

# Reading for a brighter future

BookTrust's strategy 2025–2030

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# Foreword

**We're delighted to share BookTrust's new strategy – *Reading for a brighter future*. It sets out our ambitious vision for the next five years of a world where reading is part of the everyday life of all children and families. It also reflects our continued purpose: to get children from low-income households and vulnerable family backgrounds reading regularly and by choice so that they experience its lifelong, transformative benefits.**

**Shared reading has never been more important, or more at risk. While 95% of families know that reading with their child is important, many struggle to embed the practice into everyday family life – and only 42% of 0–7 year olds get a bedtime story.**

We know that the benefits of reading are transformational. Reading with children from birth changes lives. It supports cognitive development, bonding, attachment, emotional wellbeing, creativity, school readiness and community connection. We have seen that – particularly for those from vulnerable family backgrounds – reading together helps children build connections, overcome challenges and find their place in the world. In many ways, sharing stories is a protective factor against the adversity that some children experience, helping them feel secure and loved.



**Diana Gerald**  
Co-Chief Executive  
BookTrust



**Annie Crombie**  
Co-Chief Executive  
BookTrust



**The impact we have had so far has only been possible thanks to the diverse range of partners we work with.**

We have made significant achievements over the last five years, refreshing our programmes in response to evidence-based approaches and shifting our focus towards children in greater need. But we want to do more.

Over the next five years, we will continue to operate at scale through our diverse network of partners, working with all communities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We will also extend both our reach and our depth, using evidence and insight to drive behaviour change, particularly for children from low-income households and vulnerable family backgrounds.

With this strategy, we have set out how we want to reach further and do more – but we know we can't do it alone. Our [Reading Rights campaign](#) calls on all organisations and individuals who feel they have a role to play in bringing reading to every child to lend their support.

We look forward to continuing to work with all our partners to deliver this new and exciting strategy.

We know our vision is ambitious, but we also know it's achievable, together.

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## Who we are

**For over a century, BookTrust has championed the power of reading, playing a leading role in shaping a national reading culture.**

**We're now the UK's largest children's reading charity. Each year, we reach over 1.4 million children and families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and with every local authority, delivering evidence-informed programmes that make a measurable difference to children's reading behaviours.**

**Our work is rooted in the belief that every child, especially those from low-income or vulnerable family backgrounds, deserves the chance to enjoy reading and all the lifelong benefits it brings. This belief underpins our new five-year strategy.**

For more about who we are, including our Patron and President, our governance, funders and supporters [click here](#)

## Our vision

is a world where reading is part of the everyday life of all children and families.

## Our purpose

is to get children from low-income or vulnerable family backgrounds reading regularly and by choice, so that they experience the lifelong, transformative benefits of reading.

## Why our work matters

Reading brings profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong impact on children's lives. At a time when many families face challenges, and the gaps in outcomes are growing between children from families with low incomes and their more affluent peers, reading is a way to make a positive difference.

Building children's enjoyment of reading, from the earliest moments in childhood, is a critical part of giving children the best start in life. Reading builds and sustains human relationships and connections. It supports childhood development, helping children grow their imaginations and increase empathy. Making reading part of daily family life not only brings opportunity for those facing greater challenges, it helps us understand one another and imagine a positive future.

### Reading supports children to...



#### Overcome inequalities before they deepen

- They can experience greater educational and social mobility
- Those growing up in poverty are less likely to remain in poverty as adults
- Throughout school, they are more likely to overcome the barriers caused by disadvantage



#### Bond with their caregivers and experience better mental wellbeing

- Feelings of security and bonds with parents/carers are enhanced
- They are more likely to experience better mental wellbeing, self-esteem and improved socio-emotional skills
- They are more likely to have healthy routines and habits



#### Meet early development milestones and do better at school

- Brain development, attention and cognitive ability are all enhanced
- They have greater school readiness and make more progress across the curriculum
- They have better speech and language development and literacy skills



#### Develop empathy, creativity and imagination

- They build empathy by reading fiction
- They develop creative problem solving skills
- They develop their creativity and imagination

**We know that incorporating reading into daily life is challenging:**

# 95%

**of parents and carers know reading with their child is important,** but many struggle to embed the practice into everyday family life!<sup>1</sup>



# 28%

**of parents and carers find reading with their young children challenging.**<sup>1</sup>

# 42%

**of 0–7 year olds get a bedtime story.**<sup>1</sup>

# 33%

**of 7-year-olds say they love reading,** dropping to **25%** at age 11.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BookTrust Family Survey 2022 (Online survey of 2,148 parents/carers on low incomes with children aged 0–7 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

<sup>2</sup> BookTrust Family Survey 2021 (Online survey of 7,871 parents/carers and children about children aged 0–17 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

# Our strategy for 2025-30

We are proud of the progress we have made over the past five years, reshaping our programmes, deepening partnerships and place-based working, and reaching more children and families who need support the most. Now we're building on this foundation with renewed focus and ambition. We remain committed to early shared reading and to supporting children from low-income or vulnerable family backgrounds.

By embedding what works, growing our reach and evolving the way we operate, we're working to ensure reading becomes part of everyday life for all children – especially those in greatest need.

**Our 2025-30 strategy is designed to build on and consolidate the progress we have made over the previous five years.**

**To achieve this, we will:**

- **Deepen our impact** by embedding effective, evidence-led approaches into all of our programmes
- **Expand our reach** to support even more children, particularly those from vulnerable family backgrounds
- **Invest in building a sustainable future** for BookTrust, strengthening our income generation, raising our external profile and developing the way we work so that our people, processes and decisions are set up to deliver on our ambition



## Our impact goals

Impact Goal  
**One**

**Children from vulnerable family backgrounds build strong foundations for life through reading.**

Impact Goal  
**Two**

**Reading together is embedded in the life of early years families with low incomes.**

Impact Goal  
**Three**

**Reading is a habitual part of the everyday life of all children, with focus on those who need support the most.**

## Who we will support

We will continue to work with all communities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland to support children and families in greatest need. We will work through a diverse network of delivery partners to find the best ways to reach children and their families. These include universal services such as libraries, schools and childcare settings, as well as partners supporting families with low incomes, children with additional needs or children from vulnerable family backgrounds.

In all cases, we will continue to design our programmes to meet the needs of children and families who have the greatest barriers to reading and need support the most.



**Our place-based approach: we will work through a diverse network of delivery partners to find the best ways to reach children and their families in each community.**

### This means:

**For Impact Goal One** - We will focus on children from vulnerable family backgrounds, widening our priority audiences as we grow our reach.

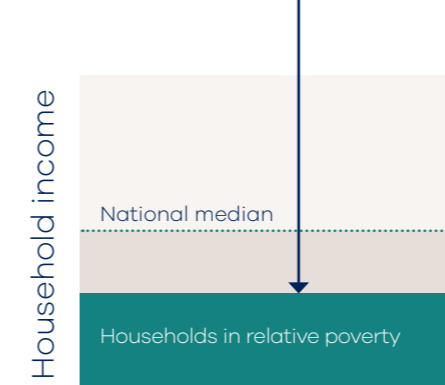
**For Impact Goal Two** - Our priority audience for Bookstart is families with low incomes. We aim to reach all new babies and their families with our universal programme, Bookstart Baby.

**For Impact Goal Three** - We will work inclusively through primary and secondary schools, and design our programmes to reach diverse audiences and to support those who need our help the most.

There are nearly  
**611,000**  
**babies born**

in England, Wales and Northern Ireland every year  
(Source: ONS, NISRA 2023)

We define families with low incomes as households in relative poverty, **i.e. a household income of 60% below the national median**



There are  
**2.2m**  
**children aged 0-4 living in low-income households in the UK**

This is 36% of all children aged 0-4 (Source: DWP 2024)

We define children from vulnerable family backgrounds as: **children who are looked after, children in kinship care, children who are adopted, children receiving early help support and children with a social worker. There are:**

**83,600**  
**looked after children in England, 14,600 of whom are aged 0-4**

This is less than 1% of all children  
(Source: DfE 2023)

**121,000**  
**children are in kinship care in England and Wales, 31,300 of whom are aged 0-7**

This is around 1% of all children  
(Source: ONS 2023)

**3,000**  
**children are adopted each year, 2,400 of whom are aged 0-4** (Source: DfE 2023)

**399,500**  
**children classed as children in need** (including those on child in need plans, those on child protection plans, children looked after by local authorities, care leavers and disabled children)

This is around 3% of all children  
(Source: DfE 2024)

# Impact Goal One

Children from vulnerable family backgrounds build strong foundations for life through reading.



Engage and support delivery partners and practitioners working with children from vulnerable family backgrounds



Design and deliver impactful offers for children from vulnerable family backgrounds



Raise the profile of the benefits of reading for children from vulnerable family backgrounds

## Impact and depth

### Our starting point

- **BookTrust's online support** explains the benefits of reading for children from vulnerable family backgrounds.
- **96%** of children receiving our Letterbox Club programme said they liked or loved it.
- **73%** said they were reading more, either independently or with an adult.

### By the end of year five

- **We will raise the profile of the role that reading can play in strengthening relationships for children from vulnerable family backgrounds** and build a strong network of advocates, experts and practitioners helping these children enjoy reading.
- **We will make sure our new and extended programmes continue to receive positive feedback** from children and families, and see them reading more frequently.

## Children and families reached

### Our starting point

- **Reaching 11,000 children** and families from vulnerable family backgrounds.
- Working with over **500 partners** and co-designing our support with practitioners and families.

### By the end of year five

- **We will reach increasing numbers of children from vulnerable family backgrounds** every year so that by the end of the strategy period we are reaching around 60,000 annually.

## Key objectives

**By 2030, we will reach 60,000 children from vulnerable family backgrounds with impactful support to embed reading in family life.**



# Impact Goal Two

Reading together is embedded in the life of early years families with low incomes.



Engage and support early years delivery partners



Design and deliver impactful offers for early years children and families



Raise and leverage our early years sector profile and influence

## Impact and depth

### Our starting point

- **85% of partners felt BookTrust resources helped them to engage children** and families from low-income households with reading.
- **95%** of parents/carers enjoyed using Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programmes.
- **61%** of families had tried to set up reading routines at home because of the programme.
- **73%** said they believed more strongly in the benefits of reading for their child since receiving the programme.

### By the end of year five

- **We will further improve support** for our early years delivery partners to help them get more children reading.
- **A higher proportion of the families we work with will hear from delivery partners** about how to share stories and why it matters.
- **Our Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programmes** will continue to get children reading.
- **A higher proportion of the families we work with will establish reading routines** and believe more strongly in the benefits of reading for children.

## Children and families reached

### Our starting point

- **We are reaching over 400,000 children** with our Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programmes.
- **72%** of the children receiving Bookstart programmes are from low-income families.

### By the end of year five

- **We will increase the reach of our Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programmes** to 450,000 children per year, of which at least 80% will be from families on low incomes.

## Key objectives

Over this strategy period, we will have reached a total of **2.15 million children, including at least 1.7 million families with low incomes.**



# Impact Goal Three

Reading is a habitual part of the everyday life of all children, with focus on those who need support the most.



Engage and support schools and teachers



Design and deliver impactful offers for children in primary schools



Design and deliver impactful offers for children in secondary schools

## Impact and depth

### Our starting point

- **Teachers engage with our resources**, particularly our reviews and recommendations.

#### In 2024–25:

- **98%** of secondary schools said they would recommend our Bookbuzz programme to others.
- **98%** said Bookbuzz supported them to encourage reading for pleasure in their school.

### By the end of year five

- **We will continue to see strong support and engagement from teachers** with our schools-based programmes.

## Children and families reached

### Our starting point

#### In 2024–25:

- Over **330,000** school-aged children were reached with direct programme activity (and many more through engaging teachers with our content).

### By the end of year five

- **We will support more children in primary and secondary schools**, and more schools and teachers, with our reading programmes.

## Key objectives

**By 2030 we will be supporting more teachers in primary and secondary schools and reaching more children with support that helps them read regularly and by choice.**





# Deepening our impact

**Our work is driven by evidence and underpinned by our theory of change, which is based on extensive research and decades of work with families and partners.**

**Over the last five years, we have learnt more about the features of our programmes that create impact and identified the most promising of these to develop further.**

## Doing more of what we know works

We have identified four key ingredients that are already contributing to strong impact. We will continue to embed these across all our programme activity.

### 1. Increasing access to books that have the features we know bring the greatest benefits

We know the importance of the 'right' book, and the features that families and children enjoy and from which they experience the greatest benefits, so they are inspired to read and keep on reading.

### 2. Communicating our evidence and insight to delivery partners

Sharing expertise, evidence and insights helps us build partners' confidence that our work supports their goals and that in working with us they are using their resources wisely.

### 3. Facilitating connections between our partners

Helping create connections across our wide and diverse stakeholder community means partners are part of a wider mission with opportunities to learn together.

### 4. Being locally embedded

Being locally embedded means that we are able to adapt and find opportunities to reach into communities where we can have the most impact and can enhance the impact of our partners.

## Increasing the impact of our support for partners

Over the next five years we will increase engagement with our delivery partners and our customers and improve the ways we support them. We will focus on three particular areas where our evidence gives promising indication of developing impact:

### 1. Helping partners understand the principles and approaches behind our programme design

We want everyone working with families to feel clear on the things they can embed into their practice. This is how we ensure our work is both evidence-informed and place-based.

### 2. Meeting the specific needs of children and families

By giving partners a menu of tools to support reading together, they will be able to choose the best approach for the specific needs of the families they are working with.

### 3. Creating a buzz

By creating a profile and excitement around reading and BookTrust activity, we can help partners feel even more inspired in their work.

## Increasing the impact of our support to families

Over the next five years we will focus on developing three promising approaches to increasing our impact with families:

### 1. Making the most of every opportunity

Making the most of multiple moments to reinforce a reading habit, at all points on a child's journey.

### 2. Showing as well as telling

By embedding modelling by practitioners in all our programmes, we can show families the magic of reading aloud as well as tell them why it matters.

### 3. Making reading relatable and relevant

When families see reading as relatable and relevant, they feel that it is for them and can be part of their daily lives.

# Equality, diversity and inclusion

**We have embedded inclusive ways of working in our approach, and we are committed to improving these further over the next period. Reading brings communities together around shared stories and helps us understand the perspectives of other people – it could not be more vital at a time when fractures within communities are clear to see.**

**Over the next five years we will continue to co-create our programmes with the diverse groups of children and families we support, improving and challenging our co-design approaches, working with a wide range of partners, and attracting and retaining a diverse staff body.**

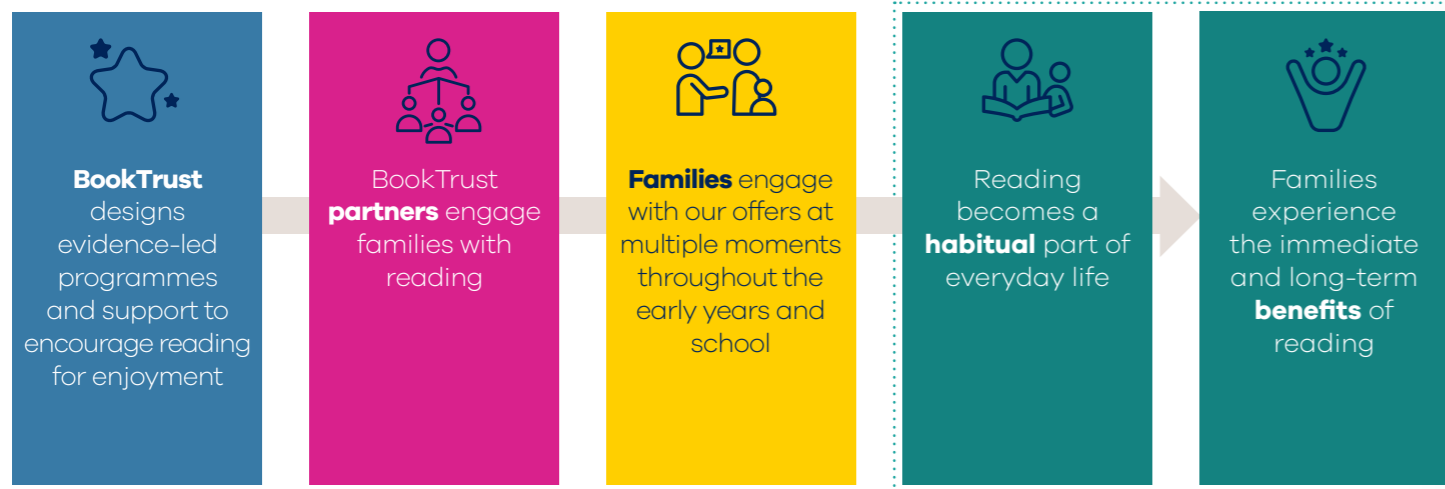
## In particular we will:

- **Deepen** our understanding of particular family needs so we can design inclusive, impactful support.
- **Strengthen** our place-based delivery approach so we can respond to the realities of individual communities.
- **Improve** our understanding of the diverse practitioners we work with so we can design flexible and relevant support to help them deliver.
- **Continue** our support for creatives of colour through BookTrust Represents – and our support for teachers and practitioners to work with representative children's books.



**We will ensure we take an inclusive approach, thinking in particular about how we support those with less opportunity and greater barriers to benefit from the transformational impact of reading and sharing stories.**

## Our summary theory of change



## What makes BookTrust special?

Our work is supported by several key factors

- ✓ **We create behaviour change in reading through digital communications and partnership approaches that go beyond the book.**
- ✓ **We're at the heart of the children's book sector, working closely with authors, illustrators and publishers.**
- ✓ **We design with children, families and partners, putting them at the heart of all innovation, design and development work.**
- ✓ **We are driven by evidence and learning, and are always trying to increase our impact.**
- ✓ **We work at scale with partners to reach every corner of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.**

## How you can help

**Reading can change lives, but we can't achieve this impact for children and families alone. There are a number of ways you can support us to reach those who can benefit most from the power of shared reading.**

### Here's how you can support the work of BookTrust

- **Make a donation**  
No matter how big or small, your donations can make a real difference in helping every child to benefit from reading.
- **Fundraise for us**  
There are lots of ways you can help raise money for BookTrust, from school events to fun runs and coffee mornings, all of which will help to get children reading.
- **Partner with us**  
Our partners are the key to our impact. Whether you can help us reach and support children, or can help us grow our impact, we'd love to work together.
- **Spread the word**  
We are always advocating for the power of shared reading. If you can help spread our message, we'd love to hear more.



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