



## Books Unlocked Evaluation 2014/15

Clémence Pabion and Hannah Howard

National Literacy Trust

2016

*Words for life*

**Registered address:** National Literacy Trust, 68 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL  
t: 020 7587 1842 f: 020 7587 1411 | [contact@literacytrust.org.uk](mailto:contact@literacytrust.org.uk) | [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

Registered charity no. 1116260 and company limited by guarantee no. 5836486 registered in England and Wales and registered charity in Scotland no. SCO 42944.  
Patron: HRH The Duchess of Cornwall

## About the National Literacy Trust

We are a national charity dedicated to raising literacy levels in the UK. Our research and analysis make us the leading authority on literacy. We run projects in the poorest communities, campaign to make literacy a priority for politicians and parents, and support schools.

Visit [www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk) to find out more, donate or sign up for a free email newsletter. You can also find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.

## Copyright

© National Literacy Trust 2016. You may report on findings or statistics included in this report if you accredit them to the National Literacy Trust.

Suggested reference for this report is: Pabion, C. and Howard, H. (2016). *Books Unlocked evaluation 2014/15*. London: National Literacy Trust.

We will consider requests to use extracts or data from this publication provided that you:

- Acknowledge that the content is the work of the National Literacy Trust and provide appropriate references in any publications or accompanying publicity;
- State that any views expressed are yours and not necessarily those of the National Literacy Trust.

**Table of Contents**

Foreword ..... 3  
Introduction ..... 4  
Methodology..... 5  
Reading groups promote discussion, tolerance and empathy..... 6  
Books Unlocked widens the range of books read and allows participants to read more..... 7  
Positive impact on confidence, well-being, managing emotions and coping with some of the challenges posed by prison life..... 8  
Book ownership..... 10  
Participants discover, or learn more about, the Man Booker Prize..... 10  
General feedback and enjoyment of the books..... 11  
Conclusion ..... 12

## Foreword

Supporting those in custody to lead productive and fulfilling lives while in prison and upon release, has to be of the utmost importance to a cohesive, prosperous and just society. In order to achieve this, opportunities must be provided that create impetus for personal change and help ensure that people leave our prisons and young offender institutions with the behaviours, skills and desire necessary to contribute fully to society.

46% of people enter prison with the literacy of, or below, that expected of an 11-year-old child. This is three times more than the adult population generally, indicating that literacy remains a challenge across the prison estate. Poor literacy can hold people back at every stage of their life and is a risk factor associated with offending. Lacking vital literacy skills can undermine well-being and stop individuals making a full contribution to the economic and cultural life of our nation.

Evidence shows that those who read for enjoyment are more likely to read more widely and more often, and also to succeed academically. Improved academic achievement correlates with increased life chances, and better literacy skills are associated with higher levels of employment. Reading is also one of life's joys, and international evidence suggests reading for enjoyment has a strong impact on wider social outcomes, such as higher levels of empathy, improved self-esteem, a greater sense of social inclusion, higher levels of trust and lower levels of reported ill health.

The responses featured in this report highlight the far-reaching impact initiatives like Books Unlocked can, and do, have in secure settings. They provide a small glimpse, a tiny snapshot, of the power of books to help people feel, think, learn and change. The responses speak for themselves and for the programme as a whole. As one participant put it, "Books Unlocked . . . , as it says, unlocks the mind . . .".

A huge number of people contribute to making this happen. We are grateful to the National Literacy Trust's Patron, Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, for her interest in the initiative and her recent visit to HMP Brixton to see it in action; to the Booker Prize Foundation, whose generous support of the programme builds on their history of celebrating the best in contemporary literature by increasing disadvantaged communities' access to high-quality writing, and whose funding since 2012 has made everything possible; to all the Man Booker Prize-shortlisted authors who have thoughtfully given of their time and insight; to the publishers who have kindly given us copies of the selected titles at discount or for free; to the prison staff whose dedication and willingness to support initiatives such as this actually bring them to life on the ground; and finally to those who have taken part and very honestly shared their thoughts in this report. A heartfelt thank you.



Clare Argar  
Senior Programme Manager, Books Unlocked

## Introduction

The National Literacy Trust's Books Unlocked programme has supported prisoners and young offenders to engage with literature since 2012. Complementing initiatives for emerging readers in secure settings, Books Unlocked works with prison and young offender institution (YOI) reading groups to increase enjoyment and frequency of reading. The programme is made possible thanks to funding from the Booker Prize Foundation which celebrates the best in contemporary literature by increasing disadvantaged communities' access to high-quality writing.

Between September 2014 and August 2015, 25 prison and YOI reading groups took part in Books Unlocked. During this period,

- more than 400 requests were made by individuals across 78 prisons for copies of books that had been serialised on the National Prison Radio (NPR) daily Books Unlocked radio show
- more than 1,200 Man Booker Prize-shortlisted books and 750 copies of a Quick Reads title, *Dead Man Talking* by Roddy Doyle, were distributed to prisons and YOIs across England, Wales and Scotland
- more than 300 Books Unlocked creative writing journals, featuring hints and tips from Man Booker Prize-shortlisted authors, were sent to participating prisons and YOIs.

An evaluation of the Books Unlocked programme was conducted using a qualitative approach to encourage fuller responses from participants who may have been put off by closed questions. A survey of open-ended questions was created which could either be completed in writing by individuals or used as the basis of a group discussion, in which case a librarian would note down collective responses and pass these on to the National Literacy Trust. The survey was first shared with participating prisons in April 2015 but as more prisons joined the programme, they were also sent the survey. Completed surveys were received by the National Literacy Trust between July and September 2015.

By October 2015, feedback had been collected by the National Literacy Trust from seven settings:

- HMYOI Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire – 1 (group discussion and form completed by librarian)
- HMP Birmingham, West Midlands – 3 (individual responses)
- HMP Bullingdon, Oxfordshire – 4 (individual responses)
- HMP Erlestoke, Wiltshire – 1 (group discussion and form completed by librarian)
- HMP Hewell, Worcestershire – 1 (group discussion and form completed by librarian)
- HMP Lewes, East Sussex – 1 (group discussion and form completed by librarian)
- HMP Thameside, London – 10 (individual responses)

### National Prison Radio survey data

Additional data was also collected by National Prison Radio (NPR) as part of their annual survey in August via *Inside Time*, a national newspaper for prisoners and detainees. NPR also sent this survey to prisoners who had recently written to them requesting a Man Booker Prize-shortlisted title. Responses to this survey were collected and analysed by NPR. The main findings are presented here and not included in the rest of the report.

- 86% of listeners said they had heard the Books Unlocked programme
- 39% of those who had heard it said that the programme had encouraged them to read or write more.

Here are some examples of the responses received:

- *"I have learned how to read and write due to [Books Unlocked]" – HMP Low Newton*

- *“I write to my family more” – HMP Peterborough*
- *“I got girls from the wing to come to the library” – HMP Foston Hall*
- *“I’ve read 20+ books since February” – HMP Swinfen Hall*
- *“I got a few books from the library. I now love to read!” – HMP Foston Hall*
- *“I’ve started my poetry again” – HMP Winchester*
- *“I learned to read” – HMP Chelmsford*
- *“Encouraged me to go back to uni” – HMP Liverpool*
- *“Reading has become such a blessing” – HMP Winchester*
- *“It rekindled my love of reading” – HMP Lincoln*
- *“I’ve never read before and I’m doing it now” – HMP Durham*

These figures suggest that there is a great awareness of the Books Unlocked programme amongst NPR listeners. Books Unlocked has cultivated a very loyal and responsive audience – as demonstrated by the 39% of listeners who heard the show saying that it had encouraged them to read or write more, and by the fact that 12% of the letters NPR received between March and September 2015 related to the programme.

*(All data from NPR’s report sent to the National Literacy Trust – not publicly available)*

## Methodology

The evaluation is entirely based on qualitative data. We do not present here percentages or any statistical analysis of responses from participants. This is partly due to the fact that quantitative data collection in prisons is extremely challenging. For example, it is notably difficult to obtain a large enough sample for meaningful quantitative analysis. It is also partly because in-depth narrative responses give participants the opportunity to share their impressions and retell their own experience of Books Unlocked with more freedom and subtlety than a directive questionnaire could ever allow. Given the nature of the programme and what it is trying to achieve in terms of personal change and improved well-being among prisoners via the power of literacy, qualitative data seemed a better fit.

As a result, the data presented in this report should be taken as a snapshot of what a few participants have felt, thought and experienced over the course of the programme. These respondents are sharing their personal views. We have worked on grouping responses according to common themes, and sharing the most representative and vivid quotes for each theme. The data presented here is not statistically significant and should not be interpreted in terms of quantity.

The findings in this report are sorted by order of response prevalence, with the most recurring themes presented first. As the survey was semi-directive, a lot of themes mentioned in the forms directly relate to our questions, such as confidence or the value of book ownership. However, there is still plenty of leeway for responses to truly reflect the views of programme participants. For example, many respondents said that they were already comfortable speaking in a group and were not influenced by the programme in that aspect, while others insist that the publisher and author visits were the most important part of the activities as far as they were concerned.

All in all, the breakdown of findings from the National Literacy Trust’s open-ended survey based on the number of responses is shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Responses by themes**

Participants particularly enjoy discussing the books in reading groups	24
Participants read more and read more varied titles	19
Books Unlocked helps to deal with some of the challenges of life in prison	13
Reading is relaxing, enjoyable and provides an emotional release	11

Positive feedback on book ownership	10
Participants discovered the Man Booker Prize (or found out more about it)	9
Specific feedback on titles	9
General positive feedback and enjoyment of reading or books	9
Books Unlocked helps with confidence	8
Author or publisher visits	5
Books Unlocked helps with reading skills	3

Note: all quotes below are verbatim.

### Reading groups promote discussion, tolerance and empathy

Respondents were asked what they thought of being able to discuss their reading with other programme participants during reading groups. The responses are overwhelmingly positive and there was no negative feedback on group discussions in any of the forms completed. Many respondents cited the opportunity to chat with other participants as one of the most important aspects of the programme, or one that they enjoyed the most.

*“I thought it was very good as it gives people the chance to come together to discuss books and share our enjoyment and understanding of the books we read.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“The opinion of others within the group was valued, and the recommendations of books by people within the group who was [sic] familiar with the author or the genre of book.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“It’s good to discuss the book after reading to give many different viewpoints.” (HMP Bullingdon)*

*“I liked working in the group and supporting each other, we had a laugh!” (HMP Lewes)*

Participants also highlight the sociable aspect of a reading group: how it mixed different people from different areas of a large prison and helped them to get to know people that they would otherwise have had nothing in common with. A few also mention that they were pleasantly surprised by the quality of the discussion and enjoyed seeing some participants open up and contribute.

*“Also great to be surprised by people who sometimes have very little to say.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“People who are quiet have a say and it’s pretty inclusive.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I liked it that it brought people of different areas of prison, some I’ve never seen or thought they’d participate. They have the most interesting things to say.” (HMP Thameside)*

Several of the forms also stress the fact that discussion actually enhances the reading experience, suggesting that the reading group aspect of the programme is key to its success and genuinely adds to the book ownership aspect.

*“(The discussion) takes it to another level because the book gets analysed from every angle. Very useful.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“On some occasions, I had not completed the book for one reason or another, but after having a discussion on the book, I found I was compelled to finish the book so I understood the reason for a particular comment during the discussion period.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“It’s nice to read a book and discuss it rather than to move on. To be able to have an intelligent discussion with someone.” (HMP Bullingdon)*

*"It is always interesting to hear what other people think and to see that there are so many different ways to read the same book. Things that one misses might be raised, and aspects one might not have fully understood can be explored into clarity." (HMP Birmingham)*

*"For me, it was the group sessions. Hearing the perspectives of others is a great thing. It's amazing the differing opinions based around the same book that all the group has been reading." (HMP Thameside)*

Finally, it appears that the reading group may have had some positive outcomes beyond the scope of literacy as it encouraged participants to listen to one another in an open, non-judgmental and respectful manner. Several of the respondents have noted their own progress in that regard without being prompted.

*"I have learnt to listen more, and learnt about many things." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Good to meet prisoners from other wings. Good to share views and feel uninhibited when doing so. It was just great fun and good to meet people from all walks of life in an open and un-judgemental atmosphere. No wrong or right answers. All views are personal and encouraged. Good to be listened to and views considered. I think this was achieved." (HMP Thameside)*

*"It's good to hear other opinions, whether these confirm or contradict what you have thought yourself." (HMP Erlestoke)*

*"It is always good to hear the opinion of others. Individuals may well find alternative points of focus. It is also good to share the enthusiasm for a book and to feed off the enthusiasm of others. I think I have become more patient and more accepting of the opinions of others." (HMP Lewes)*

*"It's cool to share opinions and point of views. Helps me to understand other people's mentalities and understanding of life." (HMP Thameside)*

### **Books Unlocked widens the range of books read and allows participants to read more**

It appears that the Books Unlocked programme has affected the quantity that participants usually read. Many say that they read more and more importantly, that they enjoy doing so.

*"It gives me an incentive to read, yes I enjoyed it, but I wish I could have more time to read the titles." (HMP Thameside)*

*"I have most definitely read more. I'm forced to read, really, if I'm going to give an opinion on something, then it's good to know I've actually put the work in. By read[ing] the book 'under the microscope' also, I've found I read more, sometimes having three books on the go at any one time!" (HMP Thameside)*

*"I am reading far more. My previously considered views from a fairly classical and academic perspective of what is good literature is being rapidly broken down. For example [The] Sisters Brothers is a very worthwhile book that is brilliantly written." (HMP Birmingham)*

*"I read a lot more, also I read a lot more varied topics." (HMP Thameside)*

*"I read with more care." (HMP Bullingdon)*

Participants are unanimous about the positive impact of the programme on their reading habits. Three actually mention that it has helped them with their reading skills, and that they have particularly enjoyed the approachable novels and the Quick Reads format.

*"Particularly enjoyed Dead Man Talking by Roddy Doyle. It was short and not demanding text. Easy words, easy reading." (HMYOI Aylesbury)*



Books Unlocked appears to have benefited both those who perceive themselves to be emergent readers as well as those who think of themselves as proficient readers. In the case of proficient readers, they particularly enjoy the fact that they discover new books, authors or genres, thanks to the excellent selection of the Man Booker Prize-shortlist and consequently the breadth of Man Booker Prize-shortlisted titles chosen to be part of the programme.

*“I thought it was fantastic, always a good varied selection of books, from different authors and genres. Keeps the mind active and engrossed.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I normally read factual books: science, documentaries, even self-help, and at most memoirs or biographies, not stories of fiction.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“Most of the books I read are business books, but I did enjoy reading something different.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I was a very good reader before, but it definitely helped me to have access to new books and to have a better understanding of literature from a general point of view.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“As I started reading, I became more and more interested in all different types of literature.” (NPR)*

*“Good introduction into different styles of writing and authors. Gives you the opportunity to read different styles or genres of books that I’d not usually read. It has opened my mind and taste a little more.” (HMP Bullingdon)*

*“I like the fact that I’ve been reading books I wouldn’t normally read.” (HMP Bullingdon)*

*“I have read no “westerns” books before and would not normally consider it. Therefore this was a very difference [sic] (and good) experience. Not previously having read a huge number of American authors. I find their style refreshing. The reading group is without doubt broadening my range and taste in literature. The librarian who runs our reading group has an extremely eclectic knowledge and is excellent at choosing different authors and genres.” (HMP Birmingham)*

*“I have been introduced to books that I would probably not have chosen, which would have been my loss.” (HMP Birmingham)*

*“I would never choose a western, so there is very little chance that I would have chosen this book. However, I thought the book was excellent on several levels. The characterisation, pace, plot and structure were superb. We are often given material which we might not choose for ourselves. We have read a range of genres. We have discovered authors new to us. The reading group compels us to broaden our reading by challenging preconceptions we may hold about certain kinds of writing. [The] Sisters Brothers is a case in point. I would NEVER have picked it up, but it was well worth reading; I enjoyed it and got a lot from it.” (HMP Birmingham)*

### **Positive impact on confidence, well-being, managing emotions and coping with some of the challenges posed by prison life**

Participants were asked if they felt that reading influences the way they manage their emotions, and whether it has impacted on their well-being in general. The specific question asked was, “Does reading affect how you feel? Does it affect how stressed you are, or any of your emotions? Can you give some examples?” Many respondents also chose to comment on how the programme improved their experience of prison at other points throughout the survey too.

*“Books Unlocked is, as it says, unlocks the mind in a locked situation. Keep the books and discussions coming.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I think that in this environment (prison) this focus groups [sic] are of benefit for everyone. I realised how I became more comfortable/confident talking when everyone participated.” (HMP Thameside)*

*"I think it's a good initiative. And it helps to take your mind off your current circumstances. It's a form of escapism." (HMP Thameside)*

*"One man said that he hadn't thought that such a thing would exist in a prison. Another hadn't come before and said he was surprised how good it was. All agreed that it didn't seem like prison but just like being 'normal people' sitting down together." (HMP Erlestoke)*

*"In a prison situation, one cannot stress enough the importance of the library, not just in terms of well-being, but the information and learning it contains. I am not being sycophantic to say that the Reading Group is the highlight of the week. I thoroughly look forward to new books, the ensuing discussion. Many of my letters are based around it." (HMP Birmingham)*

Additionally, many respondents remark on how reading is relaxing and calming and generally has a positive impact on both emotions and behaviours.

*"I feel a lot happier, calmer, enthusiastic, hopeful and positive!" (HMP Thameside)*

*"Reading slowly but effectively reduces my mind activity by focusing on the storyline. Thus I feel more at ease, less worrisome." (HMP Thameside)*

*"I would say reading opens my mind and helps me take time over decisions." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Reading can be a way of relaxing, getting a better understanding of yourself, and helps me feel more positive." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Helps me to control my stress, anger or excessive excitement. It also helps me from a more general point of view, to educate myself and my behaviour." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Reading helps to relax my mind, and very often, after a full-on day, reading helps [me] to wind down." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Taking part in the readers' group helps with social interaction and also with mental health and anxiety. Sitting round a table together to talk about a book is relaxing and good for anyone with mental problems." (HMP Erlestoke)*

*"Reading a relatively light book like [The] Sisters Brothers keeps one totally engrossed for several hours and the television off! That must reduce stress! (...) Some books more than others deeply affect my personal emotions and assist in helping understand them. Recently deeply moved by Animal's People (Indra Sinha) which positively affects mood and how one treats people." (HMP Birmingham)*

*"Reading is a source of pleasure. It can also calm. It can relieve stress. How you feel depends on what you read, but you invariably feel better after reading. Occasionally you are given or you come across a text which educates you." (HMP Lewes)*

Finally, a few respondents say that they have felt their confidence improve thanks to Books Unlocked. This is partly because of the reading group setting that encouraged them to speak in front of others, and partly because of the books themselves, which have helped some participants to see that they were indeed able to read a whole book, including a novel that has been selected for a prestigious literary prize.

*"I think it helps to speak in public and to lose that point of shame and panic we all have." (HMP Thameside)*

*"It definitely encourages confidence to speak one's mind and learn to articulate one's views more clearly. Promotes the banishment of prejudice." (HMP Thameside)*

*"Taking part has probably increased my confidence in speaking in a group and has made me less scared to air opinions or sometimes knowledge. I certainly will read a book more carefully and mark certain sentences or passages that I think should be raised to support my opinion"*

*whether negative or positive. Confidence to approach something new without thinking it is 'too difficult' or highbrow, and probably reading more critically.* (HMP Birmingham)

*"It does make me more confident to speak up."* (HMP Lewes)

*"It has helped me to keep my confidence going."* (HMP Thameside)

## **Book ownership**

Participants were asked if the book ownership aspect of the programme was important to them. Only one said this did not affect him:

*"As long as I can access it, even for reference, I don't mind if it's not my property."* (HMP Thameside)

Most others, on the contrary, very much appreciate that Books Unlocked gives books to participants to keep, and seem to highly value book ownership.

*"It is empowering."* (HMP Thameside)

*"I would rather the book belongs to me rather than anyone else. Because then I can read the book whenever."* (HMP Thameside)

*"The most import[ant] aspect [of the programme] is, no doubt, the chance of having books handed to prisoners so we can read them in our cells. Sometimes people outside don't realise about how important a book can be for a prisoner."* (HMP Thameside)

*"There's nothing like a nice shelf full of books of your own. As a regular library user, I think there are books you should have with you all your life. Also, it's the best present ever."* (HMP Thameside)

*"It is important to own books. To build a personal library. Books are to be cherished. They can bring back memories from key life stages. Can be turned to prove points, used to indulge in nostalgia and demonstrate how one has grown/changed over time. Books are personal possessions. They represent who you are as a person. They can be shared."* (HMP Thameside)

*"It's good, as many of us can't afford books. Also we can pass books on to someone else."* (HMP Erlestoke)

*"It's nice to have something new that belongs to you. You can go back to it, or pass it on to a mate."* (HMP Hewell)

*"Book ownership is important in that one can refer back or even loan. A bookshelf reflects one's own journey in life and in reading. It is a record of how you have changed, how your tastes change and how society changes."* (HMP Birmingham)

*"I like it that I can take the book with me at the end. I'm gonna keep this book 'til I leave and take it home."* (HMP Lewes)

*"Owning a book is a joy."* (HMP Lewes)

## **Participants discover, or learn more about, the Man Booker Prize**

Most respondents had never heard of the Man Booker Prize before taking part in Books Unlocked.

*"I knew nothing about it."* (HMP Thameside)

*“A couple of us had heard about it, but hadn’t read a Man Booker-shortlisted book before this.” (HMP Hewell)*

There were a few exceptions; some had heard about the Man Booker Prize, but only one participant had read Man Booker Prize-shortlisted novels before and actively sought to do so:

*“I know of the Man Booker Prize, and do take an (ignorant) interest in who is nominated or who wins. It does influence whether I would pick up a book from a library.” (HMP Birmingham)*

Almost unanimously, participants who found out about the Man Booker Prize and shortlist were enthusiastic about it, and impressed by the quality of the books. Several said that they would now look out for shortlisted novels and prizewinners to guide their future reading.

*“On the Man Booker Prize, it was great to hear about its importance.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“We didn’t know much about the Man Booker Prize, but we learnt through the people involved in Books Unlocked that it’s a very prestigious prize and that being shortlisted means that the book is of great value.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I knew nothing about it and I’m now interested in new books.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I didn’t know anything about the Man Booker Prize, but I knew Life of Pi and Never Let Me Go. Now I am more familiar with the rest of the collection.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I was unfamiliar with the [Man] Booker Prize before I got involved in the reading group. I found the books on the shortlist to be good and well deserving of being nominated for that!” (HMP Thameside)*

### **General feedback and enjoyment of the books**

A lot of very positive comments and moving testimonies were shared as part of the evaluation, which also gave respondents the opportunity to share their views on the programme, what they felt was important, or whatever they wished to write about, with little guidance.

*“Look forward to seeing you soon. Please keep up the prison work. It does make a difference!” (HMP Thameside)*

*“Very first time joining book club, so the bar is pretty high, the books are great and so are the discussions.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“Thank your team so much for all the work and help you have done. Wish you all the best. x” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I enjoyed many things: the fact of having a good book to read, the chance to discuss about it with other inmates, and most especially, the presence of the editor of the book.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“Just encourage the coordinator/volunteer to keep helping prisoners to reach literature and carry on bringing books inside our cells. It’s a wonderful thing you’re doing. Please don’t give up.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“Interesting books, written in an interesting way, and not all conventional. Sometimes a little challenging to get stuck into.” (HMP Bullingdon)*

*“Just, thank you.” (HMP Birmingham)*

*“The reading group meeting is for many of us the highlight of the week. After the meeting, we invariably start on the new material given to us. A week-long discussion ensues – where you are in the text, what do you think of... etc. A great deal of our pleasure, enthusiasm and anticipation is due, in a very large measure, to the skill, judgement and hard work of our librarian. She is also a very skilled ringmaster during our discussions.” (HMP Birmingham)*

Participants in prisons and YOIs who enjoyed a visit either from an author or a publisher tend to refer to it as the best part of the programme.

*“Great to have some outside visitors.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“One dislike, or way to improve, would be it’s rare for authors or publishers to come to book clubs. I think this should happen more often.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“I like the opportunity to meet editors and learn about the publishing business and also discover new books.” (HMP Thameside)*

*“The most important thing was the author visit. Being able to ask questions and hear other people’s feedback.” (HMP Thameside)*

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, based on feedback obtained directly from participants, Books Unlocked successfully achieves a wide range of positive outcomes.

The anticipated literacy outcomes, such as participants reading more and discovering Man Booker Prize-shortlisted titles, were achieved. These are all positive outcomes that directly relate to the nature of the programme and indicate its success.

But the programme’s outcomes go beyond literacy, with outcomes that pertain to well-being and sociability reported. Participants are keen to highlight how much reading and taking part in the reading group means to them in the prison environment; they describe how reading relieves stress and restlessness, and that it increases confidence, tolerance and empathy. These are all particularly pertinent outcomes for those in secure, and potentially challenging, settings.

When respondents express how they have enjoyed reading new types of books and having the opportunity to read materials that they would not normally have read, some of these responses suggest that Books Unlocked opens up new opportunities for participants, not only in terms of literature, but also in terms of encouraging open-mindedness and curiosity. Some of these respondents are possibly more likely to consider reading different authors and genres from their normal reading material in the future. Along with those who said that the reading group has helped them to become more patient and better able to listen to other people’s opinions, they demonstrate the positive impacts of reading for enjoyment for life and well-being in general.