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**Boosting achievement through reading for pleasure – Uxbridge College**

Uxbridge College puts reading at the heart of its offer to students with activity focused on the college learning resource centre. There is a budget to purchase fiction such as young adult readers and popular trilogies which they display prominently next to the library counter together with non-fiction titles linked to themes being explored through college-wide tutorials. They invite in local authors, poets and college alumni to talk to students and have a good working partnership with the public library service in Hillingdon.

Since 2012 the college has run the Reading Agency’s Reading Ahead programme which invites participants to pick six reads of their choice (short texts such as poems and magazine articles as well as books) and record, rate and review them in a small print reading diary in order to get incentives along the way and a certificate on completion.

For the last three years they have adapted the model for use on their college Moodle. This allows staff in the learning resource centre to feed back comments on each review submitted by participants. They encourage students from courses including Foundation Studies, Functional Skills, ESOL, GCSE English and A level to take part meaning that Reading Ahead has a college-wide profile and relevance.

Functional Skills learners select and compare articles on topical issues from different newspapers and enjoy getting feedback on their review-writing skills from someone other than their tutor. Bianca Fanciullacci, Functional Skills and GCSE tutor, explains: *“We can weave in Reading Ahead really naturally. It helps them to realise that English isn’t horrible but actually challenging and fun.”*

GCSE English candidates choose texts of their choice including poetry, in some cases as a break from the intensity of their A level studies. Many of these are young people retaking their GCSE English who were completely put off reading at school. Nikki Nikolaou, tutor in The Academy, teaching GCSE and A levels, says: *“They may have had a negative experience at school where reading felt like punishment. Reading Ahead has helped us to embed reading for pleasure into the curriculum. Their increased writing ability is directly linked to writing reviews for Reading Ahead.”*

Rebecca Morgan came to Uxbridge College without any qualifications. She took part what was then the 2015 Six Book Challenge before sitting her GCSEs and gaining a B in English: *"The best thing for me was the GCSE English grade I got. I had never read a whole book beforehand in my life: I was not a big reader, but it got me reading.”* Rebecca is now studying for A-Levels and aims to go to university.

ESOL tutors encourage their learners to choose anything from articles in the Metro newspaper to comics, titles from the Oxford Bookworms series and Quick Reads, all of which they can discuss with their peers in a regular book club. ESOL tutor Agnes Wodz says: *“Reading is a vital skill for developing all aspects of language. We’re lucky that they can choose anything to read for Reading Ahead. We have adults who have had no education before and we use images to help comprehension. We model reading aloud and get them reading books to their children.”*

The college’s record with Reading Ahead has built from 79 completers in 2012 to 1006 in 2016. For the last couple of years they have mapped completion rates to exam results and seen a correlation between success with the programme and achievement in exams. In 2016, across all courses, those who completed Reading Ahead had a 10% higher success rate including for GCSE English and Maths, rising to a 12.5% uplift for Functional Skills.

Library staff have remarked upon a progression in the length and quality of the book reviews submitted with knock-on benefits for writing skills. Suba Dickerson, now Head of Business, previously led the library team running Reading Ahead, confirms: *“Reading Ahead presses all the right buttons. It can move students from feeling that they have ‘got to read’ to ‘want to read’. You need to hook them in and get them interested so that they say: ‘Actually I can do it.’”*

There’s support from senior managers too. *“We really believe in the Reading Ahead initiative and are so pleased and proud about the progress made by the students,”* comments Principal Laraine Smith OBE.

*“We are extremely happy with the results of Reading Ahead,”* says Gavin Hughes, Director – Learning & Support Services. *“We know we are doing the right thing – everybody is engaged in it.”*

**Top Tips**

* Stress the centrality of the college library at induction and ensure that students know how to find appealing books at an appropriate reading level.
* Set deadlines and targets for completion of Reading Ahead.
* Encourage everyone to take part to engender a buzz around reading.
* Use a whole range of reading materials from short print and online texts chosen by students to Quick Reads and longer books.
* Link other college-wide activities to Reading Ahead – for example Uxbridge College flag up reading associated with their weekly EPR (Employability, Progression, Review) tutorial which is now available on their college app.
* Reward students but also the tutors who support them at an annual college-wide award ceremony attended by the principal, senior managers and an outside speaker (yachtswoman Tracey Edwards in 2016).