

# READING AHEAD

## Students get reading at East Kent College



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

The Learning Zone team at East Kent College's Broadstairs campus launched the Six Book Challenge (now called Reading Ahead) for the first time in January 2015. Open to all students, it was promoted as an option rather than a mandatory addition to curriculum, hoping it would be particularly attractive to emerging readers and encouraging to students who no longer read.

The team created a dedicated seating area for students to read in, and for tutors to hold open reading workshops. They also updated their range of available fiction and magazines, to make a more inclusive and accessible offer for students regardless of ability. As Six Book Challenge participants began to make reading choices, they found that the reading diaries were popular.

"We've encouraged people to think about their comments," explains Susan. "If you didn't like it, say so, but say why. If you've loved something, tell everyone and we'll promote it". In a diary review of *The Sun and the Stars* by Sue Peterson, one supported learning student wrote: "I thought it was good and funny. I learned something new, and I learned some new words."

**THE  
READING  
AGENCY**

## Improving vocabulary and comprehension skills

Susan and her colleagues found students they had not met before were coming in to borrow books and magazines; beginning to talk to other students about what they were reading, and swapping books. Take up was largely from progression and supported learning students.

There were positive results among students studying hair and beauty as part of the college's progression curriculum at level one. For example, doing the Six Book Challenge has been the first time that Emma and Lucy have finished a book; both are now avid readers. Meanwhile curriculum student Flavia - for whom English is a foreign language - has found her level of comprehension has increased, and she now reads for pleasure as well as study. Their tutor reports that thanks to reading, vocabulary is getting better and her students are writing "reams": increased reading and comprehension levels are supporting course achievement.



The Challenge was promoted as an individual one, not putting students in competition with each other, with inclusiveness paramount. For example, the Learning Zone team worked with Lauren, a life and employability diploma student who is blind, so that she could type her reviews in Braille and get them pasted into her diary, along with a standard English version so that others could read her opinions. Since starting the Challenge Lauren's confidence and Braille reading speeds have improved, and she's now working with the team to recommend further Braille titles for their stock.

## Tutors get involved

"We've also had non-readers engaging with books and talking through what they see; it's creatively story-telling," enthuses Susan. "We've also seen the start of word recognition - the Six Book Challenge is certainly making a difference and creating a love of books." She feels that the impressive uptake - 140 students signed up for the Challenge - is due in part to tutors' engagement with the programme. Learning Zone outreach has included creating 'rummage book boxes' to go into teaching areas for supported learning tutors to use in open workshops. These have proved very successful, with students making their own requests for what to put in them, which in turn has helped staff direct them towards new reading.



Zoe Kersley, hair and beauty lecturer, has reported: "We started going into the Learning Zone as part of the Six Book Challenge; it took a while to get everyone on board, and to start reading as it was so new to them, but now the whole group are engaged."

Meanwhile learning support practitioner Luke Daniels has fed back: "The Six Book Challenge has made us connect with the Learning Zone as a place of comfort....and when students read these books they can escape into the world that they paint."

Students' peer support and encouragement has proved key to East Kent College's inaugural Challenge success, but the Learning Zone team have also used the stamping of their reading diaries, after each read, as an opportunity to talk about their choices. "It was a great book and very funny. It made my family laugh," said one participant about *Cheeky Jokes For Kids*, whilst another said of Sarah Oliver's biography of Harry Styles and Niall Horan: "I love the book; I thought it was the best ever."

### "It's helped to demystify books"



The Learning Zone team's work to embed the Six Book Challenge paid off; they won second place in the Reader Development category of the Council of Learning Resources in Colleges (CoLRIC) 2015 Best Practice Awards. They are now planning a certificate-giving celebration and prize draw for completers.

"Everyone who took part really enjoyed it; there's no obligation or pressure," says Susan. "It's helped to demystify books, and encouraged reading at every level." Her tips including keeping the Challenge fun and offering incentives; making use of Quick Reads for adult readers but primarily spending time to support and engage each participant in their journey of reading and discovery. She adds: "It took time and encouragement, but students are now animated about reading and enjoy the chill out reading area in Learning Zone, even coming in to read when they are not in their group. We're inundated with requests for new books: this is truly exciting stuff!"

### An increase in confidence and communication skills

Paul Manning, campus principal (Broadstairs) of East Kent College concludes: "The Six Book Challenge has been a key focus in Learning Zone this year and has been excellent in promoting and engaging students with reading, as an enrichment to study, subtly embedding literacy skills, and raising levels of comprehension and vocabulary; we have also seen students increase in self-confidence and communication skills. I am delighted that so many students have participated."

Please contact [genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:genevieve.clarke@readingagency.org.uk) if you'd like to find out more about Reading Ahead.

