"It's no exaggeration to say that reading can transform British society…"

A SOCIETY OF READERS

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DEM⊙S

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Foreword

The challenges Demos has identified in this report make for worrying reading. Their projections of where we will be as a society in 2030 if no action is taken are almost dystopian.

We have been very interested in their analysis of the role reading can play in preventing this decline and in their recommendations for the future. As a national charity tacking life's big challenges through the proven power of reading, our vision is bold and ambitious. We know that reading has a vital role to play in connecting communities, supporting our health and wellbeing and helping us all to live the life we want; it is why we work with readers of all ages and at all stages of their lives. We therefore welcome Demos's call for investment to create a 'society of readers' and their ideas for getting adults to read more as well as children.

Many of their ideas focus on expanding or enhancing the brilliant work reading charities, libraries and other organisations are already doing across the country. Others need new partnerships to be forged and new approaches to be developed; all require new investment. We hope that these recommendations will be listened to by national and local government and by other funding bodies so that everyone has equal access to the transformative power of reading.

This report confirms what we have seen among people of all ages, across the UK: reading is such a powerful force for good that it can change people's lives. Reading enables us to expand our horizons and grow our ambitions. It builds creativity and imagination, knowledge and skills, empathy and understanding. It connects people and strengthens communities. It improves our prospects, shapes our life chances and helps us manage our health and wellbeing. Reading enables us to be the best we can be, whoever we are, whatever stage of life we are at, whatever challenges we face.

In a world where inequality is widening, where family and community networks are fragmenting and poor health and wellbeing is reaching epidemic proportions, we need the power of reading more than ever as a tool for change and we welcome a report which highlights, from a strong research base, its capacity to do this.

Sue Wilkinson, Chief Executive, The Reading Agency

Executive Summary

Demos carried out research over the summer of 2018 to assess the potential impact of reading on several great challenges of our time: loneliness, mental health problems, dementia and social (im)mobility. If left unchecked, our research shows, these challenges will grow into insurmountable problems.

Building on existing data, we forecast the effect these problems will have on society by 2030. For example, by 2030, we will still be struggling to improve social mobility. The attainment gap – a key measure for social mobility - is closing so slowly that it could take half a century or more to close. The attainment gap for the most deprived students will not budge at all. Between now and 2030, this will have affected over 1.5 million pupils.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the age distribution, we may expect more and more of us to eventually develop dementia. By 2030, an extra 134,000 places in care homes will be required for dementia patients, putting tremendous pressure on quality of care. There will also be demand for over 1 million informal carers. Even conservative estimates suggest that the cost would be as high as £38 *billion* – a 58 per cent increase compared to now. Under these conditions, preserving dignity and quality of life for older citizens will be one of the greatest challenges the nation has ever faced.

By 2030, the loneliness epidemic will take on disastrous proportions with 7 million lonely people in the over-60 age group alone. Two million of them may expect to see their lifespans shortened by loneliness. Across other age groups, too, we expect loneliness to rise because of long-term trends towards living alone. Loneliness will also put increasing pressures on public finances. On the current trajectory, loneliness among older people will cost almost 2 billion pounds by 2030.

Could something as simple as reading truly make a difference when the scale of the issue is quite so momentous? The short answer is yes.

Many people already use reading to ward off loneliness – and usually quite successfully, as studies find that regular readers tend to be less lonely. [1] Other research found that 95 per cent of people who are blind or partially sighted read (through an audiobook, or another technology) at least once a week to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation.[2] Books can also give groups a way to talk through their thoughts and feelings in an indirect way. [3] The power of book-based social contact is borne out by evaluations of reading programmes. In a national reading befriending programme including isolated and vulnerable older people, 88 per cent of participants appreciate the increased social contact from reading-inspired conversation.[4]

Books have also been shown to be beneficial in supporting mental and physical health. Reading significantly improves common symptoms of both depression and dementia.[5] Reading keeps the mind active, which may even delay the onset of dementia. In addition, books can help us understand our own and others' conditions. For example, many public libraries and schools have a dedicated, signposted section with self-help books, memoirs and fiction to better understand conditions such as ADHD, anxiety and depression. 75 per cent of school pupils reported a better understanding of mental health after such a dedicated book collection on mental health and wellbeing was made available.[6]

When it comes to social mobility, reading can work as a powerful boost to life chances. Reading for pleasure is one of the most important predictors of test scores at age 16, regardless of background.[7] In fact, children from disadvantaged backgrounds who read often tend to score better than more privileged pupils who do not read at all.[8] Reading and being read to from a young age sets some pupils up for a successful school career before they have ever entered the building, while others have to do without such cultural activities. Book gifting programmes, summer reading programmes and schemes to boost parents' engagement with books can all help. For example, school children on free school meals make 3 months' additional learning progress after receiving a summer book pack.[9]

The great challenges described in this report will create dividing lines in society, straining existing solidarities. In a worst case scenario, the social, political and financial pressures of these challenges will pit the young against the old, the privileged against the disadvantaged and the healthy against the ill. This report shows that books can bring us back together in surprising ways. Of course, reading is no panacea. But upon review of the evidence, there is simply no excuse to not take reading seriously as part of the solution.

Introduction

In an age of seemingly never-ending political outrage it can sometimes feel that very little unites us as a nation. One thing we share however, is reading. If perhaps not quite a nation of unabashed bookworms, UK citizens nevertheless spend hundreds of millions of hours reading books, not to mention the many hours spent reading magazines, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, webzines, blogs and countless other conduits for the written word.[10] Not only that, we also spend time discussing what we read over dinners, drinks and desktops. With friends, family, colleagues and even complete strangers online, our lives and conversations are mediated by the words we choose to consume.

This report aims to show that reading is more than just a national pastime, and that there is untapped latent potential in unleashing its transformative power to tackle some of our most pressing social challenges. We focus on four areas in particular - loneliness, mental health, dementia and social mobility - but in truth this is but the tip of an iceberg when it comes to reading's full utility as a social justice policy tool. Most importantly, it is a call to action for the Government to recognise this potential and apply it across the board. For, as it stands, reading policy interventions are inchoate and poorly co-ordinated, relying too much on the determination of committed civil society actors. There is a lot the Government can learn from these charities and social entrepreneurs, but a strategic role - directing and funding evidence-based interventions from the centre – is missing. Of course, there are good initiatives in specific Departments – the Department of Education works diligently on early years literacy, the Department of Communities and Local Government pays attention to the role of public and community libraries – but you would be extremely hard-pressed to describe encouraging reading as a key concern of government. Nor is this a symptom of Brexit-linked paralysis either: reading has never been seen as important enough to animate a cross-departmental, manifesto-guiding, 'vision of the nation' type social mission. Not by this government, or indeed by any other.

The central message of this report is that this must change. Not only must Government rise to the challenge of fulfilling that shared collective desire to read more, it should also see the need to encourage reading in precisely the way set out above: as a strategic social objective for us all – state, market and civil society – to work towards. And if the Prime Minister is looking for a transformative social agenda beyond Brexit, she should alight on reading and commit her Government to nurturing a 'society of readers'. Not only is such an aspiration broad enough to function as a unifying tie that binds all ages, backgrounds and genders together, it also speaks directly - and in a way backed up by evidence – to many of the great problems of our time.

The definition of reading this report uses encompasses two technical reading terms – pleasure and information or empowerment. (see figure one). These two types of reading run throughout the three sections of the report. First, we set out the evidence on the transformative potential of reading in three short literature reviews. Chapter one looks at the impact of reading on loneliness and social isolation; chapter two upon mental health and dementia; whilst chapter three explores reading's potential to boost Britain's social mobility. Next, we underline the scale of the challenge posed by these issues by way of a short statistical projection of how they will develop over the next decade barring effective intervention. Then, in chapter five we set out some radical reading-based policies with which the Government could unleash reading's transformative potential, before finally concluding with a vision of a true 'reading society' – a view of the future Britain could enjoy if it backed reading as a national social mission. Throughout, we will also incorporate qualitative evidence from participants in and facilitators of reading interventions.

Reading may not seem like a radical solution, and may strike others as too banal to be elevated to such a lofty social mission status. But as we will detail in the forthcoming chapters, it has so much latent potential for tackling big challenges like the four we discuss in this report. Books can train our brains and lessen the symptoms of dementia. They can help us foster connections with other readers and help alleviate loneliness or depression. They can open up new ways to fulfil our individual potential, spreading opportunity to workplaces, deprived communities and prisons. In short, it is no exaggeration to say that reading can transform British society. This report aims to show how and why we must nurture a 'society of readers'.

Definitions of Reading

Reading for pleasure: reading primarily for enjoyment, including fiction and non-fiction of many different genres. These include, amongst many others, novels, poetry and magazines as well as children's books, picture books and audiobooks.

Reading for empowerment and information: reading primarily for information, instruction or self-development, for example a self-help book or a health leaflet.

Chapter One – Reading and Loneliness

In June 2018, Theresa May announced £20 million of government funding would be used to support UK charities in their efforts to reduce loneliness and social isolation in the UK.[11] Commenting on the announcement, the Prime Minister described how "feeling lonely or isolated can have a profound and devastating impact on people's lives - it can affect anyone of any age and from any background".[12] According to the Office of National Statistics, the Prime Minister is right too – the data shows high levels of loneliness across a wide range of demographic categories, from young renters to widowed older homeowners.[13] Indeed, the British Red Cross estimated that a staggering 9 million people in the UK suffer from feeling lonely 'often' or 'always'.[14] Furthermore, in a rapidly ageing society, we can expect these numbers to rise – and quickly. Therefore, it is no surprise her Government – and the new Minister for Loneliness in particular - is currently surveying potential policy responses to what is finally being appreciated as one of the great social challenges of our era.

The conclusion of this chapter, underlined by the evidence, is that encouraging reading should absolutely be at the top of the list. Key findings include:

- Reading groups provide a route out of social isolation for young mothers, who are particularly susceptible to loneliness – with many saying reading helps to foster conversation[15]

- 95 per cent of people who are blind or partially sighted read at least once a week to alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation[16]

- In a national reading befriending programme including isolated and vulnerable older people, 88 per cent of participants appreciate the increased social contact from reading-inspired conversation[17]

Understanding loneliness

Before assessing the ways reading can help tackle loneliness and social isolation, it is important to appreciate that the two are not interchangeable terms. Social isolation specifically refers to the objective measure of reduced social contact, while loneliness refers to a subjective state.[18] In other words, a person may feel lonely despite a busy social life, or feel absolutely fine despite social isolation. That being said, there is an obvious connection and becoming socially isolated will very often trigger loneliness.

More broadly, research by Age UK found several predictors for loneliness: declining health, being widowed, living alone, and older age generally[19]. We can expect each of these factors to increase in an ageing population. As our population grows older, more people will live alone for longer and more people will develop age-related health disorders. Therefore it is reasonable to predict rising isolation and loneliness with an ageing population. Age UK found that over 3.6 million older people in the UK now live alone, almost 2 million of whom often report feeling ignored or invisible.[20]

But it is also important to stress that loneliness is emphatically not just an issue affecting older, more socially isolated citizens. Indeed quite the converse – an in-depth examination of loneliness and its characteristics carried out by the ONS in April 2018 found that the 16-24 age group were more likely to describe themselves as "always" or "often" lonely.[21] At 10 per cent of this entire cohort, this means nearly three times as many young people describe themselves in this way compared to the over 65s population.[22] This is not a trivial finding either – a cohort study by researchers from Kings College London found that this loneliness was a key catalyst for mental health challenges and that across all genders and socio-economic backgrounds, these young people were generally much more pessimistic about their future opportunities.[23]

Reading and loneliness

There is a significant body of literature associating reading with lower rates of self-reported loneliness. For example, a study in Australia, looking to inform future interventions against social isolation, interviewed people aged 65 and older to assess their pastimes and their feelings towards loneliness.[24] The researchers found reading to be one of the 'solitary' activities often mentioned as a useful pastime. "If the interviewees could be viewed as self-medicating to alleviate feelings of loneliness", the study notes, "the most common medicine reported was books."[25] Participants discussed how "reading allows them to remain cognitively active while engaging in an enjoyable and appropriate use of time."[26]

A Dutch study found a similar link between different leisure activities and the reduction in social isolation and loneliness. Surveying a representative sample of the Dutch population, the study looked to find any statistically significant associations between social connections and leisure time. Reading books was found to significantly reduce feeling of loneliness for people aged 18-64. Reading was also significantly associated with having close relationships. "People who read", the authors write, "apparently have more close contacts they can talk to about important matters." [27]

The Australian and the Dutch studies both suggest that reading combats loneliness by offering a worthwhile pastime. Some have hypothesized that self-directed activities such as reading produce a state of "flow", where the reader becomes so involved in the activity that nothing else matters – keeping loneliness at bay.[28] In this interpretation, reading can be seen as similar to activities such as gardening. However, other research suggests that reading has truly unique qualities that help readers connect with the world and manage their emotions. For example, one study presented the case of an elderly woman who had limited social contact because of physical disabilities. "When asked about how she felt about being alone and homebound, she pointed to her bookshelves and replied: 'I'm not alone. I have the whole world right here with me.'"[29]

Reading interventions and loneliness

Other studies went a step further. Rather than ask people how much they read in their day-to-day lives, they piloted and evaluated reading as a social intervention. In these interventions, researchers ask participants to increase their engagement with books and measure their wellbeing before and after the

intervention, thus isolating the effect of the reading. These 'experiments' have been conducted on many different social groups, from people in care homes, to young mothers and people with disabilities. However, the studies find universal effects: reading can help generate a sense of purpose, foster social connections and ultimately alleviate loneliness.

Perhaps inevitably, older citizens and especially those in a care home setting have been particularly targeted by such interventions. Indeed, according to some studies, over half of care home residents without cognitive impairment feel lonely.[30] The Reading Friends programme seeks to "empower, engage and connect older people who are vulnerable and isolated, people with dementia and carers by starting conversations through reading".[31] The test phase has run from 2017 across 6 UK areas: Oldham, West Sussex, Sheffield and Newcastle in England, Stirling in Scotland and Conwy in Wales. Participants' ages range from 46 to 99 and the activities involve dedicated volunteers running reading-inspired discussions, one to one and group activities across a range of sites, including care homes, community venues and local libraries. An evaluation strongly suggested a positive effect on participant social interaction: following the test phase, 39 per cent of recipients reported they discuss what they are reading with others at least once a week. Perhaps more importantly, this had a clear impact on loneliness – the vast majority of participants (88 per cent) said the programme increased their opportunities for social contact, whilst the same amount also believed the programme added "purpose" to their week.

Other interventions focus on younger age groups. Literature for Life, a group operating in the Greater Toronto area in Canada, ran the 'Women with Words'[32] scheme. Reading circles were held at various women's shelters, youth and community centres in neighbourhoods across Toronto, where young mothers meet weekly to read and discuss fiction books with trained facilitators. The reading circles aim to improve participants' literacy and self-confidence, with a long-term goal of encouraging further education or employment. Most relevantly, the reading circles also offered an opportunity for young mothers to escape their often-isolated situations.[33] This outcome is remarkable and important, especially in light of high levels of loneliness among young mothers, with a majority (57 per cent) in the UK saying they have become lonely since becoming a mother and almost a fifth reporting always feeling lonely. This appeared to be as a consequence of increasing social isolation due to motherhood, as more than two-thirds of survey respondents said they had fewer friends now they were a mother, while over a quarter (26 per cent) reported only leaving the house once a week or less.[34] A different study, by Shared Intelligence, evaluated Library Rhyme Time activities for children under 5 involving books, songs, rhymes and poetry. The study found that coming to the library to have their child take part was beneficial to the mothers as well as the children.[35]

A similar scheme to encourage reading groups is promoted in the UK by The Reading Agency, where a dedicated website supports over 4000 reading groups with resources. The resources include advice on setting up new groups and running events, a map to find nearby reading groups and a database of books for compiling reading lists.[36] An online survey in 2015 looked to explore the impact of these reading groups. Crucially, the survey found that 95 per cent of respondents reported feeling happy because of being part of the group. One of

the respondents discussed the importance of the group to her as a new mother: "A social group, like a book-club, has the power to lift, involve and welcome a person who may be feeling isolated or unhappy."[37]

A focus on printed books alone may exclude some, such as people who are blind or partially sighted. But reading groups based on spoken rather than written words are just as powerful – and allow people who struggle with written text for any reason to be involved as much as anyone else. One-to-one reading, reading aloud groups or audiobooks are all good options, in particular for people who have disabilities that might put them at an increased risk of becoming lonely. The Royal National Institute of Blind People commissioned Loughborough University to assess the evidence of the value books can have for blind and partially sighted adults.[38] Structured interviews and online questionnaires on this group's reading habits found that 95 per cent of participants read for pleasure more than once a week (for example through conventional audiobooks or more sophisticated systems such as DAISY players) – a figure considerably higher than the wider population. Some participants highlighted the positive effect on reducing isolation, especially if they were a member of a reading group: "It keeps me in touch with the world a little. I sometimes feel very isolated now I cannot join in the activities I used to do before my sight loss".[39]

Pen Portrait #1: Ron

At 92, Ron is discovering the pleasure of books. When a reading circle was set up at his assisted living facility in West Sussex, he was invited to join. Might as well give it a go, he figured. Now, he joins twice a week when volunteers come to read books to the group. "The main thing I enjoy is learning things now that I didn't learn when I was young. I'm 92, it's been a while since I went to school and I didn't learn much anyway."

Reading for pleasure was not part of the school curriculum at the school Ron attended in his youth. It was the Second World War, and the schools were severely overcrowded. "All the kids from Liverpool, and places that were being bombed were sent up. There were so many of us. At some point we were split into a morning session and an afternoon session." At 14, Ron decided to leave. "I didn't get much reading done. The last year of my school years I mainly did some gardening."

A busy career in the navy and then as an engineer kept Ron from picking up a book for most of his life. By now, he cannot read independently anymore because his eyesight is deteriorating. Still, through the reading group, he is enjoying books regardless. He particularly likes it when they read books about the army. "Reading together like that makes you happy." He laughs and adds, "But only if it's a happy book of course."

Heather Rogers, who organises the reading group, says it can be especially nice to revisit familiar books. "It allows you to retrieve things you might have forgotten about. Or bring back memories, from reading them for yourself or to your children a long time ago." Some participants struggle with reading by themselves, for instance because they are partially sighted, like Ron, or because their physical strength is waning. "Everyone's enjoying it", Heather says. "I have a lady who was a really avid reader but now she's struggling to

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read a book herself. Just holding a book is tough, because it's heavy. Her sight is struggling. So she is part of the reading group now, so she can still engage with books.

Sceptics might say that the value of reading groups is less to do with the reading and more with the value of social contact per se. Undeniably, the social contact means a great deal to participants, but the effect cannot be explained by social contact alone. Evidence from regular reading groups and special therapeutic reading groups (support groups which double as reading groups) shows that books can offer a unique path to discussing personal problems. One seminal publication on women's reading groups describes it as follows: "[Participants] often expand on an opinion by discussing their personal reasons for making a certain interpretation, using the book for self-understanding and revelation of the self to other participants rather than for discovery of meaning within the book." For example, in one reading group during a discussion about a particular character, a woman was able to talk about her own divorce.[40] Qualitative studies of reading groups often find that the text facilitates a shared focus. As one scholar notes: "The picture emerging here is that the combination of both the peer support provided by the group, and the reading material, facilitate a specific mode of interacting, enabling the discussion of distress without an integral expectation of personal disclosure."[41]

Conclusion

In summary, reading interventions can be a powerful tool in the battle against loneliness. Of course, reading can be, and very often is, a solitary pursuit; of just one person curled up with a book. But when people come together to talk about books it is obviously a social activity too. In both cases reading helps people cope with isolation and reduce loneliness. Moreover, the evidence clearly suggests this can be beneficial for many different groups – young and old. It stands to reason then, that reading should be considered one of the foremost ways in which we should look to address the growing challenge posed by loneliness.

Chapter Two – Reading, Health and Wellbeing

Reading supports health outcomes in at least three distinct ways. Firstly, reading correlates with a better ability to understand health information.[42] This in turn leads to better health outcomes across different conditions. Secondly, reading can directly affect wellbeing, as it seems to help to regulate one's mood and exercise the brain, possibly holding off mental health disorders[43] and even dementia.[44] Finally, reading for empowerment – for example, using self-help books - is known to be an effective way of supporting those with depression[45], anxiety[46] and anger issues.[47]

In this chapter, we restrict our focus to where the evidence base is strongest: mental health and dementia. Aside from cancer, no health conditions are more feared by the UK public.[48] An estimated 1 in 6 UK adults experienced a common mental health issue over the past week, up 20 per cent over the last 25 years.[49] Meanwhile, dementia has become the leading cause of death in the UK, with mortality rates steadily rising over the last 15 years.[50] The social and community impact of dementia is also rapidly increasing: as dementia incidence rises, so too does the pressure on carers, families social care services and the NHS. A report by the London School of Economics found that dementia costs a staggering £26bn a year to the UK economy – so there is an urgent public policy need to ensure we find a systemic solution that allows dementia patients to live as well as they possibly can.[51] Any public health response to these conditions requires both a medical and social approach, and reading has a huge role to play in this. Reading for wellbeing plays a significant part in many Clinical Commissioning Groups' (CCGs) social prescription offer.[52] Because, whilst certainly no panacea, there is now mounting evidence that reading keeps the mind active, which can slow down the progress of dementia and prevent or alleviate mental health issues.

Key findings from our literature review include:

- A small-scale evaluation found that 83 per cent of Public Library users who had read a book on their mental health from the library's designated mental health section said it helped them to better understand their condition; 68 per cent felt it improved their symptoms[53]

- Reading significantly improves common symptoms of both depression and dementia[54]

- 75 per cent of school pupils reported a better understanding of mental health after a dedicated book collection on mental health and wellbeing was made available[55]

Policy Background: Mental health and dementia

As more and more people seek help for mental health problems, the NHS has begun to recognise the need to raise mental health up the public health agenda.[56] Indeed, the NHS has now acknowledged, mental health has been viewed as a 'poor relation' to physical conditions for too long: a 2017 progress report, estimated up to 200,000 more people will be receiving treatment for mental health by 2019. To address the imbalance, an extra £1.4 billion has recently been freed up for mental health services.[57] However, even this extra funding has been criticised as not being sufficient to meet the escalation in demand. The charity YoungMinds, for example, has suggested the extra funding for children's mental health services are regularly diverted by clinical commissioning groups towards other priorities.[58]

In 2008, the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme was launched across England to reduce waiting times whilst improving access and the quality of mental health services for common mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.[59] The focus of IAPT is primarily on evidence based-psychological therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) with a choice of other psychological therapies such as interpersonal therapy, counselling for depression and short-term psychodynamic therapy available. Reading plays a role within CBT through the use of supported CBT self-help interventions within a stepped care model, with CBT self-help offered at Step 2 and high intensity CBT at Step 3. Supported CBT self-help based around the use of books was most commonly adopted with over 100,000 courses of treatment completed in 2016/17. [60]

Similarly, the rise in the incidence of dementia has prompted a revision of dementia care. In 2012, the government launched a national strategy to better treat the condition. By 2020, the Prime Minister has said, the UK should be the best in the world for dementia care and support.[61] An evidence-based treatment pathway was launched by the NHS to encourage more innovative ways of tackling dementia and improving access to services, such as high-quality care and support post-diagnosis.[62] But in a rapidly ageing society, this is clearly a momentous challenge. As the evidence base for reading interventions as a dementia strategy grows, reading interventions could be linked up to the treatment pathway.

The Impact of reading on health outcomes

Reading for pleasure, empowerment or information can boost literacy. This in turn has important health consequences. Health literacy is defined by the World Health Organisation as 'the personal characteristics and social resources needed for individuals and communities to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about health'. Research in England shows that between 43% and 61% of English working age adults routinely do not understand health information.[63] As a person's literacy improves, so too does their ability to understand and interpret health information.

Research presented by the Canadian Council on Learning suggested that daily reading habits have the single strongest effect on health literacy, defined as an

individual's ability to find, read and understand health information.[64] Reading books, newspapers, magazines, and even websites, letters, notes or emails, all helped to sustain or improve health-literacy rates, regardless of education level. For example, adults aged 16 to 65 who frequently engage in all these activities can score up to 38 per cent higher than the average.[65]

There is also some evidence to suggest that reading itself can have direct beneficial health effects according to a UK-wide study, which explored the benefits of reading for pleasure.[66] The study surveyed 4,000 individuals from diverse demographics through an online poll, which included questions on general mood, wellbeing and levels of social interaction in relation to reading. They reported how reading, or lack thereof, can affect our state of mind. Non-readers tend to become depressed more frequently than readers, with non-readers being 28 per cent more likely to report feelings of depression. Even those who read for just 30 minutes a week are 18 per cent more likely to report relatively high self-esteem and greater life satisfaction.[67]

Reading interventions for improving mental health and dementia outcomes

With the Reading Well Books on Prescription programme, public libraries can support mental health and wellbeing. The programme, by The Reading Agency and Libraries Connected, is a core component of the Public Library Universal Health Offer, a strategy that focuses the Public Library contribution to positive health and wellbeing of communities.[68] The programme signposts individuals to library services and recommends books that may help people with managing their health. The evidence suggests that self-help reading - on the basis of National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy - is an effective way to help common mental health conditions. An evaluation from BOP Consulting revealed that the programme continues to be popular in its fourth year, with most local authorities involved in at least one of the programme's schemes that span young people and adults' mental health, dementia and long term conditions. An early-stage, self-selected evaluation suggests that it can help users understand their mental health better and make them feel more confident about managing their symptoms, with 68 per cent reporting reading their book helped to improve their symptoms.[69]

Pen portrait #2: Sorrelle

Sorrelle Clements is Service Development Manager for Coventry Libraries. The libraries participate in the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme, which aims to promote wellbeing through books. In a special section in the library, people can find curated collections of books on many different conditions. The books range from self-help books for dealing with anxiety to memoirs and works of fiction. Sorrelle: "Even in very highly deprived areas, people have access to these books and materials. A carer or anyone working with the family will be able to tell them, this is right on your doorstep. A public library is anonymous and non-stigmatised, which makes it easy to just drop in."

The Reading Well selection is put together by a panel including health experts and people with lived experience of these conditions. Most people who borrow books from the Reading Well collection do so quietly, Sorrelle says. "But the books do issue very well – much better than I would have expected." From what the librarians can tell, it seems like the scheme is helping not just people who suffer from a condition themselves, but also their friends and family. "In its purest form it's an authenticated collection to help people with their wellbeing, but I think really it's reached out much further in to the community, with professionals and friends and family also participating." Someone might want to better understand their sister's depression or their child's ADHD. There is even a children's book to explain what it is happening when a grandparent develops dementia.

One person who came to drop in one day explained to Sorelle how much the place meant to her. "I was talking to the lady in the library one day", Sorelle recounts, "and she explained that her husband had passed and she'd just stayed at home." The woman had fallen into a deep depression. One day, on her way back from grocery shopping, she stepped into the library to hide from the rain. After that first visit, she started coming in more regularly. The library offered materials for self-help, as well as reading groups to meet new people. "It had given her a new outlook and a new approach and she'd started to come in regularly. It had made a real difference to her."

The scheme has allowed the library to foster connections with public health professionals and social workers, who can refer their clients to the collection. "Because Reading Well is nationally recognised and professionally endorsed, people have the confidence to really engage with the collections", It has given libraries a different platform in the health landscape. The scheme has allowed the library to foster connections with public health professionals and social workers, who can refer their clients to the collection. "I value the scheme so much," Sorrelle says.

A University of Liverpool report has also evaluated a programme called Get Into Reading with the Reader Organisation, investigating the therapeutic benefits of shared reading out loud in relation to depression and wellbeing. The study involved two weekly reading groups in a GP surgery or health drop-in centre with four to eight voluntary adult participants, each with a GP diagnosis of depression.[70] The effect of reading literature was assessed via qualitative methods such as researcher observation and interviews, as well as a survey measuring depression severity via questionnaire results. Over the 12 month period, clinical data from the study show patients' depression scores falling by a statistically significant margin.[71] Participants reported marked improvements in their wellbeing, such as feeling more confident and willing to talk to others.

A subsequent study by the same group expanded the Get Into Reading scheme to assess the programme's potential impact on behaviours symptomatic of dementia.[72] The participants were either residents of a care home or attended day centre or hospital groups. All had previously been diagnosed with dementia or were in the process of being evaluated. The premise of each session was to read literature aloud within the group, facilitated by a project worker who instigated group discussion after the reading. 10 behavioural areas were used to monitor the typical symptoms associated with dementia, in addition to

neurodegenerative measures such as night time behaviour and appetite. The Neuropsychiatric Inventory brief Questionnaire (NPI-Q) was used to evaluate behavioural changes. For patients in hospital and care homes who attended the reading sessions, there appeared to be a marked reduction in dementia symptom severity. Observed reductions in symptoms were statistically significant compared to baseline measurements.[73] Though the authors stress this does not suggest a causal relationship between reading and symptom improvement, they do believe the changes suggest reading can alleviate symptoms of dementia.

Reading interventions have also been used to target younger people struggling with their mental health. Almost 3 million children under 17 are in need of adolescent mental health services, while half of all anxiety disorders are experienced before the age of 12.[74] Despite the abundant risk factors for poor mental health young people are exposed to, not all will seek appropriate support. A ' Shelf Help' programme was set up as a part of the Reading Well scheme to address this issue. Shelf Help is a reading list to improve mental health and wellbeing for young people between the ages of 13-18, including fiction and non-fiction. For example, the 'anxiety' section includes Stephen Chbosky's novel The Perks of Being a Wallflower as well as self-help books such as My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic.

A recent evaluation of the scheme documented the impact of introducing Shelf Help to a secondary school in Hitchin over the course of three months. Methods to encourage young people to engage with the Shelf Help books included creating a wellbeing corner in the library and promoting a book of the week, as well as promotion of the scheme itself to the whole school. As a result, students were more aware of, knowledgeable about and understanding of mental health conditions. There was also marked improvement in emotional and mental wellbeing, specifically in relation to feelings of confidence and isolation as reported by students. Three quarters of students who were interviewed reported they had learnt more about wellbeing and healthy habits, even specifically citing conditions such as OCD, Asperger's and grief unprompted.[75] Several participants said they were now more able to empathise with people with a mental health condition, including, in some cases, their siblings. [76]

Pen portrait #3: Gaby

Gaby Clements is a student and activist with mental health charities Young Minds and Youth Access. She has been a passionate ambassador for the benefits of reading to improve mental health. "Reading can be a form of self-care, an alternative or addition to other mental health services", Gaby explains, "it can bridge a gap, especially with waiting times for some mental health services."

Gaby played a key role in the early phases of the Reading Well scheme for young people, also known as Shelf Help. The scheme provides a reading list for young people who may be experiencing problems with mental health. Gaby worked alongside a panel of leading children and young people's mental health experts and other young people with lived experience to help curate the reading list. "We'd spread the books out across our advisory group to review. We'd work up different scales to measure them by, such as how appropriate they are for helping

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with a particular issue." This meant the final booklist had been vetted by the target audience. "What adults think of as suitable for young people, and what young people actually think, are often very different!"

Other books were dropped because they risked making young people feel worse, not better. "We definitely didn't want the books to be triggering for some. For example, some books on bullying could end up being too close to home. I know that's kind of the point, but at the same time you don't want it to be detrimental to the wellbeing of vulnerable people."

Gaby believes reading schemes like Reading Well can be powerful tool for others to manage issues with mental health. "I think it's about boosting emotional intelligence. Especially for teenagers, which can be an awful time for some, it helps with ideas, thoughts they're having, whatever they've got going on." The scheme includes self-help books for helping mental health and wellbeing, but the curators are adamant that it should not be limited to that. "In our first meeting we were all asked to bring a book we thought would be helpful for wellbeing" Gaby recalls, "we all brought a fictional book. It seems like fiction is important for mental health. We can relate to the characters in the stories. When it's in the first person, it's like *you're* the character. Those characters' perspectives can be an advice mechanism."

Conclusion

Clichéd though it might be, the institution that drives health and wellbeing outcomes in Britain, the NHS, is regularly described as akin to our 'national religion'. However, over time, as we change, so to must it change and react to the pressing health needs of the age. Few are more pressing than dementia and mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, which have been growing to epidemic levels over the last few decades. "Social prescribing" – looking at individual's healthcare needs holistically and assessing what non-clinical remedies can provide to alleviate the burden – is a growing but still underdeveloped approach within the NHS. But the evidence shows that on mental health and dementia, reading can play an enormous role in improving outcomes and must therefore be uppermost in clinicians' minds as they explore the possibilities of such social prescribing.

Chapter Three – Reading and Social Mobility

Over the past decade, the UK public has come to question the state of British social mobility. In 2008, 53 per cent of the population believed that people generally had the opportunity to be socially mobile, with only 35 per cent disagreeing. Now, the sceptics are the largest group: 42 per cent disagree with the statement "people have equal opportunities to get ahead", while 40 per cent now agree.[77]

In some ways, this is a surprising finding because the change coincides with a period of improvement on some traditional markers of opportunity. For example, the attainment gap between pupil premium students and the rest has narrowed ever so slightly and there are now considerably fewer schools rated inadequate by Ofsted. Perhaps most significantly of all a new report from the OECD found Britain to have been the most successful OECD member in promoting a more open society *within* a generation (social mobility traditionally being a statistical measure *between* generations) between the 1990s and early 2010s.[78]

Overall, however, the picture remains mixed, while progress on intergenerational mobility proceeds at an agonisingly slow pace. The attainment gap has only narrowed slightly despite both concerted policy effort and sustained investment from successive governments. Equally, on most educational outcomes regional disparities between richer and poorer areas have become noticeably starker, whilst the white-collar elite professions – lawyers, doctors, politicians, journalists' etc. - remain embarrassingly hoarded by the privileged and the privately educated.

It may not be the most surprising application of reading but clearly encouraging better reading habits has an important role to play here. Whilst literacy alone cannot guarantee social mobility, in a modern digital economy it is almost impossible to be mobile without good reading skills.[79] On the other side of the divide, reading is one of the most important mechanisms through which privileged parents pass on advantage to their children. One well-known phenomenon is the 'summer slide', where teachers' hard work closing the attainment gap during the school year only widens again over summer as the privileged enjoy better access to books and cultural activities.[80]

Again, we conducted a literature review surveying the connection between reading and social mobility. Some of our key findings include:

- Reading for pleasure is one of the most important predictors of test scores at age 16, regardless of background.[81] In fact, children from disadvantaged backgrounds who read often tend to score better than more privileged pupils who do not read at all.[82]

- 77 per cent of people with reading difficulties view themselves as good readers after entering a programme encouraging reading for pleasure, information or empowerment.[83] Reading confidence in turn is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including performance on tests, boosting social mobility.[84]

- School children on free school meals make 3 months' additional learning progress after receiving a summer book pack.[85]

The state of social mobility

Despite recent progress as demonstrated in the OECD statistic, the basic inequality of opportunity in Britain should not be sugar-coated: young people living in the most disadvantaged areas are nearly three times less likely to participate in higher education than their peers living in more advantaged neighbourhoods.[86] And while the attainment gap is closing, it is doing so only at a glacial rate. The most recent data show the gap narrowing by 3 months over the course of a decade - with a gap of just under 19 months still to close.[87]

Meanwhile, regional disparities have become increasingly visible. In 2017 the Social Mobility Commission - an independent body monitoring progress on social mobility in England - unveiled the Social Mobility Index, measuring different aspects of social mobility at a local authority level.[88] These factors range from crucial early life measures such as school quality and educational attainment, to working life measures such as wage and home ownership. The majority of the social mobility 'hotspots' in the index are within the greater London area. Outside of the capital, pupils face an effective postcode lottery – particularly in the school system. This regional disparity is down to a series of cultural, economic and educational factors. For example, disadvantaged children in the so-called coldspots are 14 percentage points less likely to be school-ready by age 5, setting them up for lifelong disadvantage before their school career has even begun.[89]

Research by the Educational Policy Institute has illustrated this stark impact.[90] In the Kensington and Chelsea local authority - ranked the second top hotspot in the social mobility index - the attainment gap between local disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students nationally stands at just one month. That is, disadvantaged students from Kensington and Chelsea do almost as well as non-disadvantaged students nationwide. Whereas at the other end of the index, in the local authority of Blackpool - a social mobility 'coldspot' representative of many coastal towns - the secondary education attainment gap is over 25 months.[91] Worse still, the available data suggest that social mobility hotspots continue to improve, as some coldspots drift further behind.

Social mobility Policy Background

Successive governments have been at pains to improve social mobility in the UK. Policies have aimed to tackle the issue throughout the lifecycle, from early years, through education and into working life. Since 1997, successive governments have made large investments to reduce educational inequality for disadvantaged children.[92] This has yielded some important results, such as the fact that fewer schools are now rated inadequate by the schools inspectorate, Ofsted. Policies such as the pupil premium – where extra funding is allocated to

schools based on the number of disadvantaged pupils who attend – have also attempted to narrow the attainment gap by targeting resources more efficiently.

Clearly, it is not all bad. Between 2006 and 2015, the attainment gap has closed in maths and writing by a third for 5-7 year olds.[93] The attainment gap in GCSE results also narrowed, although this particular gap remains large. There is also a widespread policy interest in encouraging school children to read more. For example, in 2015 the Department of Education introduced the "Reading: The Next Steps" programme, supporting the establishment of book clubs in primary schools and having the school arrange library memberships for their students.[94] The importance of reading to early years child development is also largely well understood by policymakers, given the emphasis that Sure Start and other Labour Government initiatives placed upon early language development. These many initiatives have paid off, to a degree, since the attainment gap is closing – even if, at this pace, it is likely the gap will not close in our lifetimes.

Association between reading and social mobility

Evidence reviews consistently find that being able to read and write well aids inclusion in communities and in society more widely.[95] It leads to better GCSE results, boosting the chances of upward social mobility.[96] To be sure, reading alone does not guarantee positive social mobility. Nevertheless, it seems that without a capacity to read, write and engage in literacy practices necessary to understand and challenge power, that upward mobility is less likely. Indeed, a survey from the UK's National Literacy Trust concluded that after factoring in education, more literate (above level 1) employees still earn on average 12 per cent more than workers with lower literacy skills.[97] The same survey also found that literacy substantially improved employability. Meanwhile, analysis of the Government's Skills for Life survey data from 2003 found that adults with Level 1 literacy skills have a 6 per cent higher probability of finding employment than those with Entry Level 3 literacy skills, after controlling for education levels.

Reading has also been linked to success in later education for English students.[98] Using data from the Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE3+-16), one study followed a random sample of children from preschool age, tracking their attainment in different phases of education to look for similarities between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with high attainment. Children's home learning environment was included in the survey, which covered the two definitions of reading we use – pleasure and empowerment/information - as well as educational family trips, and was scored as an enrichment factor. In the survey analysis, students that were considered disadvantaged but with a high enrichment factor - such as reported reading at home - were more likely to go on to achieve three or more A levels. The authors stressed the importance of out of school learning opportunities that encourage reading for supporting disadvantaged pupils to succeed in later school years.[99]

The research consistently shows that an affinity for reading at a young age is a lifelong asset. But that is not to say that adults with little experience of reading cannot make up for lost time. One study used data from the latest round of the 1970 British Cohort Study, where participants are interviewed every few years to track different aspects of their lives - covering education and employment as well as physical and mental health.[100] Interestingly, the study also captures

reading habits and the most recent analysis found a clear link between reading and greater educational progress - both in terms of vocabulary and mathematics. The results also suggested that reading was four times more influential on intellectual progress in adolescence even than having a parent with a degree.[101] This research clearly demonstrates that we do not stop learning when we leave school, as most participants made large gains in vocabulary between the ages of 16 and 42. At 16, participants scored an average 55 per cent on a vocabulary test; by age 42, this had risen to 63 per cent on the same test. This was even more the case for frequent readers, who made an additional 4 percentage points of progress.[102]

Reading interventions and their outcomes for social mobility

Reading interventions exploring reading's ability to boost social mobility have been trialled on many different groups, from children to employees, students and prisoners. One particularly interesting and important area of research with school-age children concerns school holidays. Also known as the 'summer slide', there is a marked decline in learning progress for schoolchildren during the summer holiday period. While privileged pupils maintain or improve on their level of literacy and numeracy over the summer, underprivileged pupils often see a significant drop.[103] This is connected to the fact that disadvantaged pupils are more likely to experience combinations of isolation, boredom and inactivity during the holidays.[104] The result is stagnation or even a reversal in learning progress over the summer that places disadvantaged pupils even further behind once the school term starts again. Indeed, some estimates attribute as much as two-thirds of the attainment gap to the 'summer slide' effect. Teachers are coming to the same conclusions, and have voiced their concern.[105] Evidence gathered by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger revealed that it can take up to 6 weeks of teaching just for disadvantaged students to re-learn skills lost during the summer break, with reading skills among the worst affected.[106]

But summer holidays can also have positive effects on disadvantaged pupils. The Summer Active Reading Programme, which was trialled by the Booktrust in 2013, aimed to encourage reading for pleasure. The target group were pupils at the transition between elementary school and secondary school.[107] Participating pupils were gifted four book packs and invited to attend two summer events led by Booktrust staff at their new secondary school. A trial of the programme examined the impact on 205 pupils from 10 schools in the north of England who had been identified as unlikely to achieve Level 4a reading skills or above by the end of Key Stage 2. This was an individually randomised trial with two trial groups: control and intervention. On average, pupils participating in the programme made more progress than those who did not with the difference approximately equivalent to two months' additional progress. But when analysing the effect of the programme on pupils who accessed free school meals, the progress made by the intervention group grew to 3 months. The results of this trial, though not statistically significant (possibly because of the small sample size), show the benefit encouraging reading can have for disadvantaged school pupils[108]. Moreover, a meta-review of similar interventions found reliable and large effects, particularly for the most deprived students.[109] In a different summer reading scheme, the Summer Reading Challenge, children are encouraged to read 6 books over the summer, with special rewards for each completed book. A small-scale evaluation suggested that the scheme could boost reading enthusiasm

and attainment, but most children who took part were eager readers already, which speaks to the difficulty of involving less able and less engaged pupils.[110]

Not only does reading boost test scores, it is arguably a much better way to teach literacy than direct instruction. One study analysed the effects of two distinct reading interventions on a group of adults with low literacy skills.[111] Participants were assigned to a different intervention: direct literacy instruction or simply reading for pleasure or empowerment. Direct instruction involved being assigned a book to read and complete comprehension tasks on, while the reading group had ultimate freedom to choose from a range of books at different skill levels. Participants who read in this way increased their literacy skills far more than those who were taught formal literacy lessons. Results suggested that the reading for pleasure group - who had access to books, a free choice of reading material, and time to read during instruction hours - developed a stronger reading habit, which was still evident after a 6 month follow up.

The Reading Ahead programme for young people and adults, which aims to build confidence in reading, is organised along similar principles. Delivered by The Reading Agency, in partnership with public libraries, learning providers, prisons and youth offender institutions, it has now involved more than 275,000 people. The programme invites each participant to pick 6 books of their choice and record, rate and review them in a reading diary in order to gain a certificate. A 2016-17 evaluation report for the programme surveyed participants and organisations involved. After the challenge, more than three quarters of participants (77 per cent) considered themselves good readers - up 17 per cent from before the programme.[112] Over half reported reading for pleasure every day since the programme (56 per cent). It also increased the amount participants read to children by 5 per cent, thus delivering important knock-on effects for their children. Participating organisations overwhelmingly reported (90 per cent) that they felt participants were reading more and also felt it was improving literacy skills (84 per cent).

An organisation called the Prison Reading Group also promotes the set-up of reading groups, advice and support with prisoners.[113] A small-scale, qualitative evaluation of their work found a positive association between reading and the development of transferable skills including cognitive abilities, communication and self-esteem. These skills will allow former convicts to access opportunities they might not have had before.[114]

Conclusion

Regular reading breeds important life skills, which translate into greater opportunities in life. Often, this works out in favour of the already privileged, who have greater access to books and greater informal reading support. But the evidence cited in this chapter suggests it can also work the other way around. Reading interventions go a long way in promoting beneficial reading habits – and if these were made universal, then real progress might be made on closing the attainment gap substantially. This chapter has touched on evaluations of many different projects, dealing with many different groups. And whilst mid-career professionals, prisoners and school children may not have much in common, the evidence suggests they can all benefit from reading. Therefore, in

order to build a more productive, creative and fairer society, access to and promotion of reading needs to be made universal and common for all.

Pen portrait #4: Ya Ching

Ya Ching Darnell works at Merseytravel, a public transport organisation in Liverpool, as well as being a union representative. Since becoming involved with Reading Ahead 10 years ago, she has been a strong advocate for workplace skills development schemes. The programme involves participants in picking six different books to get them into reading. "I would have colleagues coming up to me who were interested in the programme. They would ask if it meant having to read War and Peace", she recalls, "I'd say no! It's about picking whatever's suitable for you and what you would enjoy reading."

Ya Ching also got involved with Quick Reads, a scheme which sees well-known authors producing short books designed to make reading more accessible for those daunted by the thought of committing too much time to reading, or lacking confidence in their reading skills. "Quick Reads is quite good for people to just get started with," Ya Ching explains, "it can be for people who drop out of reading, it can get them back into reading again." Ya Ching also promotes Quick Reads books as great companions for work commutes. "It can just be 20 minutes on a bus journey, but they can read a whole book!" She found these shorter books a crucial introduction to reading in English. "I think the first book I finished was a Quick Reads, then I challenged myself to go on to read bigger books."

Ya Ching greatly appreciates the opportunities these reading programmes provided. Before she discovered the Reading Ahead programme, she worked part time as a cleaner and was struggling with learning English as a new language. "I wanted to improve my English to help with work. I wanted to build my confidence but the language was a big barrier. Trying to communicate, or express yourself, it gets frustrating. You want people to understand, and you want to understand people. My self-esteem suffered from this language barrier."

But the reading schemes acted as a springboard for Ya Ching, helping to build her confidence and develop new skills in the workplace. "I really liked how they were promoting reading for pleasure, not pressure," she explains, "It all helped with my career development because after I'd learnt these new skills, I was given more opportunities."

Ya Ching has been an advocate for bringing reading-based initiatives into the workplace. She set up a Bookswap by the printer in the office for people to browse through and take books. She also established a book club with her colleagues, even inviting the authors of the books they've read to speak to the club. "In our office we now have people talking about books and bringing books in to share with others."

It's clear that Ya Ching values reading as a way to help others improve their confidence and skills. While continuing to promote Quick Reads, she also helps the local library promote the Summer Reading Challenge, which

encourages children to read during the school holidays. "When it comes to the reading, don't give yourself high expectations, it can be small, achievable steps. Just keep trying".

Chapter Four: Britain in 2030

To put it mildly, Britain must now face up to a series of severe and acute social challenges. Problems such as mental health, social mobility and loneliness gnaw at the roots of our entire social fabric.

Take depression and anxiety as prescient examples. Rising mental health challenges of this nature are not just a problem for the NHS and Treasury that must, respectively, deal with the symptoms and foot the bill. Rising depression can also lead to a propensity for risky behaviours, addiction and substance abuse. It can mean more stress, more sick days, lower productivity and a fraying of the dignity that comes with secure employment. For some it can mean a pathway towards worklessness, poverty and a dependence on meagre benefits. In children it can mean unfulfilled potential, life-long emotional scarring and a loss of confidence in your ability to take the opportunities life makes available to you. It can drive families apart, breaking hearts, relationships and ultimately lives. Most of all, it is a disease that deserves our attention and treatment because every one of these knock-on effects listed might catalyse another, feeding the cycle of low self-esteem and depression all over again. It is a scourge on individuals, families, communities and ultimately the nation.

Moreover, as we will show in this chapter, the social challenges we focus on in this report – loneliness, mental health conditions, dementia and weak social mobility are set to grow worse at frankly shocking rates. This presents us all – not just policymakers – with huge questions. Questions such as: how can we provide equality of opportunity in a time of large and growing regional divides? How can we ensure a dignified and meaningful later life in a rapidly ageing society? How can we help our young people to feel connected and secure with one another so that they have the confidence to explore opportunities to fulfil their aspirations?

These issues require imaginative approaches informed by evidence – yet for now, we will shelve those questions and focus first on demonstrating the urgency of the problems we must face. Therefore, in this chapter we will project current trends into the future, estimating what each of the social challenges we focus on in this report will look like by 2030. These findings should be taken as a major warning sign:

- The attainment gap is closing so slowly that it will still be wide open by 2030.

- The attainment gap for the most deprived students will not budge at all. By 2030, this will have affected over 1.5 million pupils.

- By 2030, an extra 134,000 places in care homes will be required for dementia patients alone, putting tremendous pressure on quality of care. There will also be demand for over 1 million informal carers.

- The loneliness epidemic will take on disastrous proportions with 7 million people will be lonely in the over-60 age group alone. Two million of them can expect to see their lifespans shortened by loneliness.

The future of social mobility

The gap between disadvantaged 16 year old pupils and their peers narrowed by 3 months between 2007 and 2016, with a gap of just under 19 months still left to close. At the current speed, it will take 50 years before we achieve parity between disadvantaged students and their peers in secondary school. In fact, this estimate may still be too optimistic, because the rate at which the gap has been closing has been slowing down, which has led some to suggest it could take *over a century* to achieve parity.[115] For persistently disadvantaged pupils – those who receive free school meals for at least 80 per cent of their schooling - the picture looks bleaker still. The attainment gap at primary school has closed somewhat for this group, but by the time they enter secondary school education they are roughly 12 months behind their peers. As persistently disadvantaged pupils make their way through the education system, the gap continues to grow by up to 2.4 months a year, ultimately leaving them with an attainment gap equal to around 2 years of learning.[116] The recent evidence does not suggest any optimism for hoping this attainment gap for persistently disadvantaged pupils will close at all.

The end of Key Stage 4 is the point at which the attainment gap peaks, just as the majority of disadvantaged students finish their education. The 'disadvantaged pupils' metric includes all students who have claimed free school meals at any point up to Key Stage 4. At this point, the average disadvantaged student lags almost 2 years' worth of learning behind the average non-disadvantaged student.[117] In the 2016-2017 school year, this was a group of 143,000 pupils who had arguably been failed by the education system.[118] For persistently disadvantaged students, the gap is even larger, at 24.3 months. Looking ahead to 2030, we can expect the attainment gap to close at a glacial speed. This will affect over 1.5 million disadvantaged students who will pass through the education system between now and then. Even by 2030, they will still be almost a year and a half behind their more privileged peers. This is likely an underestimate when considering the hundreds of thousands of pupils each year who do not claim their free school meals despite being eligible.[119]

This persistent disparity is extremely costly to the economy, as talented pupils fail to develop their true potential. This is particularly harmful in the context of the UK economy's dire need for skilled labour. Economic modelling studies have suggested that closing the attainment gap would bring economic benefits as sizeable as 14 billion pounds per year by 2030.[120]

Future of mental health

In the UK, 1 in 6 adults suffer from a common mental health disorder every week. If this remains unchanged, and taking into account the estimated growth in the UK population in the next 12 years, we can expect there to be over half a million more people suffering from a common mental health disorder in 2030. This will be
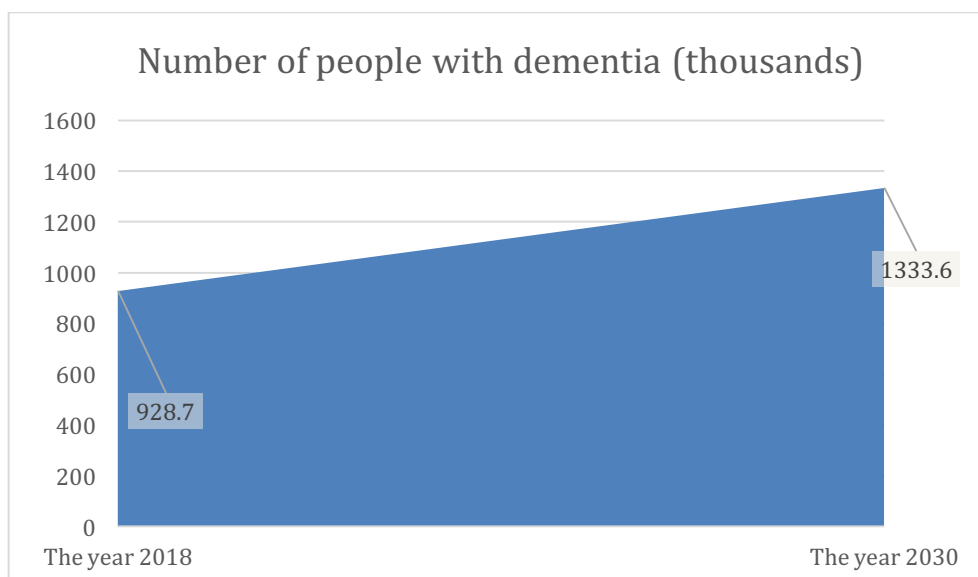
a challenge for mental health providers, many of which are already overburdened and understaffed.[121]

Somewhat unexpectedly, the state of mental health provision will also be significantly affected by our ageing population. In general, older people are less likely to be offered mental health support than younger people with the same symptoms. Roughly 1 in 5 younger people (22.95 per cent) showing symptoms of common mental health problems can expect to be referred to services provided by the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies programme.[122] By contrast, only 6 per cent of people over 70 who show similar symptoms are referred to these more talking-based treatments, despite evidence showing these services may benefit older people more than the young.[123] This echoes findings from an Age UK survey, which found 2.9 million people who are currently over the age of 65 feel like they had no one to go to for support.[124] By 2030, this would equate to two million older people with mental health issues and scant professional help to draw upon, if numbers of qualified nurses continue to decline as they do.[125]

The future of dementia

The projections for dementia are even more striking. As the UK population grows older and older, the number of people with the condition will rise rapidly in the next 12 years. By 2030 there will be over 1.3 million people diagnosed with dementia, up by almost 60 per cent from 2015 levels.[126] Cases of dementia will become so common that, for children born in the UK this year, one in three will go on to develop dementia in their lifetime.[127] These trends will produce the greatest social care challenge this country has ever seen. Current estimates on the care requirements of dementia patients show that one third of people living with dementia are in a care home, while for every 1000 living with the condition, there are 850 informal carers providing help.[128] If we wish to maintain these levels of care, we will require an extra 134,000 places in care homes for dementia patients alone by 2030, in addition to demand for over 1 million informal carers.
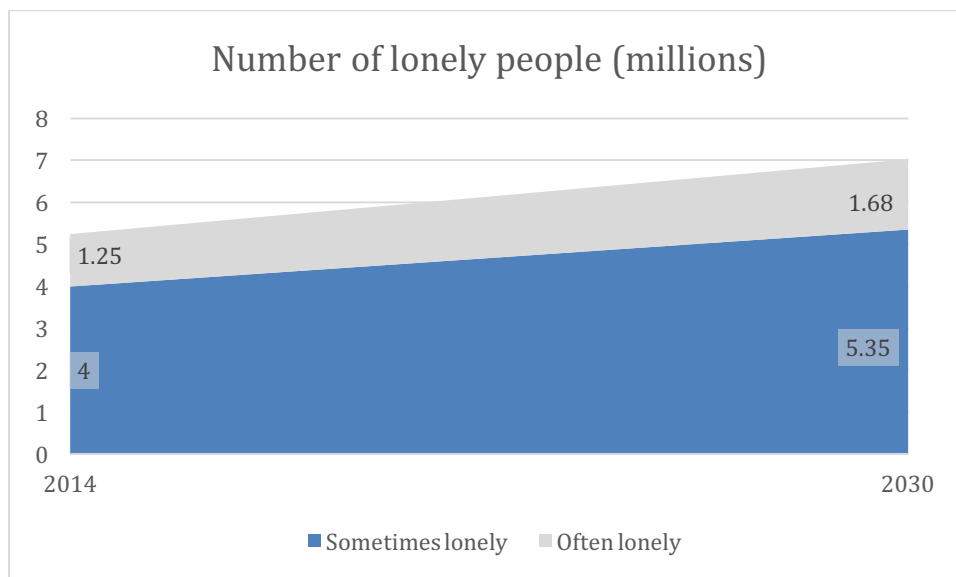
The associated cost estimates for dementia over time are truly baffling. The current cost of dementia in the UK is around £24 billion. But by 2030, even conservative estimates suggest that the cost would be as high as *£38 billion*, a 58 per cent increase compared to the present situation.[129]

Number of people with dementia (thousands)

(Chart showing an area graph with values: 928.7 for "The year 2018" rising to 1333.6 for "The year 2030". Y-axis ranges from 0 to 1600 in increments of 200.)

The future of loneliness

Rates of loneliness are already high across all age groups. For example, some 10 per cent of people aged 16-24 suffer from loneliness 'often' or 'always'.[130] People who are widowed, or who live alone are at increased risk for loneliness.[131] Rates of living alone are still rising, for all but the youngest groups. By 2030, some 11 million people will be living on their own according to analysis by the King's Fund[132], which is an increase of over 3 million.[133]

Age especially will have a profound impact on patterns and rates of loneliness by 2030. In 2014, the Future Foundation presented research which projected the effect loneliness will have on a UK population through to 2030 - with a particular focus on older age groups as they are the fastest growing demographic and particularly susceptible to isolation and loneliness.[134] Their projections show that we have now entered a period, from 2017 onwards, where the population aged 70 and over will grow more rapidly. This is due to the 'mini baby boomers' - a spike of births in the immediate aftermath of the second world war - approaching this age. By 2030, the number of older people aged 80 and over will have increased by 50 per cent relative to 2013. Accounting for the expected changes in age profile, partnership status, and prevalence of loneliness, the foundation projected that the number of people over the age of 60 who will suffer from loneliness will be 7 million by 2030, almost 2 million more than in 2014.[135]

Number of lonely people (millions)

	2014	2030
Often lonely	1.25	1.68
Sometimes lonely	4	5.35

■ Sometimes lonely ■ Often lonely

Numbers of 60+s suffering loneliness, 2014–2030 (model based upon forecast changes in age and partnership status of UK population).[136]

This will be an immense public health and public finance problem. On the current trajectory, loneliness among older people will cost almost 2 billion pounds by 2030. LSE researchers McDaid, Park and Fernandez estimate that the cost of loneliness for people who are sometimes lonely is £1,700 over 10 years. For people who are often lonely, the cost rises to £6,000.[137] The researchers suggest that stemming the tide of loneliness could save significant amounts of money through reducing unplanned hospital admissions, avoidance of excess GP visits and delaying the moment when dementia care is required. But if a concerted strategy against loneliness does not materialise, loneliness of over-60s will cost 1.91 billion pounds on a yearly basis by 2030.

In addition, there will be a tremendous human cost of loneliness. Of the 7 million people over 60 who are lonely in 2030, almost 2 million will have a shortened life due to loneliness. It is likely that over 2 million will suffer a stroke that can be linked to their loneliness, while more than double that will develop dementia.[138,139]

33

Chapter Five – Unleashing the Potential of Reading

Lack of opportunity; mental health issues; dementia; and loneliness - the big social challenges discussed in this report, affect many millions of UK citizens. Mental illness can be as debilitating as any physical condition. When children are let down by the education system, they will have to fight an uphill battle for the rest of their lives. Meanwhile, researchers suggest loneliness is as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes per day.[140] What these issues have in common is that they prevent people from flourishing. They keep young people from realising their full potential and keep older generations from enjoying the retirement they deserve. The evidence presented in previous chapters suggests that the issues are too large for families and communities to tackle on their own. Ignoring the problems is not an option either – or at least should not be for a responsible Government.

In chapters 1 – 3 we underlined the clear evidence that reading can play a role in tackling these problems. Yet despite this robust evidence base, reading is often overlooked as a credible policy strategy beyond its 'traditional' role within the education sector. This must change and in this chapter we set out thirteen practical policies that suggest how the Government can begin to unleash reading's potential to solve our broader societal ills.

Loneliness

The depth of evidence that supports reading groups and book clubs as tools for tackling loneliness and social isolation is staggering. Equally, we know that by 2030 loneliness will have reached epidemic levels – cruelly shortening 2m lives. The Government has already committed £20m to meet this challenge but whilst welcome this is woefully short. Building on the success of Reading Friends – but extended to all ages – it should at the very least add an extra nought to that fund and focus its efforts on evidence-based reading interventions:

Recommendation one: The Government should build on the success of programmes such as Reading Friends and fund a £200m national loneliness intervention that uses reading to tackle loneliness for all ages.

Furthermore, we have seen evidence that young mothers are a group that are particularly susceptible to loneliness. Encouraging them to go to public libraries, where they can draw up on the library's networks, be supported into social reading and making connections with other readers seems to us a self-evidently good thing to encourage. Equally, we know that one of the absolutely crucial aspects of early child development is encouraging parents to be comfortable reading to their children – and this can have a marked effect on social mobility over time. Therefore, we see a clear synergy in encouraging the co-location of children's centres and public libraries, for both loneliness and social mobility reasons:

Recommendation Two: The Government should provide both investment and practical guidance to encourage greater co-location of children's centres and libraries.

Finally, the Department for Education is currently conducting a wide-ranging consultation on sex, relationship and health education guidance. Hard evidence is scant at the moment, but there does appear to be growing anecdotal support – including some consumer polling – that social media could be contributing to the rise of young people's loneliness with some critics also suggesting that the unrealistic portrait of life that platforms such as Instagram portray makes young people feel excluded and even depressed. [141] The Government needs to work with the major tech companies to assess why this might be happening – it is clearly not in their commercial interest if their products to make young people lonely or ill. However, as a helpful start the Government should include a clear focus on preventing loneliness in its guidance to schools – as it stands, loneliness is not even mentioned in the PSHE programme of study.

Recommendation Three: The Government should include a dedicated focus on loneliness in its new guidance on health education. This should pay particular attention to the role that reading based community and volunteering activities can play in helping to tackle this issue.

We hope too that this change, though not as directly linked to reading as many of our other recommendations, might help spark a conversation – between parents and educators – about how best to protect children from too much screen time and why encouraging their children off-line is important for their health and feelings of belonging. This could be encouraged by connecting it to the need for educational settings to provide access to mental health reading materials as demonstrated by the success of the "Shelf Help" component of the Reading Well programme (see Chapter Two and below).

Mental Health and Dementia

One area, at least in theory, where new money is available is mental health – in 2017 Government has recently committed an extra £1.4 billion pounds and the NHS also recently received a £20bn 'birthday present' by way of extra funding for the duration of this Parliament. Leaving aside accusations that Clinical Commissioning Groups are still not prioritising mental health, we believe that there should be ample money for Care Commissioning Groups to invest more in the well-evidenced social prescribing potential of book-based interventions. Programmes like Reading Well Books on Prescription have a track record in using reading to support mental health and social prescribing of this nature has shown encouraging potential in supporting people with dementia too. This programme has recently been funded by the Welsh government in Wales – the rest of the UK should follow suit:

Recommendation Four: The NHS should encourage Clinical Commissioning Groups to invest more in book-based interventions as part of its social prescribing strategy for mental health and dementia making funds necessary as required. Moreover, it should fund the distribution of medically-robust materials for book-based therapies in libraries across the country, as the Welsh government has done in Wales.

In an ideal world, one would rebuild Child and Adolescent Metal Health Services (CAMHS) so that all schools and colleges would have access to a fully qualified

mental health specialist at a minimum of nurse practitioner level. However, more realistically in the short-term, schools should be required to at least provide access to a "shelf help" type scheme, through partnership with a public library:

Recommendation Five: the Government should put a requirement on all schools and colleges to provide access to a dedicated mental health section in a library.

In an ideal world the Government should be looking to ensure that the school or college's own library facilities could provide this access on-site. This is not just about mental health reading resources either - the Education Policy Institute have summarised the evidence connecting online time and child mental health, emphasising the need for an education system that promotes resilience.[142] Demos believes a crucial part of this – particularly in the future – is about providing young people with safe online reading spaces. Therefore, the Government should clearly invest in school and college libraries (and librarians who, far from obsolete in the digital economy may prove to be one of the most important jobs, promoting healthy and effective digital reading skills) but also work with the tech companies to develop new product standards that promote healthier and better reading habits. For example, we believe something like an easily accessible 'reading mode' that allowed users to stay connected but temporarily turned off all notifications and pop-up adverts, would be a boon for both mental health and educational outcomes. After all, it is unrealistic to think that the proportional volume of reading conducted online will not grow over time – the key is encouraging people to read healthier and better online. The bottom line is it is absolutely vital that young people in particular should be able to read online in a more mindful manner, without being subject to the bombardments of the attention economy – and technology products like smartphones and tablets are more than sophisticated enough devices to enable this. For example, many smartphones now will alert their users when they are listening to music at a dangerous level – there is no reason why phones could not include similar behavioural nudges that promoted better reading. Furthermore, with Brexit meaning there is more scope for Britain to 'control' its product standards in a light touch way, this need not be too onerous a regulation either. Therefore, we recommend:

Recommendation Six: The Government should work with tech companies to develop new product standards that can allow users to control their settings more easily or that have default settings that promote a better reading environment – for example 'a reading mode' that immediately switched online browsing on smartphones to optimal settings for reading (e.g. blocking distracting pop-ups/adverts). They should also invest in school and college libraries with the ambition that all schools can provide safe reading spaces that protect children from the attention economy whilst they read online.

Social Mobility

Some things are so fundamental to social mobility that it pays to use every opportunity to call on the Government to do more. The importance of early years investment – and in particular early language development – is one of those. A better-trained early years workforce was a key demand of the "Read On, Get on" campaign in 2015.[143] It remains absolutely vital to creating a reading society where children can fulfil their potential – and Demos still supports its early years

recommendations. But as our evidence review uncovered, we must also avoid the fatalism that says reading and social mobility can only be tackled through the early years. Reading interventions have a good track record of improving outcomes for adults too – and if the projections on automation are anything to go by then reform of adult re-training will soon rise up the political agenda. Reading has a key role to play here – it is not enough to say that all children in a school or college setting should be reading, or studying English. Reading for pleasure should be embedded in all qualifications and training programmes – from traineeships, right through to degree level technical qualifications. There is absolutely no reason why this needs to be onerous, either to the student or the education and training system: the Reading Ahead programme shows that even keeping a reading diary can go a long way to encouraging life-long reading and learning. Therefore, we recommend:

Recommendation Seven: The Government should launch a consultation with post-16 training providers about redesigning qualification standards so that every qualification contains a reading component. The aspiration is that no child or adult should be undertaking an education or training qualification that does not encourage reading beyond the classroom.

But encouraging adults to read needs to go beyond the training, skills and education systems. As our evidence review shows, there are a number of schemes – such as Reading Ahead (see Chapter Three) – that successfully promote reading for enjoyment to adults in a variety of settings. We would like to see this expanded into a national movement – we want all adults to feel comfortable and secure talking about reading with their peers. This will require bringing in partners like the BBC as well as the private and voluntary sectors. After all, a national reading for pleasure movement would require volunteers, social capital, institutional buy-in from local civil society and therefore should be accompanied by a drive for private philanthropic investment too. It is not just a job merely for the state and, though understandable given low levels of political trust, governments too often forget the power of persuasion – making active demands of citizens to become active participants in a social mission, rather than just passive recipients of public services.

Therefore, the Government, in partnership with the BBC and others, should look to draw upon a clear citizen desire to read more and use that to drive a national movement for boosting adult reading for enjoyment. This should have its own brand – perhaps "a society of readers" – and encourage voluntarism, with some particpants becoming reading champions in their local area. Done well, we believe this would have a significant impact on economic inclusion and social mobility:

Recommendation Eight: The Government invest in encouraging adult reading for pleasure. The model for this should encourage volunteerism to create a sense of this as a national movement and also to give the participants a greater sense of agency.

Furthermore, our literature review uncovered ample evidence of the scarring effect of the school summer holiday upon social mobility and disadvantaged educational attainment. This is an issue that a whole host of vested interests all too regularly duck – and Demos has long been open to a reform of the school

calendar. However, even if the school holiday was reduced to 3 weeks that is, at best, a mitigation strategy. The basic problem is that outside of school, privilege will always flex its social capital muscles, with dire consequences for educational attainment, social mobility and loneliness too. Therefore, we believe it is time for the Government, working with reading charities, to develop a universal entitlement for disadvantaged children to enjoy sport, reading and cultural enrichment over the summer holidays. The evidence shows that reading programmes – such as the Summer Reading Challenge (see Chapter Three) can prevent the 'summer slide' for disadvantaged kids – and many programmes do already exist. But they are not universal and many more disadvantaged pupils should take part in reading and cultural enrichment programmes over the summer. The Government should address that:

Recommendation Nine: Building on existing best practice, the Government should work with reading charities to ensure that all disadvantaged children enjoy an entitlement to a universal summer reading programme over the summer holiday as part of a broader cultural enrichment strategy.

Once established however, this could become a model for encouraging voluntarism and leadership for children back in the classroom. Therefore, drawing on best practice from organisations such as the National Citizen Sevice, we would like to see this universal summer reading entitlement grow into a programme which could develop young reading champions, who could then be encouraged to set up reading interventions back in term time – in much the same way that we want to see increased reading volunteers in our movement for adult reading. As well as spreading the enjoyment of reading, this could also help disengaged children into a leadership role in an educational setting, which previous Demos research has shown can be develop non-cognitive 'character' skills that are intimately linked to improved educational and social mobility outcomes[144]:

Recommendation Ten: Over time the universal summer reading programme should be developed, along the lines of the National Citizen Service, into an programme which can extend and promote reading-based volunteerism for young people, to help them inspire others to read

Raising the Status of Books and Reading

Yet to create a society where reading is pursed by all – a society of readers – the Government, publishers and media stakeholders must also elevate the status of books. Crucially, this must be done in a socially inclusive not elitist way – putting books on a pedestal as the pinnacle of culture, might not always be the best way of helping those who may have been failed by the education system or feel part of a society of readers.

We believe a crucial part of this will be encouraging a state-sponsored book gifting scheme. There are a number of civil society led book gifting schemes that already give books to people at different stages of their life – for example, the Book Trust's Bookstart scheme that gifts books to children in the early years. Evaluators find it "is undoubtedly an important element in supporting parents to develop book sharing practices.[145] The Government should certainly not aim to

assimilate these schemes into a state-backed one and should work with charities to draw upon their expertise. Nevertheless, we believe that it would say something subtle but profound about who we are as a nation – and the centrality of reading within that – if the state were to enshrine book gifting as an entitlement at key stages of a citizen's life: starting school, leaving school, entering the labour market, leaving prison, reaching state pension age.

There are a number of ways book gifting could be done – and we would not want to be too prescriptive, given the need to work with third sector organisations and indeed public libraries, which could have a key role in administering such a scheme. Therefore, we recommend:

Recommendation Eleven: The Government should consult with reading charities and public libraries to develop a national lifetime book gifting scheme, enshrining book ownership and reading as a key citizen entitlement.

Finally, we believe the BBC must play an active role in helping to create a society of readers. In an age where shared communal activities – at least at national level – have become more difficult to nurture, its societal importance as the one institution still just about able to facilitate that has only increased. Therefore, in the same way as we see a regular Sports Relief and Comic Relief fundraising events, why not a Book Relief? Over time this might grow into the leading national campaign for promoting reading, but for the moment it would be important merely to send an important signal about the importance of reading to British society:

Recommendation Twelve: The BBC should work with relevant organisations and seek to create a "Book Relief" equivalent to "Sports Relief" and "Comic Relief". As with Sports Relief the fundraising activities should be loosely themed around reading and education, and invest in reading and education causes both domestically and around the world.

Conclusion – A Society of Readers

We have focused on the social challenges highlighted in this report - loneliness and social isolation, mental health, dementia and social mobility – because they both gnaw at the fabric of our society and there is clear evidence of reading's ability to dramatically change the outlook. But, as should be obvious, they are neither an exhaustive list of Britain's ills, nor do they exist in a social vacuum. When we consider the country we will live in 2030 there are numerous crises of equal heft that both catalyse and interact with the problems we have discussed. For example, rising levels of dementia will quite clearly not be the only impact of the ageing society. No, if left unaddressed it will also break our social care system (if it has not already), threaten the viability of the NHS and the welfare state, fundamentally change our working culture as we take on informal caring responsibilities and transform the political outlook and democratic priorities of the country. In fact, by 2030 we could easily be outsourcing our political decisions to intelligent machines who will decide our voting preferences based on a number of data points collected by algorithms contained in our smartphones – obviously – but also our televisions, microwaves, fridges, kettles, bank cards, radiators, our driverless cars and, perhaps, even our personalised AI assistants! That is, of course, if we even still have elections after the rise of China ushers in the 'technocratic authoritarian era' in place of the liberal one that preceded it.

Now, this may all seem a bit far-fetched – and as early as 2030 it probably is! But it serves to illustrate the potential ripple effect through society if we do not deal with serious social challenges in the here and now. Moreover, one very clear thing the last few years of technological innovation should tell us is that shared communal experiences will be more difficult in the next industrial epoch than they are at the tail end of this one; that when more of human experience is mediated through the online world, we need to work harder to preserve the connection and belonging that we, as social animals, need in the offline one. Indeed, to some extent this is the lesson we should draw from rising social isolation and mental health, particularly in young people: humans need meaningful and close relationships, both in terms of proximity and emotion.

Reading is not a panacea for all of Britain's ills and it certainly cannot mitigate all the challenges we will face as we move into the digital era. Nevertheless, if the Government were to view the promotion of reading across society as a true social mission then we do think that says something profound about the future that goes above and beyond specific policy recommendations. For example, a National Book Gifting scheme may not initially sound like a radical public policy. But with some imagination – and a little help from book publishers - a Government committed to a 'society of readers' could transform that policy into a tool for guaranteeing every citizen regular communal, shared and distinctively British experiences, all of which encourage further reading. Book gifting schemes could play a role at every significant moment in a person's life – birth, starting and leaving education, marriage, retirement, after significant health events, even after incarceration. It is a way of boosting reading, of course. But it is also a way of positioning book reading as a unifying British experience in a world where powerful forces seem more likely to push us towards fragmentation. Many of our other proposals, from book gifting to the universal summer reading programme, to a national movement for adults reading for pleasure, would do this. And this is

the spirit we would wish policymakers to take this report in: to see reading not only as a credible and perhaps surprisingly effective tool for tackling our social ills, but also as a social activity that can provide a way to connect people in a world where forming human connections, at least offline, may become much more difficult.

That is what we mean by a 'society of readers' – a society that values reading, and which is in turn sustained by the benefits that reading brings. A society that saturates itself with books for everyone at every point of life. A state that marks significant life events with the gift of reading – especially to its children. A school system where children, by and large, arrive with a love of reading that was handed down to them by their parents who were supported at various points in their life to turn to books themselves. A school system where learning continues throughout the year ensuring that disadvantaged children can engage with reading groups – surrounding themselves with books even and especially if their home environment lacks them. A society whose clinicians understand that reading can have a medicinal quality when it comes to illnesses such as anxiety, ADHD, depression and even dementia. A society where a well-resourced re-training and further education system encourages reading beyond the classroom too. A society where workplaces may even carve out the time to allow their employees the time to attend further reading classes and reading groups. And a society that does not forget that its ill and ill-informed not only have cognitive needs but imaginations that can still light a fire too – and where we encourage them to share these imaginations by bonding with their contemporaries over the written word.

Is it really so fanciful to call such a society a unifying post-Brexit vision for the country? We hope not.

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Appendix A: Evidence by type

Table One – Reading Interventions to tackle loneliness or social isolation.

Publication	Authors	Published	Evidence or Intervention	Outcomes
Addressing Loneliness In Later Life	Pettigrew, S.	2007	Evidence	Reading reported as a beneficial solitary past time in later life, effective in limiting the pathway between isolation and loneliness
Ageing, Leisure, And Social Connectedness: How Could Leisure Help Reduce Social Isolation Of Older People?	Friends of the Elderly. Future Foundation	2014	Evidence	Reading books was found to significantly reduce feeling of loneliness for people aged 18-64. Reading books was also significantly associated with having close relationships across this age group.
Reading Friends: Test Phase Evaluation	Renaisi. The Reading Agency	2018	Intervention	29% of participants reported reading for enjoyment at least once a week since the reading group intervention; 39% reported saying they discuss what they are reading with others once a week. 88% believed the programme increased opportunities for social contact; the same amount also believed the programme added purpose to their week.
Assessing The Impact Of Reading For Blind And Partially Sighted Young People	Greenwood, H. Hicks, D. The Reading Agency	2015	Intervention	Participants reported that reading helped the to improve mood, relax, cope with stress and anxiety, and to escape and engage their imaginations. There was also agreement that reading helped build empathy and understanding; it was an important way of engaging in meaningful activity and play a part in filling the gaps left by loneliness and isolation.
Assessing The Impact Of Reading For Blind And Partially Sighted Adults	Creaser, C. Spacey, R. Hicks, D. The Reading Agency	2012	Intervention	95% of participants read for pleasure more than once a week; 69% believed it made them 'feel good'. 44% believed it helped reduce stress
Reading Groups In The Uk In 2015	The Reading Agency	2015	Intervention	95% felt happy about being part of a group; 80% reported enjoying what they were reading more when they discussed it at their reading group.

Table Two: Reading interventions to improve dementia or mental health outcomes.

Publication	Authors	Published	Evidence or Intervention	Outcomes
Reading Between The Lines: The Benefits Of Reading For Pleasure	Billingdon, J.	2015	Evidence	Non-readers 28% more likely to report feelings of depression; 19% of readers say that reading stops them from feeling lonely; Readers are 10% more likely to report good self-esteem than non readers and those who read for just 30 minutes a week are 18% more likely to report higher self-esteem. Reading for just 30 minutes a week being 20% more likely to report greater life satisfaction.
Health Literacy In Canada: A Healthy Understanding 2008	Canadian Council on Learning	2008	Evidence	Adults aged 16 to 65 who frequently engage in general reading activities can score up to 38% higher than the average on health literacy metrics; daily readers over the age of 65 can score up to 52% higher than the average for their age.
Reading Well Books On Prescription	The Reading Agency. Society of Chief Librarians	2017	Intervention	83% reported having a better understanding of their condition; 74% feeling more confident about managing their symptoms; 68% reported reading their book helped to improve their symptoms.
Reading Well For Young People Scheme	Polley, M. Kovandzic, M.	2017	Intervention	75% of students reported they had learnt more about wellbeing and healthy habits; specifically citing conditions such as OCD, asperger's and grief.
An Investigation Into The Therapeutic Benefits Of Reading In Relation To Depression And Well-being	Billington J, Dowrick C, Hamer A, Robinson J, Williams C.	2010	Intervention	Significant reduction in symptoms of depression after 12 months of participation in reading groups. Individual participants reported feeling more comfortable talking to others
A Literature-based Intervention For Older People Living With Dementia	Billington, J. Carroll, J. Davis, P. Healey, C. Kinderman, P. A.	2012	Intervention	Significant reduction in dementia symptom severity following participation in reading groups.

Table Three: Reading Interventions targeting improved social mobility outcomes

Publication	Authors	Published	Evidence or Intervention	Outcomes
The Life-long Benefits Of Reading For Pleasure	Sullivan, A.	2015	Evidence	Reading for pleasure made a difference of four times greater than the difference made by having a parent with a degree compared to a parent with no qualifications, to intellectual progress in adolescence.
The Drivers Of Academic Success For 'bright' But Disadvantaged Students: A Longitudinal Study Of As And A-level Outcomes In England	Sammons, P. Toth, K. Sylva, K.	2018	Evidence	Disadvantaged students with a strong home learning environment (including reading for pleasure) were more likely to go on to attain three or more A-levels
Changes In Reading Habits By Low Literate Adults Through Extensive Reading	Rodrigo, V. Greenberg, D. Segal, D.	2014	Evidence	Respondents who spent time reading for pleasure increased their literacy skills and motivations for reading significantly more than those who were taught formal literacy lessons.
Reading Ahead 2016-17 Evaluation Report	The Reading Agency	2017	Intervention	77% taking part in the programme believed they were good readers - up 17% from when asked before the programme. (56% reported reading for pleasure every day since the programme. The intervention increased the amount participants read to children by 5%. 90% of participating organisations reported that they felt participants were reading more and 84% felt it was improving literacy skills.
The Summer Active Reading Programme	Education Endowment Foundation	2014	Intervention	Pupils who participated in the programme made approximately two months additional progress than those who did not. For FSM pupils alone, there was 3 months progress made by the intervention group.