



# Vision for Literacy Business Pledge 2023

**The award-winning Vision for Literacy Business Pledge is now in its eighth year and so far 97 businesses have committed to working to improve literacy levels in the UK in 2023.**

Disruptions to education over the past few years risk reversing the past decade's progress in closing the attainment gap. The need to address the nation's declining literacy rates is clear, and as business leaders, we know the role we can play in improving this. We estimate that over three million children benefited from businesses' backing during lockdown, through activities ranging from book donations to community initiatives and funding of essential programmes in light of the disruption to education. As the economic impact of COVID-19 becomes clearer, action is needed to secure the economic future of the next generation. These impacts of the pandemic on literacy rates have now only been exasperated by the current cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

As is often the case in an economic downturn, the cost-of-living crisis has disproportionately impacted young people. With parents and carers under intensified pressure to make ends meet, 1 in 3 parents have stated they were too stressed to read to their child. In addition, 1 in 5 parents and carers said they were spending less on books for their children due to increases in the cost of living<sup>1</sup>. This could have a long-term impact on a child's literacy ability as 1 in 6 parents and carers said their child was struggling more at school compared to 12 months ago. Teachers have additionally reported seeing an increase in students who are coming to school hungry, as well as an increase in students who are unable to concentrate during school<sup>2</sup>. Key Stage 2 SATs results for 2022 showed that 1 in 4 (25 per cent) 11-year-olds left primary school unable to read at the expected level.

Additionally, currently, a quarter of all 15-year-olds have a reading age of 12 or below. This puts them at a disadvantage in their GCSEs, meaning they are unlikely to get the grades to progress to further education. As businesses, we need to give young people the literacy skills they need to stay in educational settings and protect them from future unemployment.

School closures caused by the pandemic, coupled by the current cost-of-living crisis, have meant that pupils in disadvantaged areas have had the greatest levels of learning loss. Assessment data from 2022 shows that the percentage of Key Stage 2 students who reached the expected level of reading, writing, and maths was 42% for Free School Meal eligible students, compared to 64% of non-eligible students. We know that lacking vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of their life. As a child they won't be able to succeed at school, as a young adult they will be locked out of the job market, and as a parent they won't be able to support their own child's learning.

As businesses, we must focus our support on these areas of disadvantage that have been particularly affected. By working with other businesses, schools, charities, and government we can prioritise literacy skills in these communities and ensure that the young people who have been most affected by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis are given the support they need.

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

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



# Our pledge in more detail

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

# 2023 signatories



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## Chase

Digital bank, Chase, has been working with the National Literacy Trust since October 2021 and is a new signatory for the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge in 2023. Chase launched its community impact initiative, Chase Rewarding Futures, to make a positive and measurable impact in underserved communities across Great Britain. In partnership with the National Literacy Trust and supported by Penguin Random House UK, the Chase Rewarding Futures school libraries programme aims to improve the lives of children and young people by giving them access to books, literacy resources, and library spaces.

In the first year of the programme, Chase supported nearly 55,000 children; transforming 156 libraries into enjoyable reading spaces in seven regions, and delivering 92,820 books and e-books to give children diverse resources. Recent **research** from Chase and the National Literacy Trust showed that growing pressure on family budgets means 1 in 4 parents are now asking their children to borrow

more books from their school library, so in 2023 Chase is expanding the programme to reach seven additional regions and supporting these communities with the tools and resources they need to help instil a love of reading. Our partnership ambition is to positively impact 62,000 more children in underserved areas by transforming another 156 library spaces, organising inspiring author visits and providing books, audio players and e-readers to enhance their reading experience.

## Siemens

Siemens has been part of the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge since 2022. We are working in partnership to help children from disadvantaged communities across England improve their literacy skills whilst also learning about the importance of environmental advocacy and sustainability. We have done this through bespoke training of community volunteers, enabling them to become Eco Literacy Champions. This training allows them to promote awareness of environmental issues and sustainability to children and families while helping raise their literacy levels through specialised activities and events. In 2022, we recruited and trained 246 volunteers in Manchester, Birmingham, Swindon, Doncaster, Peterborough and Suffolk. The training has had a ripple effect on the communities they serve through their hard work.

Siemens showcases their commitment to the Vision for Literacy Pledge by supporting the drive to raise literacy levels in local communities. This is achieved through the innovative ideas and passion of the Eco-Literacy Champions. For example, in Doncaster, books have been hidden around a park for children to find, and a portable



eco-library was set up in a community garden and used for storytelling sessions. As these activities take momentum across the area, they have a combined impact on improving our reach, giving children and young people more access to books and helping cultivate an interest in reading and learning about environmental issues. To complement this activity and contribute to the national campaign to raise literacy levels, an interactive webpage on the National Literacy Trust's Words for Life site has been developed, linking to free, educational, fun activities for children to do with their parents on themes including climate change, decarbonisation, and renewable energy.

## Bupa



The Bupa Foundation has been part of the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge since becoming a partner of the National Literacy Trust in 2020. Together we are supporting children and young people's wellbeing through literacy. In the Summer of 2022, we embarked on one of our most ambitious and creative projects yet, The Salford Literacy Trail. 20 BookBench sculptures were displayed across Salford. The project brilliantly demonstrates the Bupa Foundation's and Bupa's commitment to all three areas of the Vision for Literacy Business Pledge. It supported the drive to raise literacy levels in the local community by getting hundreds of children from local schools to work with local artists to co-create the colourful benches, bringing joy to the community and inspiring reading. It engaged Bupa employees in the literacy challenge through book-reading volunteering opportunities. The trail was enjoyed by hundreds of families and local people who followed the BookBenches path around the city. Bupa's influence as a large Salford employer helped build awareness of the need to boost literacy levels and helped us harness additional funding and involvement of many local businesses, community partners, education institutions and

local government. This project has a significant lasting legacy not only through the local schools that proudly display their BookBenches in their playgrounds but also through the significant funds raised that continue building an even brighter future for the local area and contribute to the national campaign to raise literacy. As a result of the Salford Literacy Trail, the National Literacy Trust and local Partners connected through this project are now in conversations about new initiatives and joint working.



For more information on the **Vision for Literacy Business Pledge 2023** visit [literacytrust.org.uk/businesspledge](https://literacytrust.org.uk/businesspledge) or contact [policy@literacytrust.org.uk](mailto:policy@literacytrust.org.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Children and young people's access to books and educational devices at home during the cost-of-living crisis, National Literacy Trust (2023)

<sup>2</sup> Cost of Living and Education 2022, The Sutton Trust (2022)