

Vision for Literacy Business Pledge 2021

The Vision for Literacy Business Pledge is now in its sixth year and so far 83 businesses have committed to working to improve literacy levels in the UK in 2021.

Literacy in the UK is a pressing priority and the impact on the business community is immense. Research from KPMG has estimated that literacy failure costs the UK economy £2.5 billion each year¹. As well as bearing its impact, research has demonstrated the unique role the business community has in raising literacy levels.

As business leaders, we know that prompt action on literacy is vital in securing the economic future of the next generation. Youth unemployment currently stands at a record low of 5.5%, but is predicted to rise to 17% by late 2020². Evidence from previous recessions has shown that young people who have just left full time education are harder hit than other age groups³.



Research from the Resolution Foundation calls for young people to be supported to stay in education for longer, which will help protect them from youth unemployment⁴. However, currently a quarter of all 15-year-olds have a reading age of twelve or below⁵. This puts them at a disadvantage in their GCSEs, meaning they are unlikely to get the grades to progress to further education and access the governments newly announced Lifetime Skills Guarantee. As businesses, we know that we need to act now to protect young people from future unemployment by giving them the literacy skills they need to stay in educational settings.

We also know that there is a link between a child's home learning environment in early childhood and their later educational outcomes and future employability. The current cohort of young people will

be disproportionately affected by the disruption to their education and the economic impact of the pandemic. School closures, lockdown and ongoing disruption to education services is set to have a disastrous impact on the literacy of the 4.6 million children living in poverty in the UK. As businesses, we know the recession will affect these communities the most and leave them vulnerable to further economic shocks. We know that we need to work together with other businesses and across sectors to prioritise literacy skills in these communities to ensure that young people can fully participate in social and economic recovery.

We pledge to elevate the literacy issue within our business and take action (commensurate with size) based on the needs of our local area to close the literacy gap and safeguard children's futures. We will do this by:

- Engaging our employees in the literacy challenge
- Supporting the drive to raise literacy levels in our local community
- Contributing to the national campaign to raise literacy levels



Our pledge in more detail

PLEDGE	PRACTICAL ACTION (at least one action to fulfil each pledge)
<p>Engage our employees in the literacy challenge by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Raising the profile of literacy in the workplace ✓ Engaging employees as parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage our employees to volunteer to support local students with their CVs and interview skills • Commit to understanding staff needs in terms of literacy skill development and providing opportunities for developing these, where appropriate • Equip parents we employ with information on how to develop their child's literacy and communication skills at home • Promote the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge internally to show the importance of the campaign to employees
<p>Support the drive to raise literacy levels in our local community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Working with local schools, libraries and partners ✓ Targeting outreach work to the communities most in need of literacy support ✓ Promoting volunteer and fundraising opportunities to staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build links with local schools and libraries and engage with the literacy challenge in our local community • Provide work-experience opportunities to young people in our local community from disadvantaged backgrounds • Gift free books to children and families who might not be able to afford their own • Include literacy development opportunities and reading for pleasure within all relevant community outreach activities • Promote opportunities for staff to volunteer to support literacy and reading-based activities in schools, communities and libraries • Promote fundraising opportunities to staff to help raise funds to support language and literacy levels in disadvantaged communities
<p>Contribute to the national campaign to raise literacy levels by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increasing the evidence-base ✓ Raising awareness of the issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the development of the research base through funding educational research • Increase the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge evidence base through evaluation of our literacy programmes and activity, and by providing case studies • Support nationwide campaigns that support literacy initiatives across our channels

2021 signatories



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Baker McKenzie.

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Impact

Engaging employees in the literacy challenge

Cleary Gottlieb: During lockdown, Cleary Gottlieb organised a company-wide virtual quiz – with a special guest appearance from Waterstones Children's Laureate, Cressida Cowell – raising £3,180 for the National Literacy Trust's COVID-19 emergency appeal. Employees from across the firm shared blogs about their jobs, conducted mock interviews, and volunteered as mentors to support students while, secondary schools and colleges were closed.

Lancôme: During the summer holidays, the Words for Work team and Lancôme gave 10 young women aged 16-19 the opportunity to take part in a virtual internship, providing them with meaningful encounters with Lancôme volunteers, the opportunity to work on a creative project independently and to partake in employability and literacy masterclasses with the National Literacy Trust.

Raising literacy levels in the local community

British Land: The National Literacy Trust worked closely with real estate partner British Land to adapt the Young Readers Programme, ensuring that children were still able to benefit despite school closures. British Land also connected the National Literacy Trust with their local teams at 20 UK locations, donating 6,000 books and 3,000 literacy activity packs through local food banks during lockdown.

Penguin Random House: Penguin Random House worked with the National Literacy Trust to donate more than 200,000 books and writing resources to children who needed them most. They also recruited 80 new primary schools serving disadvantaged communities to benefit from their school library programme, Puffin World Of Stories, for free from September.

Contribution to the national literacy campaign

McDonald's: The McDonald's Happy Readers scheme, where toys are replaced with books for a six-week period annually, has run for the past eight years and will now take place all year round. McDonald's also distributed 2,500 books to local charities such as Fareshare, to help ensure families in the greatest need had books over the summer.

Bloomsbury: During lockdown, Bloomsbury launched Katherine Rundell's *The Book of Hopes*, a free online collection of new short stories, poems and pictures from more than 110 writers and illustrators to comfort and inspire children during lockdown. It was hosted exclusively on the National Literacy Trust's Family Zone website and brought more than 100,000 families to the website, where they could access more literacy support. In November 2020, Bloomsbury Publishing, Bupa Foundation and The National Literacy Trust are coming together to provide 5,000 schools each with 3 copies of *The Book of Hopes*.

Developed by members and supporters of the National Literacy Forum



For more information on the **Vision for Literacy Business Pledge 2021** visit literacytrust.org.uk/businesspledge or contact businesspledge@literacytrust.org.uk

1 https://readingrecovery.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/long_term_costs_of_literacy_difficulties_2nd_edition_2009.pdf | 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/oct/07/covid-generation-uk-youth-unemployment-set-to-triple-to-80s-levels> | 3 <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Class-of-2020.pdf> | 4 <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2020/05/Class-of-2020.pdf> | 5 <https://www.gi-assessment.co.uk/news-hub/press-releases/new-study-highlights-the-importance-of-reading-to-the-whole-school-curriculum/> | The National Literacy Trust is a registered charity no. 1116260 (England and Wales) and SC042944 (Scotland).