



Let's get every UK child reading well by 2025

Despite being the world's sixth largest economy, the UK's literacy rates are nothing to write home about. A 2013 report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ranked the UK 22nd out of 24 western countries in terms of literacy.

England is the only country in the developed world in which adults aged 55-to-65 had better foundation levels of literacy than people aged 16-to-24. The skills deficit is most acute among the poorest sections of society, where four out of ten children are not able to read well by the age of 11.

Read On Get On is a new campaign led by Save the Children and supported by a variety of businesses and charities and which seeks to ensure all children have brighter futures by leaving primary school as confident readers. The Publishers Association is a founder member of the campaign. Chief Executive **Richard Mollet** told us about how the initiative will work, and how publishers can play their part.

IPA: What are the drivers behind Read On Get On?



Richard Mollet: We've known for some time that the UK has a serious literacy deficit. We are the only economically developed country in which 16-24 year olds have the lowest literacy skills among adult age groups. According to the National Literacy Trust, around 16 per cent of adults in England can be described as "functionally illiterate".

It's particularly alarming that a recent study found that a third of London's children do not have any books of their own at home.

We already have a number of great initiatives focused on literacy and reading for pleasure (for example Booktrust, Beanstalk, World Book Day, World Book Night etc). The "Read On Get On" campaign has brought the global charity, Save the Children, into the fray with one of its first UK-focused campaigns in many years.

IPA: What is the campaign's main goal?

RM: The campaign aims to get **all children reading well by the age of eleven by 2025**. That's the age when children leave primary school and it's an obvious staging post on a child's education journey. It's vital that by age 11 children are able to achieve a level of literacy which will enable them to study a wide range of subjects. The measure of 'reading well' that the campaign advocates is to be determined, but will be based around the current national standard used in schools, but which is being phased out next year.

What does "reading well" mean?

'Reading well' by the age of 11 means that children should not only be able to read the words that are written down, but they should also have a wider understanding of the meaning behind stories and information and be able to talk about them"

IPA: 2025 is a long way away. How will we be able to quantify the success of Read On. Get On in the meantime?

RM: If we are to succeed with the primary goal for 2025, we need to start taking action now, and the campaign has set two interim goals to help focus efforts. With literacy initiatives, the younger you start, the better, so we'll be targeting children before they even start school with the goal that by 2020, all five year olds should demonstrate "good" early language development. We'll also be working with children who have started at primary school, with the aim that by 2020 we will be at least halfway to achieving the 2025 goal for 11-year-olds reading well.

IPA: With a general election looming, what specific manifesto commitments are you looking for?

RM: The Publishers Association recently launched "Publishing for Britain", an eight-point policy document which we hope will inform the actions of the next government. We're calling on the next government to "boost reading for pleasure and work with industry and charities to get more people reading and drive up children's literacy levels". Encouragingly, all of the main political parties have publically endorsed Read On. Get On. We now want to see that support reflected in their eventual manifestos so that whoever gets into power next year, they have a commitment to the electorate to improve literacy.

IPA: What can publishers do to support Read On Get On?

RM: Publishers have a long history of supporting literacy and reading for pleasure campaigns, eg by providing free or discounted books to charities. We hope publishers will step up the level of their involvement and partnerships with literacy charities. With this in mind, we have started running a Reading for Pleasure roadshow, with the literacy charities visiting publishing firms in their offices and talking to staff about how they can get involved.

In the Literacy section of the PA website, you can download a "Reading for Pleasure" guide to the different charities and initiatives supporting reading. You'll see that there are great opportunities to participate for everyone working in our industry.

IPA: You must have experienced a number of literacy campaigns. What are the secrets of success?

RM: What has struck me most is the incredible effectiveness and importance of local intervention. You have to be engaging at the coalface to get results – it can't all be about slogans and aspirations. I was at a meeting of BookTrust recently, with parents from some deprived areas of the UK, whose ability to read with their children had been transformed by the provision of free books from BookStart. You hear the same stories about adult literacy from Quick Reads do an amazing job of helping getting books into prisons, helping to boost literacy rates. **When you intervene directly, when you get books into people's hands, you get amazing results.**

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