

First Minister's Reading Challenge Advisory Group

Minutes

5 October 2017

10.00am – 12.00pm

Scottish Book Trust, Sandeman House, Trunk's Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1SR

Present:

Caitlyn Bannatyne – Graphic Novelist

Kevin Brack – Brunstane Primary School

Antonia Clark – Scottish Book Trust

Clair Halliday – National Parent Forum of Scotland

Jen Harwood – Scottish Book Trust

Lucy Jukes – Chair

Catriona Mackenzie – Scottish Government

Susan Morton – Inverclyde Academy

James Robertson – Writer

Pamela Tulloch – Scottish Library and Information Council

Katherine Wilkinson – Scottish Book Trust

Matt Wheavil – Scottish Book Trust (note-taker)

Apologies:

Derek Brown – Association of Directors of Education

Angie Crawford – Waterstones

Helen Fairlee – Education Scotland

Lindsey Fraser – Fraser Ross Associates

Margaret Leitch – National Parent Forum of Scotland

James McParland – St. Maurice's High School

Amina Shah – Scottish Book Trust

Rosemary Ward – Gaelic Books Council

0. Previous Minutes Approved

Pamela Tulloch attended the previous meeting and should be added to the list of those present. Other than this the minutes were approved by the meeting.

1. Registration statistics

1.1. Comparison of registration year-on-year

Scottish Book Trust (SBT) introduced the registration statistics documents, which show that at this time last year 53% of primary schools had signed up, against 27% this year. 98% of registered schools have registered their P1-3 classes alongside P4-7. Jen Harwood reported that the new P1-3 resources have been received well by teachers at the information events she ran in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness and Perth in September and October.

SBT said that they believed that many of the schools that signed up last year had not actively engaged with the First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) and had registered to see what FMRC was. A drop in registration levels is therefore not unexpected; however, given that they now know what FMRC is and have examples from last year to draw on, SBT believe that schools participating this year will be more engaged across the board, and anticipate receiving more submissions for the challenges.

The meeting discussed anecdotal evidence suggesting that some schools that took part last year and have not yet re-registered are concerned about the competitive nature of the programme. SBT reported that they continue to work with schools to show the range of ways schools and pupils can engage with FMRC.

1.2. Registration levels across Local Authorities

The meeting discussed the document showing the differing levels of participation across Local Authorities. The meeting agreed that these statistics suggest that certain areas of Scotland should be targeted and agreed that SBT should engage with Local Authorities where appropriate to encourage them to promote registration. This could include providing evidence from the Blake Stevenson evaluation report and examples of FMRC being positively cited by HMIE to show the impact FMRC had in schools actively taking part in 2016/17.

Further to the discussion under item 1.1, the meeting agreed that it is important that FMRC be fundamentally about reading culture rather than competition, and discussed how to strengthen this perception with ideas suggested including individual rewards such as badges for participating pupils. The meeting agreed that the evolution of FMRC into a Reading Communities model, in the vein of Eco Schools, Digital Schools and Rights Respecting Schools, would provide a sustainable approach, allowing schools and communities to build on their reading cultures year-on-year, promoting long-term engagement.

The meeting discussed the issue that some schools that were registered last year may assume they are automatically re-registered for this year. SBT agreed that this has been the case for some schools that discovered they needed to actively re-register when they did not receive Reading Passports for the new school year. While automatic re-registration was considered an ideal, SBT noted that in practice school staff turnover and changes in class numbers, combined with web development limitations mean that active re-registration is currently the only feasible system; however, SBT will continue to investigate the possibilities for 2018/19 to ensure registration is as easy as possible for schools.

The meeting discussed what level of registration would represent 'success' this year. Given the above discussions, it was agreed that the registration of 50% of primary schools in Scotland would represent a successful second year of the programme.

Actions:

- SBT to engage with Local Authorities to encourage them to promote registration.
- SBT to investigate the possibilities for 2018/19 to ensure registration is as easy as possible for schools.

1.3 Maintaining momentum into second year of FMRC

The meeting discussed ways to maintain momentum including continued

engagement through social media, such as the possible addition of an Instagram account, and the creation of videos to promote FMRC online, with the possible involvement of the First Minister.

SBT confirmed that it is visiting schools across Scotland to promote Read, Write, Count and is using this as an opportunity to also talk about the FMRC. An additional Outreach Coordinator is being recruited by SBT to enable them to visit more schools and Local Authorities.

The meeting discussed whether FMRC could adopt a universal model, with every school automatically receiving Reading Passports. It was agreed that it is better for schools to actively order Passports to enable SBT to monitor engagement and to avoid unnecessary costs and unused resources.

The meeting acknowledged that some parents have expressed disappointment that their school is not taking part in FMRC and agreed that parents could contact their schools to request they take part.

Given the issues with access to books experienced by many families in areas of high deprivation and/or with no access to a local library, the meeting discussed whether a gifting model could be adopted for FMRC, especially for P4-7 children who don't currently benefit from SBT's other gifting programmes and at which stage the attainment gap begins to widen (and potentially for S1-3 pupils, should FMRC be rolled-out at secondary school level). It was agreed that at this age the power of personal choice and peer recommendation become increasingly important, and such a gifting scheme would need to balance choice with economy. SBT will investigate options in this area, and the Advisory Group will discuss this further at future meetings.

In addition, SBT noted a Read, Write, Count pilot scheme running this year, gifting 'Home Kits' of books, writing and numeracy resources to each P4-7 class in 100 schools across Scotland. This is an opportunity to explore the impact of gifting for the P4-7 age range.

Further, the meeting discussed Inspiring Classrooms as another source of funding for resources and noted the enthusiasm for the fund last year amongst schools; it will run again this year with an increased number of grants available.

Actions:

- SBT to consider creating an Instagram account for FMRC.
- SBT to liaise with SG around the possibility of creating a video featuring the First Minister to promote FMRC online.
- Advisory Group to continue discussions around the possibility of book gifting for P4-7s.
- SBT to investigate possible models for book gifting for P4-7s.

2. Evaluation report

SBT updated the meeting on outcomes of the Blake Stevenson evaluation of FMRC:

- Schools reported that the emphasis on reading for pleasure gave them the impetus to make this more prominent in their schools.
- The flexibility of the programme was very positively received by schools.
- In many cases, those schools that engaged with SBT outreach saw the greatest impact.
- Online resources were well received by teachers and librarians, although many survey respondents reported that they were not aware of them.
- Inspiring Classrooms was very positively received.
- The printed booklist had a mixed reception, and the list will now grow over time on the FMRC website.
- Some survey respondents felt the Reading Passports seemed like homework. These have been slightly altered this year to make it clear that pupils are not expected to write a review on every page.
- Parental engagement continues to pose a difficult challenge. SBT will run a blog series this year showcasing good practice and offering guidance in this area. However, it was noted that there is anecdotal evidence from pupils in

the evaluation report that does suggest that more parents took their children to the library and/or talked more with them about reading as a result of the increased emphasis on reading FMRC prompted.

2.1 Discussion of findings and recommendations

The meeting agreed that the evaluation report is thorough, offers a strong body of evidence and presents many positive findings.

The meeting discussed the report's final recommendations. One area of potential concern is teachers' mixed feelings regarding the recent expansion of the programme to include P1-3. The meeting acknowledged that significant resources are already allocated to lower primary including the Read, Write, Count and Bookbug schemes; it was agreed to keep P1-3 participation in FMRC under review.

In response to a recommendation that a longitudinal study be undertaken to assess FMRC's impact on attainment over time, the meeting suggested that Scottish Government (SG) consider the creation of a self-assessment framework to allow schools to monitor this.

The meeting suggested that in order to promote the impact that FMRC has had in participating schools and to share best practice, an FMRC case study be included on the National Improvement Hub, and if possible FMRC be included as one of the interventions on the Scottish Attainment Challenge Learning and Teaching Toolkit.

The meeting raised some uncertainty over conclusion 6.1 of the evaluation report which states: *"The First Minister's Reading Challenge has been overwhelmingly positively received by teachers, pupils and their parents."* The sample informing this statement in the report included only nine parents, which the meeting acknowledged is too small to be conclusive. The meeting felt that anecdotal evidence suggests a more complex picture for parental engagement, and that this is an area that requires more attention.

The meeting discussed the potential for advertising FMRC outside of school environments. It was agreed that that this could be frustrating for parents whose schools were not taking part. The meeting discussed opening FMRC to libraries and other community groups and spaces independently of schools, and it was agreed that this would be a positive development, allowing the broadening of reading cultures. To this end, the meeting recommended that new challenges be considered to award those taking part outside of a school setting.

2.2 Agreement of advice to Ministers based on evaluation

Based on discussions at the meeting, SBT will put together a document detailing the Advisory Group's recommendations to SG, and updating on work currently being done in relation to the evaluation report's recommendations.

Action:

- SBT to compile a document detailing the Advisory Group's recommendations to SG and circulate to Advisory Group for approval.

3. Update on secondary school pilots (JH)

Jen Harwood updated the meeting on the secondary school pilot taking place in six schools across Scotland:

- Arbroath Academy (Angus)
- Bannockburn High School (Stirling)
- Clydebank High School (West Dunbartonshire)
- Renfrew High School (Renfrewshire)
- Sgoil Lionacleit (Benbecula, Eilean Siar)
- St. Andrew's & St. Bride's High Schools (South Lanarkshire)

Schools taking part in the pilot programme were selected by SBT from 19 volunteers based on their contexts, locations and plans for the pilot year, allowing the pilot to trial as broad a range of approaches as possible.

- Clydebank High School intends to use the pilot to extend their activities relating to reading for pleasure and parental engagement, by creating parent partnerships, literacy steering groups and using film.
- St. Andrew's and St. Bride's High Schools are hoping to focus on pupil voice and leadership roles in their school, with shared reading and role-modelling.
- Renfrew High School plans to extend their reading culture into the local community by developing a prototype reading passport app and using digital storytelling.
- Bannockburn High School will utilise the pilot to enhance their existing book gifting scheme.
- Sgoil Lionacleit will start to work with SBT from January, which reflects that not all schools participate in FMRC throughout the entire school year.
- Arbroath Academy are yet to confirm their plans and are currently exploring ways they can use their PEF to promote reading for pleasure.

SBT also confirmed that a Young Persons' Advisory Group will help to facilitate the pilot and will include two pupils from each of the secondary schools. This Group will be chaired by Caitlyn Bannatyne.

The meeting welcomed the broad sample of schools involved and agreed to evaluate the pilot in January and April, with the potential for a roll out of FMRC at secondary level to be announced in early 2018.

Action:

- Advisory Group to review progress of secondary school pilot at future meetings, with the aim of making a recommendation to SG regarding a possible roll-out in January 2018.

4. Dates of Advisory Group meetings 2017/18

The meeting confirmed that the next Advisory Group meetings will take place on the following dates at the SBT office:

- 21 November 2017
- January 2018 (Date TBC)
- March 2018 (Date TBC)
- May 2018 (Date TBC)

SBT will gauge availability for the TBC dates via a doodle poll.

The meeting expressed an intention to hold another Celebration Event in June 2018, and agreed to explore holding the event somewhere other than Edinburgh.

Action:

- SBT to gauge availability for the TBC dates via a doodle poll.

5. AOB

No other business was discussed.