

# READING AHEAD

Newcastle-under-Lyme College integrates reading for pleasure into the curriculum



[Reading Ahead](http://www.readingagency.org.uk) is the new name for the *Six Book Challenge*. See [www.readingagency.org.uk](http://www.readingagency.org.uk)

Since Newcastle-under-Lyme College's foundation studies department first used the Six Book Challenge (now called Reading Ahead) four years ago it has become enshrined in curriculum delivery, achieving not just keen participation from tutors and learners but also praise from Ofsted. According to their report on the college in November 2013, 'the promotion and value of reading skills is highly effective with most learners participating in the national Six Book Challenge.'

Foundation Studies Lecturer Lorraine Myers says: "When our Curriculum Manager forwarded me an email about the Challenge, I thought it offered a useful structure for a reading programme to

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support students with reading issues. I introduced it in a very relaxed, informal way, running 'drop-in' style sessions twice a week where I would chat to students about books they had enjoyed reading, and books they would recommend. The format worked: they began to bring in material they had read at home, or which family and friends had suggested they might like."

## **Support for tutors**

Twenty-one entry level 1 and 2 learners became involved in that inaugural year, all completing the Challenge. Lorraine then led its roll-out to the whole department for the second year, providing short training courses for tutors which supported them with tools like a lesson plan, how to embed it into a scheme of work, and outlining the support and resources that the college's Learning Resource Centre (LRC) could offer, including the Quick Reads series. Lorraine says:

"Our LRC was very supportive, buying lots of new books especially for the Six Book Challenge, and tutors were really enthusiastic. Most importantly, we were delighted when participating students' reading ability, confidence, self-esteem and speaking in class all improved."

The last two years have seen the Challenge become an ingrained part of the college's foundation studies curriculum, with tutors increasingly taking individual ownership of delivery, but keeping it an informal, enjoyable experience.

## **"I am excited to share my reading experiences"**

Lorna Hardiman, a lecturer in functional skills, maths and English and beauty therapy has delivered it for the first time this year as a key part of her functional skills lessons. She says:

"I've had great success. It encourages wide reading, which spurs students on in other areas of study. For example, it gets them reading things like newspaper articles, and then we can work on skills like scan reading, and summarising and transferring information. Some learners had been turned off reading because they haven't been interested in 'set books', so they've been really pleased to discover that reading about things they're interested in can count towards completing the Six Book Challenge."



Meanwhile, her 18 year-old life skills student Daniel Edwards (pictured) was thrilled to be able to read fashion and celebrity magazines like Heat and Best to complete the Challenge. He says:

"I loved sitting with my Mum and having cake whilst reading fashion magazines and books together. You learn so much when you are reading! Read about a subject you are really interested in and keep reading in your spare time. When we have class discussions, I am excited to share my reading experiences. The Six Book Challenge has given me confidence and I will put it on my CV."

## **Endorsement from senior management**

The department of foundation studies now ensures the Six Book Challenge is promoted to prospective students coming for experience days and to new students during their induction visits. For the next academic year, curriculum manager Jeanette Sword has allocated one hour a week to the programme across all functional skills classes - a very visible acknowledgement of the importance of reading for pleasure.

This is fully endorsed by College Principal Karen Dobson. She says: "Through successful participation in the Six Book Challenge, our foundation department learners experience wide ranging opportunities in language and literacy development. Tutors have reported an increased confidence in learners' reading skills, vocabulary and speaking and listening. I would highly recommend it as a very current and enriching project to other colleges and hope there may be scope to integrate it in other departments at the college."

Fifty-eight students completed the 2015 Six Book Challenge, with an additional 11 learners successfully engaged in reading through taking part. "It's an integral part of the curriculum and it's becoming more important year by year," concludes Lorraine Myers. "All of our learners engage with it; it gives them a fantastic sense of achievement."

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