening to talking books but among the unenthusiastic readers, they were thought to send you to sleep.

Participants were generally surprised when the use of computer games with a narrative was brought up. All the mothers of teenage or older sons in the book group were aware of the games and admitted that their initial reaction had been to be quite worried about the time spent in apparent isolation playing them. They agreed that they had adjusted their thinking and now viewed them as 'very creative and quite sociable', possibly also helping to foster reading skills

'My son, not that that he's unsociable, but thinking about it, I think we have this big prejudice, we hold reading up as like this thing, this fantastic thing

... I think possibly our generation have a sentimental feeling about reading...

... Exactly my point and yes, we hold it up, but actually times have changed. It is a great thing, it's lovely, but it's not the only thing ...

... I think a lot of those computer games have probably helped Dan develop his reading skills actually, because there's a lot of reading involved, a lot of typing is involved and it's social.' (Book Group)

One woman in the highly engaged group was a keen resident of Second Life and knowledgeable about World of Warcraft and while she felt they involved little reading, she could see that they offer many of the benefits of social reading

'I'm part of an online community, it's called Second Life, it's a game and basically you can create different, all sorts of different things, it's pretty much, the mind boggles, because it's a complete virtual community...

And you're interacting with other people?

... Interacting with other people and you're going to different places and you're doing all sorts of different things ... so again, it's a bit of escapism, if you want to learn how to pilot an aircraft, you pilot an aircraft, things like that. Obviously it's not real but it gives you that sort of ... it's not as time consuming as how long it would actually take to learn to pilot a plane but it's just, I find it really interesting. And again, it's one of those things, broadening your horizons, opening your mind to different points of view, different ways of looking at things and it's creative as well because you can create all sorts of different scenarios and you can spend money and buy things, trade things.' (Highly engaged reader)

- After

The 'homework' pack provided participants with information that they could supplement by looking at sites on the internet. Indeed, much of this information signposted them to sites that promoted reading in some form on the web. Some in each group looked into all or some of these sites though rather fewer than visited the library or talked to their friends and family.

Some websites had greater appeal than others and a number were felt to be 'too highbrow'. The American format of certain sites was disliked by a small number who visited them although the concept of offering a facility to catalogue one's books was rather liked

'I can't remember whether it was Safari.com or Llibrarything.com, that they had a facility where you could go and catalogue all your books and you could keep your library and then swap them back and forth and that's totally my sort of thing. I like cataloguing so I thought that was really cool. I didn't have time to do it then but it's certainly something I'm going to go back and do.' (Highly engaged reader)

The website lovereading.co.uk was also seized on by a couple of women (including one of the unenthusiastic readers) who registered with it. The ability to dip into a book before buying was part of its appeal as well as its very friendly and unintimidating design

'But I liked the one, the lovereading.co.uk, I had a good look at that one because there were books on there, Richard and Judy's Top 10 were on there. And you can actually read an extract of the start of a book which I thought was really good, because there was a book on there that I actually looked at in Waterstones, so I was able to read the first chapter of it and I thought that was a really, really good idea. So yeah, I really enjoyed it.' (Unenthusiastic reader)

A few other women had looked at examples of digital fiction; one finding that it held her interest while the other was unsure about the strain of reading on screen

'But something else I found quite interesting was the digital fiction. I had a little look on the website and I actually found myself starting to read it and I couldn't stop! I went back on the next day and carried on reading the next chapter. I didn't finish it but I did manage to read quite a few chapters of one of the digital books and I found that quite interesting. I didn't know at all that they existed.' (Regular reader)

'I don't know if I quite like the idea because for me, sitting reading a book online, unless I suppose if you limit yourself to ten minutes at a time, it hurts my eyes and I get a headache. I suppose you are supposed to limit yourself but if you're reading something online and it's good, you want to keep going and keep going. I think they're a good idea for some things but not if it's a long book, it would have to be short fiction or something like that.' (Occasional reader)

Another had sought out graphic novels suitable for her 14 year old non-reading daughter.

7.4 Social reading

We have noted at 5.3.3 that a couple of participants had decided to look into joining a book group after reading about them as part of their 'homework' and indeed there were other positive outcomes from these tasks

- a couple of people felt that poetry slams looked interesting, possibly as a family activity
- the concept of book crossing grabbed the imagination of a small number and led to an enthusiasm for the idea of exchanging books

'At work now, we are swapping books, paperbacks. Most of us are planning our summer holidays and it's got to the point where somebody said, "oh, I've got a really good book at home" and before you knew it, we've now formed our own little book group at work, so everybody brings their books in and we just pick them out of the thing and take them on holiday and bring them back.' (Regular reader)

'I'm heavily into scouting and I suddenly got bit with this bug that I'm going to put a box in the corner of the scout hut, just so that kids can come in and put their books that they don't want any more in this box and take one.' (Regular reader)

- a number of participants seemed to derive much satisfaction from talking to others about reading and a couple found they had reawakened a desire to read in others

'I think the most interesting bit was what a lot of other people said, talking to people and I found I'd inspired my father-in-law to start reading. He took early retirement about four/five years ago and hadn't picked a book up since he was at school and now he's never without one. I have to watch him every time he comes round our house because mine disappear

off the shelf and I'm quite possessive about my books, so I have to make sure I get them back off him.' (Regular reader)

8 Ideas for encouraging reading

8.1 Introduction

Divided into smaller groups of between five and six people in the second workshop, participants set about generating ideas that they felt would encourage people to read more. Following presentation of each group's ideas, each participant individually selected five ideas from across all those presented which they felt had most promise. The ideas which gained most support are emboldened in the text.

In addition, one of the questions asked of the ninety or so friends and family to whom the participants spoke was what would help them to read more for pleasure. We have incorporated these ideas into this feedback.

Some of the ideas created in the groups were not new but based on activities of which participants were already aware. In other cases, they seemed to be unaware that such things were already available.

8.2 Raising the profile of reading

There was a widespread call for a higher profile for reading which, it was assumed, would require **marketing and advertising in the press and on television and radio**. Any campaign had to be a long way from the gremlin themed literacy ad and the common assumption was that in order to have broad appeal, it might **use a variety of celebrities**. Various formats were suggested

- celebrities choosing their favourite books and explaining why

'I don't know if everyone's seen the Nintendo DS Lite advert where they've got every cool celebrity under the sun playing the DS whereas if you had something slightly similar, with celebrities just sitting reading a book on holiday or in their home, with the kids or with their dog, something like that.' (More engaged reader)

- celebrity readings on TV
- 'Book of the week/month' read and commented on by celebrities and discussed on mainstream programmes like GMTV and Loose Women rather than niche broadcasters (Sky Arts, Channel 4)

- a modern day ‘Jackanory’

‘Somebody really well thought of and well respected, just to read a chapter of a book every week.’ (Less engaged reader)

- celebrities talking about their own difficulties with reading and what they get out of it

‘I know a rugby player, Kenny Logan’s dyslexic and he doesn’t hide that fact and I think that’s encouraged a lot more people to come out and identify that they do have an issue, they can’t read and just seek help.’ (Less engaged reader)

‘But I think as well that they could put the slant on it that “I wasn’t a very good reader as a child and then something happened and sparked my interest and look where I am now”. ...

... Yes, sort of like Richard Branson, “I didn’t do well at school” and all that sort of thing.’ (More engaged readers)

- show characters in TV soaps reading a book when they are waiting in say, a café

‘On some of those soaps, they go into the cafe or they go into the park and if they’re on their own, they’re sitting there, gazing at a menu or something. If I go into a cafe and people are sitting on their own, quite often some of them have got books in their hands but you never see anyone reading on television.’ (More engaged reader)

There was some awareness of various campaigns to promote reading such as World Book Day and the suggestion was made several times that **there should be more such events** with possibly a National Book Week.

On a more local footing, it was proposed that libraries should promote their services more actively, and local events and groups should be advertised in the local newspaper or in prominent places such as the notice boards of doctors’ surgeries

‘Libraries do a great job of promoting themselves internally. As soon as you get in the library, there’s loads of information everywhere but it’s like this gentleman said, getting people to actually go to the library, I don’t know whether it would be through leaflets through doors, I don’t know. But I think that’s what really needs to be encouraged more, just getting people actually down there because once they’re down there, like a lot of people have said, they didn’t realise the amount of things they do down there.’ (More engaged reader)

'We thought that the libraries needed to advertise a bit more on their hours, nobody seemed to know exactly when they open. People turn up and they're closed and whatever and also, what they needed to do when they went to the library to join. Some are online, do we know this, do the libraries publicise this enough?' (More engaged reader)

The showcasing of books and fund raisers for buying books were expected to be supported by publishers, again at a local level. Authors might also be involved in promotions.

8.3 Promotions

While there was not widespread resistance to buying books on the basis of cost, it was suggested by many groups and especially the less engaged readers, that it might help to incentivise people to read in some way. Given that reading was seen as requiring effort and commitment (mainly in terms of time but also financial), there seems to be a logic to this. The ideas related therefore in part to saving money but also to gaining something that the non-reader considered more enjoyable. Specific ideas were:

- **a reduction in book prices** – for example, what happened to the 99p classic?
- 'half price book week'
- 'half price' book exchange – if you bring along a book you no longer want, you can buy a new book at half price
- **giveaways of books and audio books in tabloid newspapers and magazines**
- **competitions, rewards, incentives in general that in effect, mean you are 'paid for reading'** eg. borrowing a computer game free from the library if you complete a book game, getting concert tickets if you read so many books or getting a free music download if you download a book onto your ipod
- **book tokens from supermarkets so that the shopper can save them to buy a book (rather than collecting them for a school)**

'The amount of people behind you in the queue that say, "do you want the vouchers for schools?" and they all go, "no". But if they said, "do you want a voucher yourself?" I could put it towards a book.' (Less engaged reader)

- book tokens on packets of crisps and pop, thereby targeting children through the very things that they like to eat
- offer pick 'n mix boxes of books so that readers can select the books they want to buy rather than having them chosen for them

'You can get box sets but they're usually picked for you ... and you don't like all of them, so why can't you pick the ones that you want? So you'd want six for whatever amount of money.' (More engaged reader)

8.4 Trialling

The idea of being able to 'try out' a book before buying, borrowing or committing to reading it, came up in several groups. This was so that the potential reader could gain an idea of what they were likely to get out of the book and whether they were likely to enjoy it

- **'try before you buy'** so that you can quickly get an idea of what a book is about and see if it might suit you. It would provide more than the cover blurb and show the book's highlights or take the form of excerpts from an audio-book

'Like a PlayStation game, you used to be able to scan it into a screen and it would show you highlights of the game and things like that ... you know, when you read the back of the book and it gives you the quick brief of what the book's about, maybe just go a bit further on that.' (Less engaged reader)

'Audio books, having a room or a booth in the library or in a coffee shop to try it out, just to try snippets of it or to try the first chapter and you think "actually yeah, okay, I'll go and buy the book".' (More engaged reader)

'Illustrations were encouraged, this is again going down towards the lower level, giving them a picture to describe the book almost, trying to say "this book will give you this" and a picture of the emotional uplift or something that will give them the basis of what the book's about. A picture says a thousand words and if we can drag them in with the picture to then read the thousand words, it's brilliant.' (More engaged reader)

- short book 'teasers' given away in shopping centres – the full book is then available to buy in book shops or supermarkets

- film offer – see the film of the book and get the book discounted or free

‘Couldn't you do some kind of promotion where you buy the film or watch the film and get something free to get money off the book, because if they did go and watch the film, they might move onto the book maybe if it's offered to them in some way...

... Maybe there should be a film connection with cinemas or local rental stores, Blockbuster, if they're going to do the film, they could quite easily put the book on the shelf.’ (More engaged readers)

‘I remember at school we read this book, it was absolutely terrible, ‘Far from the Madding Crowd’, I didn't understand a word of it. But then we got the video, we watched the video and I understood all of it...

... Try before you buy...

... Free use of video/DVD before the book or something?’ (Less engaged readers)

- play offer – give away or offer for sale at a discount the book of the play or the script

‘We talked about theatres and amateur dramatics groups, people who go and watch those types of plays, maybe being given free literature following that, so it might be the script for the play.’ (More engaged reader)

8.5 Book exchange

The concept of book crossing and **swapping books** gave rise to various ideas for ways of saving money and paper while accessing books. A range of contexts were envisaged where such an exchange might take place - railway stations, cafes, the work place, libraries, the golf club, youth clubs, block of flats, the supermarket (*‘swap and shop’*). It was noted at 7.4 that a couple of regular readers had started something up in their work place and scout troop. Some of the less engaged readers also suggested this idea

‘In a workplace, just having a book exchange system, say a team of 10 colleagues, you get a load of books in and just swap them all round, review each other's books and whatnot.’ (Less engaged reader)

‘And then we thought about a swap shop but not just in a library. There's no reason why they can't have a swap shop in a supermarket where they have cafes or people can sit down and have a read. I see that quite often in libraries and they could have it in schools, pretty much anywhere, even in the local corner shop. All you have to do is, you put a book in and you take one out, as a kind of mix and match.’ (Less engaged reader)

It was suggested that the swapping could be turned into an event so that people have the opportunity to tell others about why they liked a particular book

'Book swap parties, this would be really good for teenagers as well that don't think it's cool to read books. If you make it a party and then if they want to swap books, fine. If they want to just turn up and have the party – because they might get there and say, "I haven't got a book to swap but I'll come to the next one", so try and encourage that way as well...

... Talking to each other, I think you can get more of a feeling of what the book's about, somebody's emotions, how they talk to you, it's all in the body language, it's all about, "God this was really good, you get to the middle and you can't put it down" and anyone who says to you, "I sat there for the whole day reading the book", you think, "wow, that's quite good". So it does encourage you to pick them up.' (More engaged readers)

The appealing concept of book crossing was one that a number of participants felt should be promoted more and that the **environment could be used as a platform** for encouraging the exchange of books

'We talked about having an environmental book swap campaign, so putting an environmental spin on things. So if you've got books collecting dust in the loft, think about how many trees you could save, bring them to a central place, bring all your other books and perhaps take a couple to read yourself.' (More engaged reader)

8.6 Social reading

A few ideas for more formal reading activities were proposed by the groups but none of them counted among people's favoured choices. The feeling seemed to be that while book groups, for example, might have appeal for certain people and they themselves might like to know about local groups, the types of people in them and how to join, these were not going to be something that would encourage people in general to read more.

The preference was much more for informal types of social reading

- families reading together or reading aloud together
- more encouragement for people to read aloud with the benefits for the person doing it as much as the listener

'If you're being read to, you don't perceive it as work. And you can't be shown up that you can't read and you're stumbling on the words and you don't understand what the words mean. But if you're being read to, it really

does excite you and your imagination, if you're really enjoying it, it then prompts you. It comes from yourself, it comes from within and that's what gets people going, the fact that it's up to them, they've the control, the power and the choice.' (Book Group)

- encouraging people to tell their own stories building on the fascination that children have of what their parents' or grandparents' lives were like as children

'Young children are endlessly interested in what parents did or what grandparents did, how it all hangs together...

... and before, you would have privileged those stories over and above all others in a way, but now, do they have the same standing they might have had in the previous era?..

... so maybe telling your own stories would be a way of getting into that. It's about ownership of that story process.' (Book Group)

- people who enjoy reading should talk to others, almost as advocates of reading

'We thought as well that we, as keen readers, have a duty to promote reading. We all read because we enjoy it and we've got to tell that it's worth doing and I think in some of our comments earlier on around the big table where we talked to friends and family, you've encouraged your colleagues at work to start a book club, that's something we need to do. And it benefits us because the more people we know that read, the more options and chances there are of swapping books, the better information into new authors and what have you.' (More engaged reader)

- books made available in the workplace by employers (and other settings) for people to read at lunchtime and hopefully discuss what they are reading.

8.7 Events

While various organised events were suggested to encourage reading and these in some ways represent another form of social reading, it is worth noting that many of these suggested events are fairly informal - anyone could turn up without making a prior commitment and could drift in and out as they wished. Such events would be made available in the neighbourhood and so people could opt to join in or not depending on how much fun they seemed to be without feeling pressured to participate. Many of the suggestions are aimed at families rather than adults and, while people wanted to

encourage children to read, our feeling is that some might feel more comfortable sharing the spotlight of participation with their children rather than attending an adult-focused event. These ideas were:

- **local book festivals** for all the family including short plays, dressing up, readings etc. Alternatively, children might be taken to such events by their school

'One several of us liked was a book festival, a local festival within any area where you've got several people up and down the road play acting some of the chapters of the book, dressing up for the kids and getting the kids involved, getting the parents involved if they want to but having like a festival for the whole day and try and cover as many authors, as many types of books and get a lot of people interested.' (More engaged reader)

- **family nights/days in the library**

'Family nights, not quite sure exactly how they'd work but run activities to get the whole of the family down. So that perhaps they'd have an author in or a celebrity, somebody reading to the kids whilst the adults, they've got a bit of private reading time to themselves or an author coming and talking to the adults, while the library did something for the kids. So that everybody was involved at the same time.' (More engaged reader)

- book treasure hunt

'I like your idea about the treasure hunts for, it could be any age, it would be lovely for children in the holidays. What a wonderful thing to get kids doing, going on a bear hunt. What about acting out children's picture books? ' (More engaged reader)

- acting out children's books in parks etc. for families

- poetry on the streets as at speakers corner

- poetry slams

'The poetry slams which I looked on the internet, my children would absolutely love, but they're few and far between, but I think that really would encourage children to get into poetry and therefore reading ... I would go to them to take the children. I enjoy poetry so I would happily go but I think it would be a whole family thing.' (Less engaged reader)

Various other ideas for events were proposed by the more engaged readers, many of which involved authors. These were quite different events, things that would need to be

signed up to and might well involve expenditure. By this second workshop, many seemed more confident about the idea of interaction with authors although none of the ideas came high in their lists of favourites.

- themed events with authors, for example, talking about their take on crime/romance etc. This might take place in the local library or could involve visiting the setting for particular books eg. a Morse weekend in Oxford
- weekend breaks/ evenings with author/theme (comparable with a murder mystery)
- author-run workshops
- **book tours that ‘bring a book to life’**
- reading holidays in which participants are encouraged to read different books and possibly write short stories.

8.8 Libraries

Suggestions for things that libraries might do to encourage reading tended to divide into the nuts and bolts of how they organise their services, and the sorts of opportunities to read they might offer. In terms of the nuts and bolts, people wanted:

- **extended library hours such as Saturday and Sunday and evenings**
- the requirements for joining to be simplified
- a 6 week (longer) loan period
- no fines for late returns
- join the library and claim a free book
- consistently welcoming and helpful staff and more appealing environments

*‘It needs to be more welcome and friendly with people. Sometimes it’s make or break getting the person through the door the second time.’
(More engaged reader)*

They also wanted easier access for those who find it difficult to get to their local library or for those who might never think to go because they do not realise that there might be something there to interest them. It is interesting that these ideas tended to come from the less engaged readers

- more local mobile libraries visiting housing estates, work places etc.

'We had mobile libraries. Again, not just targeting a specific audience, mobile libraries everywhere. I remember being in hospital and there were little trolleys with books. Mobile libraries in local villages and not just specific villages, why not go to council estates? Why not go to other areas as well, into work places?' (Less engaged reader)

- **home delivery service for books**
- **'ring and ride' service to the library**

'We thought about a ring and ride, so a bit like a delivery service but this is picking people up from areas and then taking them to libraries. Again, it's not a case of just old people, it could be people with specific needs, it could be people that don't drive, could be kids during holidays, so we thought that was quite important.' (Less engaged reader)

Some of the ideas for extending services related to the range of material that was available to borrow

- comics and magazines

'Libraries to loan magazines. For instance, I'm a member of Top Gear magazine, get that through every month but it's about £4.50 to £5. If libraries get magazines in like that, free of charge, you can hire them for a week or two weeks, so that will be ideal.' (Less engaged reader)

- a greater range of the latest books
- more large print books in mobile libraries
- genuine 'quick reads' (ie. they are short!)
- digital books for loan or to give away
- the allocation of the sequel of a book to a reader who borrows the previous book in the series

'You read a first book and then we tried to get the sequel and we just couldn't get it anywhere, so it would be nice if, when you ordered a book, if it is part of a sequence, that there is an automatic - they order it ready for you.' (Less engaged reader)

Other ideas were for ways of finding out what might be good reads for you.

Interestingly, none of them involved talking to the librarian and it may be that some people prefer a more impersonal service or simply one that means they do not need to come into the library

- reviews available in libraries (including mobile libraries) or online based on what readers think of a book
- recommendations sent to you by the library based on your past borrowing
- information about new books coming in which is sent to you.

Lastly, a number of suggestions were made for different types of activities that libraries might provide

- story tellers at the weekend
- biography workshops facilitating telling/recording of stories - not necessarily the big stories but the small insights into everyday life
- themed displays and activities (possibly involving authors) eg. war, romance

'Perhaps the library could have a theme for a month where they promoted a certain type of book, they could be fiction or they could be factual and then run activities within the library in that time, to promote that.' (More engaged reader)

- coffee shops in libraries (and bookshops).

8.9 New technology

While the majority of participants in the workshops were unsure that new ways of reading were for them, they thought that they had an important role to play in engaging a younger audience. There were suggestions for:

- **free digital/e-book downloads to MP3 players or e-book readers, including short stories**

'First thing we've got is ipod, downloading short stories onto an ipod, for people like students who are on the train or bus, again for revision, things like that.' (Less engaged reader)

'Teens are more into their ipods and MP3s with music, it could almost be linked with something like that, join a library and get a free book download. Plug your ipod in at the library, get a book but also get a free song.' (More engaged reader)

- promotion of downloads for travelling
- mobile phone offers with free downloads of audio books
- encouragement of digital books and availability of a greater variety
- links to technology such as the Nintendo DS to be promoted
- renting out of computer games based on books
- online forums involving different constituencies such as schools, work places, older people
- promotion of websites that help you choose books.

8.10 Reading opportunities

Books might be made available in new settings

- audio book room/booths in coffee shops, libraries, book shops
- books or other material in restaurants and other public places

'Talking books in restaurants, sit in the restaurant, five/ten minutes waiting for the food to come out. Why not have some small books on there, Mr. Men books for the kids? You can read to the kids, the kids can read to themselves. Book reviews for the adults because obviously you're not going to read a novel in ten minutes, but book reviews so you can pick up some ideas there, or talking books.' (More engaged reader)

- book store concessions in coffee shops, supermarkets etc.

8.11 Schools and Children

Many of the ideas reported on thus far involve children and schools but there were others aimed at children in the setting of school

- volunteers going into schools to read to the children
- teachers reading aloud to pupils more
- sport/pop stars/celebrities going into schools to encourage pupils and students to read
- regular school visits to the library
- book clubs in schools
- encouraging students to choose their own books and to use ebooks and blogs
- book quizzes that might be completed on holiday.

Teenagers were felt to miss out on reading opportunities just when they might lose some of the enthusiasm for reading that they discovered in childhood. As noted above, some felt there was a poorer quality of library facilities for this age group. Criticism was also made of the way that secondary school students are not encouraged to use libraries and it was suggested that this should be addressed

'Because I've got young kids, I find that the nursery school and the junior up to primary school level, they really encourage the kids. From secondary school time, although the secondary schools have got libraries, they don't get encouraged to use it...

... I agree, when I phoned the library, she gave me age groups, it was age 4-12 and it was like, what happens after 12? Nothing. I think literally, everything she gave me was in that age group...

... There's only a small space for the teenagers, they're the people who need the most encouraging.' (More engaged reader)

In the same way that it was suggested that families should be encouraged to take part in reading events outside school, ideas were also put forward for bringing parents into school for the same purpose

- a books section for adults at school book fairs
- *‘I went to my daughter’s book fair ... I bought my son and a daughter a book and I possibly would have bought a book, but there was nothing at all for me so it would have been really good.’ (Less engaged reader)*
- other book-related events in school for families
- fund raising events based on books including visits from authors.

8.12 Reading material

The success of certain types of books led some participants to suggest that people might be encouraged to read books that formed part of a serial. The marketing ploy of aiming different cover designs at different age groups was also felt to work.

There were suggestions for there to be greater availability and ‘endorsement’ of the types of reading material that the less enthusiastic reader might prefer, often those that present information in shorter bursts. These included:

- comics and annuals
- short stories
- books with shorter chapters
- *‘He would like to see chapters in books shorter. It’s the thing that when you start getting into the book, you want to get to the end of the chapter and when the chapters are quite long, it kind of puts you off reading, full stop.’ (Less engaged reader)*
- books with more pictures or illustrations
- serialised stories in newspapers. The Metro was suggested as a medium that many people travelling to work in cities read. It was interesting that in both the groups where this was suggested, the association was with Dickens and the original serialisation of his novels
- *‘Some of the newspapers and magazines, where you can get a chapter every week based on a certain book, it’s normally biographies but it could be, they could actually start putting classics in. If people were more likely to pick up a newspaper and read that than reading a book, Nicholas*

Nickleby or something, and it could then follow on from there.' (More engaged reader)

- promotion of song lyrics as poetry. A newspaper article by Ian Rankin in the Sun had highlighted this point for one unenthusiastic reader

'It's been in the paper today, it's poetry. Lyrics of songs are actually poetry if you listen to them, and children listen to ... kids and teenagers listen to CDs.' (Less engaged reader)

- more stories on the radio.

9 The 'Campaign'

9.1 Introduction

The smaller groups were each asked to think about some of the elements of a campaign that would raise the profile of reading as something that people can enjoy.

9.2 Target audience

The general feeling across both workshops was that any campaign aimed at encouraging people to read should be aimed at everyone, regardless of age and background

'We thought obviously, it should be aimed at everyone, aimed at everyone on different levels. There's highbrow readers, people that can't read, children. You can't discriminate who you're aiming at, you want as broad an amount of people that you can possibly get to read and encourage to read.' (More engaged reader)

Only one of the smaller groups proposed that the focus should be on adults because, they argued, a lot was already done to support children's reading.

9.3 Organisations that might be involved

The organisations that they thought needed to be involved in a campaign covered both the public and private sector. Local councils were felt to have a role because many of the activities to promote reading would take place in the locality and they needed to support the libraries.

Participants anticipated that a range of community based organisations would be responsible for delivering or hosting the initiatives; libraries were to the fore but also local arts centres and community centres. Other organisations might have a role to play in developing activities or encouraging their 'members' to take part. These included schools and colleges, youth organisations (including the Scouts Movement) and Youth Offenders institutions.

Given the importance attached to raising the profile of reading generally, local and national media needed to be involved alongside publishers who had a vested interest in encouraging people to read, and celebrities in the form of authors and other personalities who would like to be associated with the campaign

‘And publishers, very much like the authors, should get more involved. I know of names like Macmillan and Penguin and companies like that, but do you really know what they do? Are they doing active things out there in the community?’ (More engaged reader)

Supermarkets (including Marks and Spencer), music and game outlets and book shops, the places selling books and other ‘reading’ materials, would have a role in supporting the campaign in part by providing promotions. Other venues where people come together and spend time (the work place, sports clubs) or places where people meet up but have little to do, might also be supportive in other ways, such as facilitating the exchange of books.

9.4 Name and strapline for the campaign

Many of the ideas for a name for the campaign’s identity revolved around the word ‘Read’, as a play on the word or as a play on the letters making it up (or both). This applied especially (but not exclusively) to the ideas from the more engaged readers.

Name	Strapline
<p>Dare to Read</p> <p><i>‘We came up with a little plan with the word ‘Read’, so ‘Dare To Read’. We just thought it would make people stand up and listen. ‘Dare To Read’, everyone likes a dare, don’t they?’ (More engaged reader)</i></p>	<p>Read, Evolve And Develop</p>
<p>R.E.A.D</p> <p><i>‘We kind of talked about having a celebrity for each letter, so like ‘relaxation’ would be someone lying by a pool, a celebrity laying by the pool reading their book and ‘entertainment’, a celebrity laughing their head off at reading a book, finding it really funny,’ all ages’ could be like the family thing, so we just had different ideas and visual images of celebrities doing things.’ (More engaged reader)</i></p>	<p>Relaxation, Entertainment, All ages and ...</p>
<p>All 4 Reading</p>	<p>Recreation, Escapism, Author, Desire, Inspiring, Novel, Grand tourismo</p>

<p>Read it? Read it</p> <p><i>'We thought it was quite catchy as a name, with a logo of an open book, words, letters, images coming out, this could be done either as a plain picture or then become animated and whatever for television.'</i> (More engaged reader)</p>	<p>A book is for life, not just for Christmas</p> <p><i>'This doesn't necessarily mean you're going to get a book and keep it on your shelf and never give it away, but it means to a degree that what you get from the book that you retain up here [head], retain in there [heart], you get whatever you get from it, you keep that for life, even if you give the book away.'</i> (More engaged reader)</p>
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The ideas from some of the less engaged reader groups were more exhortations to enjoy reading. Some of their sketches of logos that might be associated with the names (book worms and spectacles) seem to be the antithesis of how they think reading should be seen but like some of the ideas below, they demonstrate the desire for the campaign not to be worthy and serious.

Name	Strapline
Let's Get Reading	Read On....!
Love literature, Learn to love literature, Love to read, Enjoy books, Enjoy reading, Easy reading, Once upon a time	Once upon a time, Relish reading, Read your dream, Read and relax, Open your mind
<p>Walter Worm's Reading Revival</p> <p><i>'I think you've got to put a sense of humour in reading, you can't have that sensible factor all the time, you've got to have a bit of humour in it as well...</i></p> <p><i>... I would have thought if it was too heavy, some people might be put off by that anyway...</i></p> <p><i>... too geeky.'</i> (Less engaged reader)</p>	'Walter Worm says reading is fun'