

First Minister's Reading Challenge



First Minister's Reading Challenge Advisory Group

Recommendations

Preface

The First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) supports the Scottish Government's ambition to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. The programme is inclusive, flexible and focuses predominantly on encouraging reading for pleasure and building a reading culture within schools and communities¹. With this primary focus, it can easily incorporate and work alongside other reading programmes taking place in schools, libraries and at home.

The ethos of FMRC is based on research that shows that children are motivated to read for pleasure when they are allowed to develop intrinsic drivers² and that developing a love of books and reading supports children's literacy skills, confidence and imagination and therefore supports their attainment. Reading is essential to academic achievement across the curriculum and there is clear evidence that those from the most deprived backgrounds have less access to books and reading³. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between the number of books in a child's house and their educational attainment⁴. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that self-determined choice and intrinsic rather than extrinsic drivers are more successful in encouraging children to enjoy reading and choose to be readers⁵.

FMRC supports the four key priorities for Scottish education as laid out in the National Improvement Framework⁶:

¹ <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/2078964>

² <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131881.2012.710089>

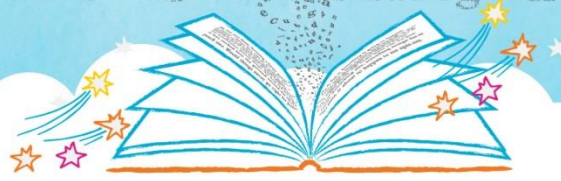
³ <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/face/pdf/research-compendium/access-to-books.pdf>

⁴ <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/92/4/1573/2235883?sid=a57c56a3-aa1c-4e45-8a08-7e45d7cd9df0>

⁵ Dr S. McGeown: *An academic evaluation of the First Minister's Reading Challenge*.

⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/8072>

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- **Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy**
By supporting a reading culture in schools and encouraging children to read more widely for pleasure, literacy skills should improve. Moreover, by encouraging children to identify as 'readers', FMRC supports the development of a life-long openness to reading which has been linked to improved academic performance and life-long, self-directed learning^{7,8}.
- **Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children**
The Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2016 found performance in reading improved as level of deprivation declined across all stages (P4, P7, and S2)⁹. By supporting reading in early education and the development of reading cultures in communities there are opportunities to break the cycle of educational poverty and the gap between the most and least deprived.
- **Improvement in children's and young people's health and wellbeing**
Reading skills are essential for health literacy and understanding information and advice. Reading has also been shown to have a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing¹⁰.
- **Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school leaver destinations for all young people**
As well as supporting educational attainment and wellbeing, reading has been shown to support the development of empathy and soft skills essential in the work place and for the development of the cultural and knowledge economy¹¹. Further, studies have shown that over 70% of the prison population in Scotland have literacy problems¹², illustrating the link between low attainment in literacy and future prospects.

⁷ <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=1941>

⁸ <http://www.shsu.edu/academics/education/journal-of-multidisciplinary-graduate-research/documents/2016/WhittenJournalFinal.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/SSLN>

¹⁰ <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/english/news/articles/30-minutes-reading-week-can-improve-life>

¹¹ <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/early/2013/10/02/science.1239918>

¹² <https://archive.cilip.org.uk/blog/prisoners-literacy-numeracy-levels>

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Recommendations

Following the meeting of the First Minister's Reading Challenge (FMRC) Advisory Group held on 21st November 2017, the following recommendations are made to Scottish Government in response to Blake Stevenson's evaluation of August 2017. A more detailed response to each of Blake Stevenson's recommendations is included in appendix 2.

Recommendation 1 – 'Reading Communities' model

The Advisory Group recommends that a 'Readings Communities' model be considered by Scottish Government. This model, similar to Digital Schools and Eco Schools, would incorporate FMRC into a framework, along with Read, Write, Count, Summer Reading Challenge and other local programmes, to provide an accreditation system for schools, libraries and communities to work towards. Such a model would provide motivation, include self and peer assessment, continuous improvement, CLPL support, and offer an opportunity to showcase and share best practice. This would pull reading initiatives under a single umbrella and reward schools and /or communities for sustained commitment to reading culture and FMRC would sit at the heart of the framework, thus encouraging participation in national schemes while also highlighting local initiatives. Further details of Reading Communities can be found in appendix 1.

It is recommended that this model is developed in close collaboration with the six secondary pilots and detailed proposals for the framework rolled out from August 2019. Within 2018, FRMC should be rolled out to all secondary schools by way of a single challenge whilst concentrated development work continues with the six pilot schools.

It is the Advisory Group's view that the future vision for FMRC is the development of Reading Communities umbrella which brings together a range of reading interventions.

Recommendation 2 – Book gifting

The Advisory Group recommends that Scottish Book Trust present further research-based evidence on the benefits of a book gifting model for upper primary and secondary pupils, including consideration of the importance of personal choice for

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these age groups. It should also address other methods, such as working with libraries and Young Scot to support increased library memberships and improved use of existing resources. Strong links should also be made with the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), Booksellers and Publishers to identify possible synergies.

Recommendation 3 – Additional library and community challenges

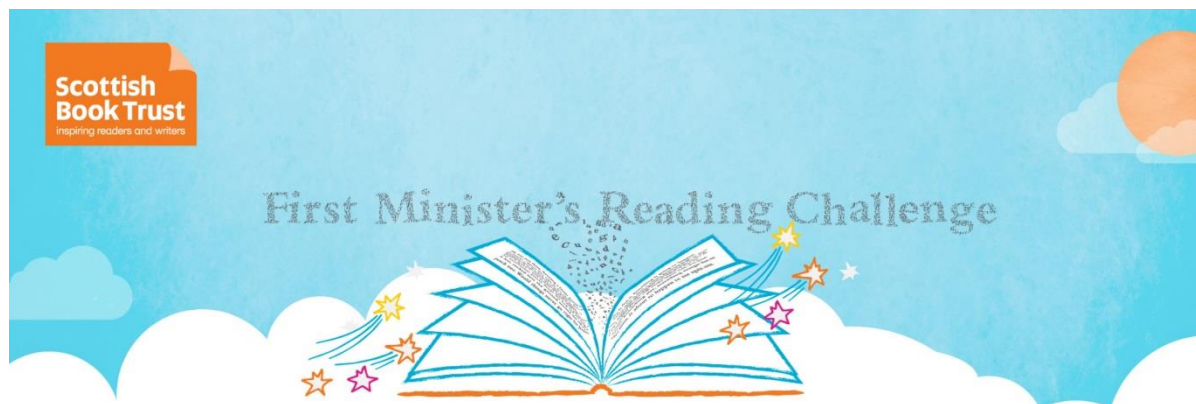
The Advisory Group recommends that in 2018/19, community spaces and groups, such as libraries and extra-curricular groups, are able to register to take part in FMRC. This will serve to reinforce the work being done in schools to embed reading cultures, and provide additional opportunities for parents to be involved in FMRC. To support this, the Advisory Group recommends that a library and community challenge is added to the suite of challenges but that secondary schools have the option of entering a single 'reading inspiration' challenge in the first year of their participation.

Recommendation 4 – Sharing best practice

The Advisory Group recommends maximising learning for practitioners from FMRC, including through the National Improvement Hub.

Recommendation 5 – Measuring FMRC's impact on attainment

The Advisory Group recommends the development and promotion of a self-assessment toolkit, aligned with How good is our school? (Fourth Edition), to allow schools to measure the impact of FMRC against its stated aims, including raising attainment.



Appendix 1

Recommendations from Blake Stevenson's August 2017 evaluation of FMRC, with commentary from Scottish Book Trust (SBT) and the Advisory Group (AG)

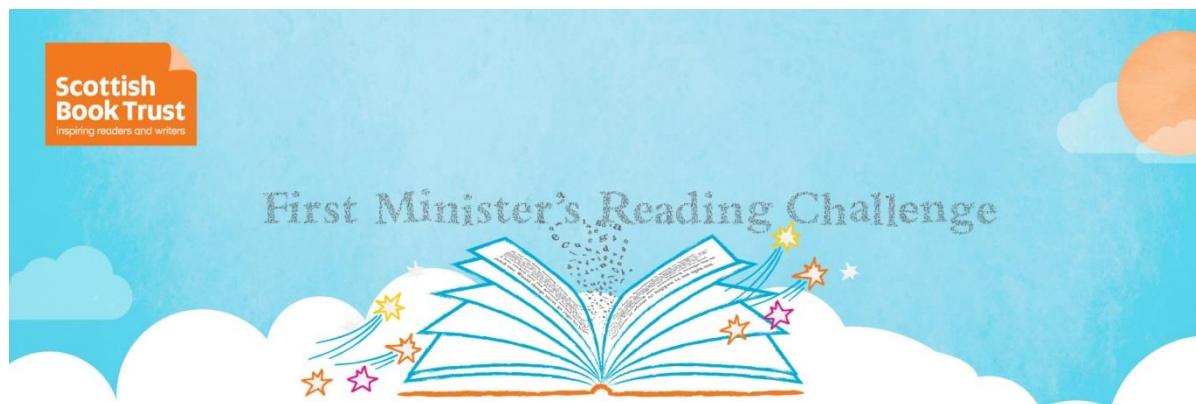
Blake Stevenson recommendation	Progress to date (SBT)	Further recommended action (AG)
<p>Recommendation 1: The Reading Challenge is continued, but roll-out to other year groups should only take place in close consultation with teachers. Some merging with other initiatives in place may address concerns about the multitude of initiatives currently being implemented by schools. We can envisage, for example, a natural fit with the book-gifting function that SBT also implements on behalf of Scottish Government.</p>	<p>FMRC has now been rolled out to P1-3, where so far it is receiving high engagement, with 98% of registered schools including their P1-3 pupils. SBT worked with P1-3 teachers to consult on the shape FMRC at this level and created new resources for P1-3 classes based on these consultations.</p> <p>All P1-3s are already the recipients of book gifting through the Bookbug and Read, Write, Count programmes.</p>	<p>SBT produce a research informed paper examining the benefits and possibilities of book-gifting for older primary and secondary school pupils. Paper will be presented to the AG and SG by March 2018.</p> <p>SBT to produce a detailed paper for the AG and Scottish Government on Reading Communities Framework including a detailed analysis of how this sits alongside existing reading programmes and how it fits with programmes such as Read, Write, Count, that are not exclusively related to reading. This paper will be presented at the January AG meeting.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: Explore new ways to engage parents more significantly in the Reading Challenge, building on ideas tested in individual schools and communities already, and consider gifting book bags to parents to encourage them to read more in front of their children.</p>	<p>SBT continue to work on approaches and resources to engage parents in FMRC. These include a blog series running throughout 2017/18 sharing schools' good practice in this area, providing resources such as Reading Passports, guides and tips to help schools engage parents, and engaging with parents on social media.</p>	<p>There are challenges in terms of book gifting to adults and details of this should be examined in the book gifting paper as mentioned above. Possible synergies with exiting adult reader development work in SBT and in libraries will also be examined.</p>



<p>Recommendation 3: Continue to develop opportunities for teachers and schools to learn from each other's approaches.</p>	<p>SBT continue to engage with as many schools as possible, visiting schools individually to learn from their approaches and share ideas with them, bringing professionals together at CLPL events, and sharing good practice on the FMRC website. SBT have recruited a second Outreach Coordinator to increase their capacity for this work.</p> <p>Schools reported that one of the most valuable elements of the Celebration Event in June 2017 was the opportunity to see and hear about other schools' journeys and approaches, and it is intended that this is an integral part of the next Celebration Event in 2018.</p>	<p>The AG recommends maximising learning for practitioners from FMRC, including through the National Improvement Hub. SBT to map activity and best practice to present to the AG for consideration as a standing item at future meetings.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Undertake longitudinal evaluation of the initiative over a number of years to better understand the impact of attainment.</p>	<p>No progress to date.</p>	<p>The Advisory Group recommends the development and promotion of a self-assessment toolkit, aligned with How good is our school? (Fourth Edition), to allow schools to measure the impact of FMRC against its stated aims, including raising attainment, and maximising learning for practitioners through the National Improvement Hub.</p>



<p>Recommendation 5: Actively seek partnerships to build an evidence base for the role of reading in relation to the poverty-related attainment gap.</p>	<p>Alongside Scottish Government and Education Scotland, SBT has recently partnered with Scottish Universities Insight Institute on a successful proposal for the knowledge exchange project 'Conversations about language and literacy: promoting equity and attainment through engagement'.</p> <p>SBT will continue to pursue opportunities to build this evidence base wherever possible.</p>	<p>SBT to report back to the AG regarding progress on this at the January, March and May meetings.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: Explore opportunities to actively encourage more partnership working with libraries, the local community, and business, given the success of this approach in individual schools and communities.</p>	<p>SBT continue to showcase good practice in these areas wherever possible, and offer guidance and assistance to schools looking to set up partnerships.</p>	<p>SBT will work up detailed proposals for the AG to consider regarding potential Library and community challenge strands to be included next year to be presented at the March meeting. SBT should work with SLIC and identify synergies.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: Work with libraries to encourage a more active input to the Reading Challenge in areas where this is not currently happening.</p>	<p>As above, SBT continue to showcase good practice in these areas wherever possible, and offer guidance and assistance to schools looking to set up partnerships.</p>	<p>The AG recommends maximising learning for practitioners from FMRC including through the National Improvement Hub.</p>



<p>Recommendation 8: Continue to offer Inspiring Classrooms, or alternative funding, to enable more Author Events to be delivered in schools, and to enable school libraries to be upgraded to be attractive and welcoming hubs for reading for pleasure, for pupils and the wider community.</p>	<p>Inspiring Classrooms funding has been increased for 2017/18 to reflect the expansion of FMRC to P1-3.</p> <p>SBT will work with the National Strategy for School Libraries group and 'Ambition and Opportunity' implementation group for public libraries.</p>	<p>The development of a library challenge would support use of school libraries. SBT should continue to advocate for the value of public and school libraries.</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Consider gifting of book bags to older pupils as a step to encourage more reading for pleasure, and to ensure access to good quality reading materials.</p>	<p>No progress to date.</p>	<p>As above, a research paper will be brought to the AG, which examines the benefits of book gifting.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: Review routes of communication, taking account of challenges in ensuring that information about the Reading Challenge reaches those it is targeted at, to ensure that opportunities to tap into the learning, tools and resources offered are not missed.</p>	<p>For 2017/18 SBT has sent information about FMRC to both the Literacy Coordinators and Head Teachers of every Primary School in Scotland. SBT have also been in touch with Local Authorities contacts regarding FMRC. SBT engages schools, pupils and parents as widely as possible through social media and will continue to seek out new routes of communication to ensure as many schools, pupils and parents are aware of FMRC and its benefits as possible.</p>	<p>SBT to report on progress to the AG at the January, March and May meetings.</p>



<p>Recommendation 11: Explore opportunities to collaborate with book festivals and other similar initiatives to offer opportunities for pupils to engage with them locally as part of any further roll-out of the Reading Challenge.</p>	<p>SBT have produced a resource for schools in collaboration with Edinburgh International Book Festival that can be used to prepare for and respond to any author event or festival local to them. Book Week Scotland is used as an opportunity to promote FMRC as well as the value of reading more generally.</p>	<p>Further synergies between local festivals could be included in Reading Communities Framework.</p>
<p>Recommendation 12: Consider how the Reading Challenge might integrate with or contribute to local strategies to deliver literacy outcomes (for example through Community Planning Partnerships). Dundee, for example, has a commitment in its Single Outcome Agreement to ensure that “Parents/carers become engaged with and actively support their children’s learning in the early years”. There is an obvious fit here with the work of the Reading Challenge, and this is likely to be the case in other local authority areas across the country. Understanding the ways in which the Reading Challenge contributes or can contribute to delivering these local outcomes is an important development going forward.</p>	<p>SBT have been in touch with Local Authorities contacts regarding FMRC and takes the opportunity to engage and meet with Local Authority contacts wherever possible.</p>	<p>SBT to report on progress to the AG at the January, March and May meetings.</p>

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Appendix 2

Reading Communities

A refreshed focus on reading in line with the frameworks developed for [Eco Schools](#), [Digital Schools](#) and [Rights Respecting Schools](#) would support schools long term to make best use of existing resources and assets, support parental engagement and pupil voice, and build a much-needed reading culture across Scotland. An assessment model would:

- Provide a framework for showcasing reading activities
- Empower children to be involved in their own learning
- Be part of an continuous improvement model for schools
- Make best use of existing resources and offer opportunities to share best practice
- Encourage schools to bring inspiring author events to children
- Provide teachers with high quality CPD
- Reduce the poverty-related attainment gap between those who have access to books and reading experiences and those who do not

