

Bookstart: A Need to Continue the Programmes

22 October 2011

To: Rt Hon Dr Vince Cable, Business Secretary

The BA is a strong supporter of Bookstart - a programme that has been strongly supported by the Department of Education up to now - which encourages parents to share books with their baby from their earliest years, and Booktime which gives books as children start reception at age five. We also support Booked Up, which gives every eleven-year-old the opportunity to choose a brand new book to keep as their own. Through these programmes, 5.9 million free books are given to children every year, encouraging their interest in reading.

These programmes are, we think, extremely innovative public/private partnerships. Relatively small amounts of public money are used as a catalyst for releasing vast investment from publishers and booksellers in the private sector: for every £1 invested by the DfE, an additional £4 is provided in support from private sector partners in publishing and bookselling.

Obviously, with all the focus being on cuts at the moment, we do hope it might be possible for you to use your considerable influence as Secretary of State for Business to ensure that these Bookstart programmes continue.

A recent forecasted Social Return on Investment study by Just Economics LLP, who conducted the analysis using the Cabinet Office process for assessing SROI, on Bookstart activities in the 2009-10 financial year showed that:

- For every £1 the state invests, Bookstart returns a total £25 of value to society and £4.19 in social value back to the state.
- £614m of social value is generated by using £9m of DfE funding to leverage support from private sector partners, local authorities and Primary Care Trusts.

We believe universal bookgifting is helping to create the readers of tomorrow. In the global marketplace, UK plc needs a literate workforce who have the skills to innovate, and books play a key part in helping to bring this about. A lack of books in the home cannot be conveniently mapped along socio-economic lines, while the economies of scale currently achieved means that targeted programmes would be far less cost effective. If the Government's contribution to fund the bookgifting programmes reduced from £13 million (the current grant) to £8.5million (to reach just 20% of children), Booktrust (the Bookstart administrators) has estimated that the average cost per child would increase from £3.95 to £12.14, due to lower levels of book discounts and publisher sponsorship.

In 1999 Bookstart became the first national book gifting programme in the world. Considered to be one of the most important early intervention programmes, Bookstart has inspired more than 24 different countries to create their own bookgifting schemes, with knock on benefits for the prestige of British industry abroad.

Please can you help to keep the Bookstart programmes going? May we count on your support?

Yours sincerely
Tim Godfray
Chief Executive