

Running the 6 Book Challenge in your branch – A guide

Across the E Midlands a number of branches have run the 6 Book Challenge and had incredible success. Now, our aim is to get as many branches as possible to run it in 2015. This guide explains what it is, how it works and how it can help your branch.

What is it?

It couldn't be more simple! It's a national challenge, organised by The Reading Agency, to read 6 Books in 6 Months. It's aimed at everyone but especially less confident readers or people who don't normally read and it can be any book they choose (*War and Peace* or *The Gruffalo*, it doesn't matter). It usually starts in January but you can start any time.

Resources?

1. The Reading Agency provide packs that can be purchased (see below for funding) which includes Reading Diaries, certificates and leaflets. <http://sixbookchallenge.org.uk/>
2. UNISON can provide some funding through the Union Learning Fund (ULF) to run the campaign. This can pay for books, packs, shelves and even the buffet to launch the Challenge. There are also some limited freebies and UNISON stickers for the front of the books. Contact g.mccann@unison.co.uk for details

How to do it?

1. It's sensible to get the employer on board so maybe go and see them about it. Their buy-in could be key to encouraging more staff to take part
2. Make books available! Set up a book swap, hand them out, place in them various locations etc.
3. Launch your event. Invite somebody senior to come and launch it, get a buffet, a key speaker etc
4. Keep readers involved. Maybe get them together for an author visit or a book group
5. Celebrate success. Invite Readers to come to a Celebration event where they're given a certificate (and maybe a prize?)

What's the benefit to the branch?

Where the 6 Book Challenge has run it has been really beneficial to branches. Benefits include:

1. No employer is going to say, "no, we don't support your literacy campaign" so it's a fantastic way to get access to staff and gain entry to workplaces
2. We are being visible. The Challenge offers a chance for the union to be seen at the launch, celebration events, author visits etc. Book swap shelves can be set up in remote workplaces as well so members who feel isolated can see a benefit.
3. It promotes a very positive view of the union. Not only are we seen but it's in a really positive way
4. Enables us to create other activity. We can use the events to talk to members about other things going on. We often find that the Challenge brings members along who wouldn't normally come to a UNISON meeting so this is a chance to engage and see if they'd like to be more involved

Tips

1. Create a 'buzz'. The Challenge is a fantastic way to get a sense of 'community' in the workplace
2. Promote the idea that this can be used to encourage people to read to their kids/grandkids
3. Involve Occupational Health – highlights the benefits of reading to Mental Health
4. Ask people to be '6 Book Challenge Champions' to promote reading in their workplace
5. Maybe set up a Book Group where people can talk about the book they are reading
6. Use the Libraries. They will be delighted and it supports UNISON's Libraries campaigns

Some case studies

DeMontfort University (DMU) – DMU branch have had such success with the Challenge that one of their ULRs was rewarded in the Queen's Birthday Honours list and have attended a Downing Street reception. Each year around 200 non-academic staff sign up and the branch make a huge effort with book shelves across the Uni. The books have been funded by the University, the Branch and through the ULF. A key to their success has been the fantastic support of management with the Vice Chancellor's huge involvement. A number of authors have visited during Lunchtime talks and on one occasion school kids came along too which the University was really happy about. Each year the Challenge is launched with great fanfare and it creates an incredible buzz.



DMU – Challenge completers

Leicester City Council – New ULR, Mayank Pandit, worked in a building with no UNISON steward but set about promoting the UNISON Learning offer. When he found out about the Challenge he contacted his library, ordered his books and set up a Reading group with 40-50 taking part. The challenge was such a success that best-selling SAS author Andy McNabb visited to hand out certificates. Such was the buzz about the event that a new UNISON steward came forward and has since recruited around 20 members!



SAS author Andy McNabb at Leicester City Council