



Read Easy

Helping adults learn to read



UK | 2024
Strategy | 2029

Introduction

This plan sets out the bold and ambitious new strategy that Read Easy UK will follow over the next five years.

It is a response to both poor adult literacy and our own first-hand experience of helping thousands of people to read. It builds on 13 years of successful service, recognises the daunting challenges we now face, and prepares us for the future.

The plan involves everyone who is part of Read Easy – Readers, volunteers, local groups, employees, trustees, partners, and supporters. It will require all of us to change.

At its heart, though, this new strategy has one simple aim: to help more adults learn to read.



Context

The Skills for Life report (UK Government, 2011) found that in England alone, 2.4 million adults – one in 14 of us – struggle with reading.

The fact that these studies are more than ten years old and yet remain the most comprehensive research demonstrates a lack of national recognition and concern about adult literacy.

In the years since the surveys were published, there has been no measurable or demonstrable improvement in UK literacy rates. Indeed, the pandemic and resulting educational disruption have almost certainly worsened the situation. After being failed by traditional educational settings, many adults have sought help with reading later in life and tried various learning programmes, yet few have found the support they need.

2.4

million adults in the UK
struggle with reading

At an individual level, struggling to read can be a great personal frustration and disadvantage. It can affect a person's confidence and sense of well-being, limit their ability to access training and employment, and to participate fully in society. It reinforces social inequality, restricts economic growth, and worsens intergenerational disadvantage. In addition, as more and more public services go online, being unable to read is increasingly isolating and dangerous for some of the most vulnerable adults in our society.

Now, more than ever, there is a critical need for a visible Reading Movement that destigmatises the inability to read and opens doors to learning.



Read Easy

Read Easy transforms lives by giving any adult who wants to read the chance to learn.

We are a pioneering national literacy charity offering personalised one-to-one coaching that is free and confidential. Local, volunteer-led groups deliver this coaching to Readers, both face-to-face in their own communities, and online.

Over the past thirteen years we have empowered thousands of adults to overcome reading barriers and unlock new opportunities. For many, Read Easy has been their last chance to learn.

The last three years have seen a dramatic expansion of our work. The number of local groups has more than doubled, and we are now supporting Readers in every region of England. We have a thriving network of more than 2000 volunteers across 90 areas of England, who are transforming lives in their communities.

Over
1,500
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learning to read with
Read Easy in 2024

Most importantly, some 1,500 adults are currently learning to read with Read Easy. That's 200% more than three years ago.

In tandem with this rapid expansion, we have begun to strengthen our service by:

- Actively listening to and acting on Reader feedback.
- Gathering evidence for more rigorous impact assessment.
- Encouraging sharing of experience and best practice between groups.

Another positive recent development is that our profile has been raised through national and regional media campaigns. This greater visibility, coupled with our expanded network of groups, gives us the potential to coach even more Readers over the next five years.

Learning to read can unlock many benefits. These include:



Increased independence.



Improved confidence and self esteem.



Improved wellbeing and prospects.



Increased aspirations to continue learning.



New skills and knowledge.

There are broader societal benefits too:



Increased social participation.



Increased economic participation.



Reduced stigma and isolation.



Improved outcomes for children by breaking intergenerational cycles of literacy challenges.



More people being inspired to read.

The case for change

If everything is going well, why do we need a new strategy?

The simple and over-riding answer is that, for all the hard work and dedication of our Readers, volunteers and employees, and despite the huge achievement of having helped thousands of adults learn to read, we are not doing enough. Our waiting lists are growing. We can and must do more.

The other reason is organisational. In recent months, we have consulted people across Read Easy – Readers, volunteers, local groups, employees and trustees. We have reflected on our history, challenged the status quo and considered different options, all with the aim of ensuring that we can help thousands more Readers in the years ahead.

Consultation has reaffirmed that we have much to be proud of. Readers are learning to read and transforming their lives. Dedicated and skilled volunteers are giving selfless service, year in, year out. Our staff team has coped well with the pressures and challenges of managing a rapidly expanding organisation.

However, we have also identified serious concerns and challenges.

- Read Easy is struggling to cope with increased demand from potential Readers and is failing to realise its potential to become a nationally known and visible Reading Movement.
- Despite huge and rapid growth in the numbers of groups and Readers, our central resources have barely changed and are now over-stretched.
- The financial situation at national level is a serious concern. Fundraising – both nationally and locally – has become exceptionally challenging.
- Funders, Supporters and Partners are increasingly requiring hard evidence of the impact of our work, and we do not yet have sufficient data to respond.
- Our current strategic goals are no longer fit for purpose, and so our work risks becoming unfocused, and our impact diluted.
- Although we have achieved nationwide coverage, the strength of our groups and the numbers of Readers that each group helps vary enormously. Some groups are highly successful, others less so.
- While we provide coaching across England, we are not yet active in the other countries of the UK.
- Forming a group requires significant expense, effort and time for all involved and we need to ensure that this investment helps as many Readers as possible.
- We now have waiting lists in some areas and may be better able to manage ‘supply and demand’ by directing Readers to groups that have a surplus of coaches for remote coaching.
- Crucially, we need to give Readers a greater role in the provision and development of our services. The Reader Panel is a first step in that direction but there is a long way to go.

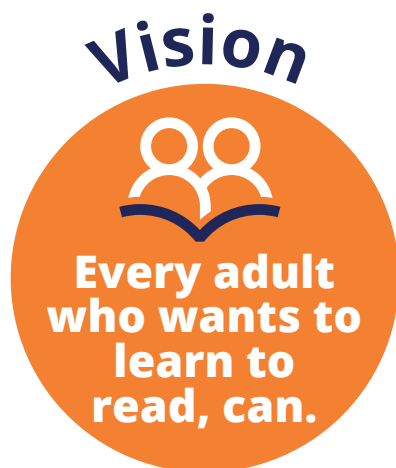
Our Vision and Values

By 2029, Read Easy will be a Reading Movement – coaching Readers, raising awareness, tackling stigma, advocating change.

The Readers' interests will be at the heart of everything we do, and we will be well known as a national Reading Movement. Our volunteers

will be coaching thousands of Readers every year, supported by a small but highly effective, well-resourced and sustainable central team.

Before setting out the steps we will take to make this happen, it is important to stress the Vision and Values that underpin the new strategy.



Values

These are not just a wish list. They represent the core of who we are and how we will achieve the best outcomes for our Readers.



Reader focus

We exist for our Readers.



Togetherness

We are one team, always respectful, supporting one another.



Empowerment

We enable Readers, volunteers and employees.



Aspiration

We are ambitious and aspire to help many more Readers.



Fairness

We stand for equity and do what is right.



Excellence

We expect excellence from everyone.

Strategic Overview

Over the next five years:

- We will continue to place Readers at the heart of our work. We will ask not 'what is best for our volunteers and employees' but 'what is best for our Readers'.
- Our focus will shift away from establishing new local groups to strengthening those we already have. We will aim for each group to coach 25-35+ Readers annually, locally and remotely, by 2027. This alone could double the total number of people we help each year.
- Groups will be expected and helped to collaborate and learn from each other, and the long-term aim is for more groups to achieve county-wide impact. In 2027, we will consider the possibility of extending our service to other UK countries.
- We will strengthen our gathering of data and other evidence across the organisation, so that we can demonstrate the impact of our work, both nationally and locally.
- Whilst celebrating the geographical spread and unique characteristics of our local groups, we will solidify our identity as a powerful force for change nationally. As part of this, every group, every volunteer and every employee will be required to respect and demonstrate Read Easy's values.
- We will continuously improve the efficiency of our central operations, ensuring that we continue to provide manageable resources for the different stages in a group's development. These will include a robust Reading Coach training programme, additional learning materials, comprehensive policy support, and a unified marketing voice.
- We will continue to strengthen the finances of Read Easy UK, by both cutting costs and diversifying income. To maximise our service to Readers, we must ensure that Read Easy UK is financially sustainable, and we will therefore seek to increase our reserves.
- Publicity at a national level can have local benefits, attracting new Readers, volunteers, new funders, partners and supporters. To increase the effectiveness of our communications, we will develop a clear communications plan and provide the resources needed to implement it.
- By 2027, we will formalise Read Easy as a Reading Movement, and from 2028 will use our unified voice and strategic partnerships with other organisations to amplify our advocacy, raise our profile and improve our accessibility for adults who want to learn to read.



Collaboration

Read Easy cannot solve the issue of poor adult literacy alone, and recent discussions with another charity about a possible merger were instructive.

We eventually decided not to merge, but we recognise the value of strengthening and expanding partnerships.

When we talk about 'strategic partnerships', we mean formal, long-term collaborations between Read Easy and one or more organisations (such as businesses, other nonprofits, or governmental bodies) to achieve mutual goals and enhance impact. We currently work with five strategic partners (three charities and two corporate organisations). This focus will continue with our existing priority partners in Years 1 to 3 of this plan and then expand in Years 4 and 5.

Ultimately, partnerships are not just collaborations; they are powerful catalysts for change. By uniting and amplifying our collective voice, we significantly expand our ability to attract Readers and raise awareness of the fact that millions of adults cannot read.



Our Priorities and Strategic Themes for 2024-2029

Our new strategy has been developed at a critical time for the reading movement, as we work to destigmatise the inability to read and create more opportunities for adults who want to learn.

We need to build on our current successes and position Read Easy UK to have even greater impact.

We will have five strategic goals in Years 1 to 3 and a further two in Years 4 and 5. These are:



2024 - 2027

Strategic Goal 1: EMPOWERING AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING

Aspiration

We are an inclusive community that empowers Readers.

Strategic Priorities

A key part of our evolution is further amplifying Readers' voices and developing our service with and for them. We will actively listen to Reader feedback across the organisation. While some groups already do this, we will require it from all.

We know how to coach, and already provide comprehensive training on how to do it well, and by involving Readers in shaping their experiences – how they learn (in person or digitally), the reading material they enjoy, how they share their stories – we will give them a crucial role in developing our services.

Strategic Goal 2: A UNITED VOICE

Aspiration

We are aligned in our efforts, fostering consistent messaging and shared goals across the organisation. This collective approach strengthens impact, streamlines communication, and enhances our ability to advocate effectively.

Strategic Priorities

We are a diverse organisation, and we celebrate equity, equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging, but we speak with one voice.

We take pride in the national, regional, and local aspects of Read Easy and embrace a collaborative approach.

We offer clear guidance about what is compulsory, what is best practice and what is optional. This allows groups to deliver in a way that suits and reflects their community while ensuring that Readers get a high-quality experience.

By speaking with one voice, internally and externally, we strengthen the Read Easy brand, so that future Readers, referral agencies and the wider community become aware of our services.



"I really want to encourage other people who struggle with reading to take up this opportunity. The first step is scary – but the change is amazing. It's really transformed my life."

Vicky – Reader, Read Easy South Dorset

Strategic Goal 3: EXCELLENCE IN DELIVERY

Aspiration

Provide more adults with access to high-quality coaching nationwide.

We provide free, confidential, one-to-one reading coaching to any adult eager to learn.

Our quality-assured groups maintain consistent national standards. All adults can easily access our service, whether by referring others or themselves, with remote coaching available for greater accessibility.

Read Easy UK provides cohesive support to our affiliated groups.

Strategic Priorities

Our goal is to highlight the literacy challenge facing millions of adults and the solution we provide.

After three years of rapid growth, we will focus on strengthening our existing Read Easy groups, enhancing their capacity and sustainability. Each group will be supported to coach at least 25-35 Readers annually, using both face to face and remote methods, and will aim to extend its reach.

We will develop a 'Reader Impact Framework' to clarify what excellence for groups is and will support them to achieve this over time.

We will ensure that all our training and resources lead to excellence in delivery for Readers and that we contribute to, and provide opportunities for, spaces to learn together, for peer learning and best practice workshops.

We are clear about what we don't do, so that we can invest time and resources into achieving our priorities.

To raise Read Easy's profile, we will leverage national media, build an online presence and a unified brand, all supported by a comprehensive communications plan.

Strategic Goal 4: EVIDENCE AND IMPACT

Aspiration

Positively influence Readers' long-term outcomes.

We are confident in the quality of our reading coaching and the positive impact it has on individuals and their lives.

Strategic Priorities

To support future growth, we are committed to strong quality assurance and impact measurement. This will help us maintain high standards and demonstrate our significant impact on Readers' lives.

We will gather data-driven evidence to show the excellence of our delivery and the meaningful difference we make.

We will also review internal processes, to ensure that they too have impact.

Strategic Goal 5: EVOLVING AND HIGH-QUALITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Aspiration

Ensure that our ways of working support our long-term future sustainability, and that we invest in the resources and capabilities to achieve our aims.

We are innovative and resourceful. Our actions are supported by continuously evolving systems and processes that enhance capacity and efficiency, both locally and nationally.

Strategic Priorities

As we mature as an organisation, this strategy reflects our bold ambition to embed quality and success across all our groups. By enhancing the capacity of both individual groups and the wider organisation, we will create a network of strong, sustainable Read Easy groups that are well-known fixtures in their communities.

This solid foundation will support future growth and innovation, allowing us to continue pioneering novel approaches to adult literacy.

This goal, although the least 'exciting', is significant because our current Readers rely on us, and we owe it to them, and those who are waiting for coaching, to be sustainable.

2027 - 2029

Goal 6: A READING MOVEMENT

Aspiration

We must enhance our profile and reputation. We advocate for those who cannot read. By raising awareness of learning opportunities and reducing barriers to access, we are driving a reading revolution.

Strategic Priorities

Priorities to be developed in Year 3.

Goal 7: A TRUSTED STRATEGIC PARTNER

Aspiration

We believe we can have a greater impact by partnering with organisations that share our values. We prioritise existing partnerships that engage beneficiaries and actively work to remove barriers to learning.

Strategic Priorities

Priorities to be developed in Year 3.



Managing Change

The goals set out in this plan have all been created with the aim of helping as many people as possible to learn to read.

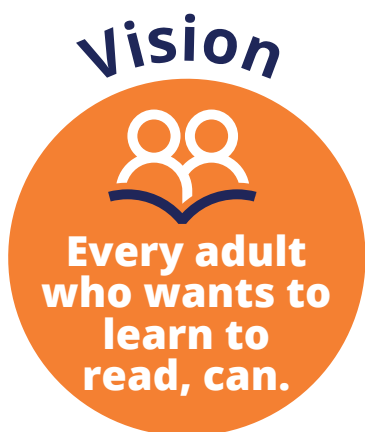
We recognise that the strategy is bold and ambitious and that things will feel different. Change can be hard, and some will find the new strategy challenging. While most of our work will continue as before, new initiatives will begin and some of our current practices will change. The new strategy will mean saying “No” to things which do not align with our goals.

Although the new strategy takes effect immediately, change will take time. That is why we have set realistic and limited objectives for Years 1 to 3 and broader, more ambitious goals for Years 4 and 5.

Here are ten examples of how Read Easy will change over the next three years.

- We will consult and involve our Readers in the continuing improvement of our service, and we will actively target adults who find our service hard to reach.
- We will stop prioritising the establishment of new groups. Instead, we will encourage and support our existing groups – including those currently in development – to help more Readers and to expand, both geographically and remotely.
- We will no longer treat evaluation as optional. We need data-based evidence to demonstrate to funders the quality of our work and thereby support more future Readers.





- We will foster a culture of unity, collaboration and shared purpose between our trustees, employees and our 90+ groups.
- We will provide groups with a framework for quality-assurance and will look to our highest performing groups to support groups that may be struggling. If groups prefer not to be part of a larger organisation, we will support their disaffiliation with minimal disruption to Readers.
- Communications sent to groups will be clearer and will explain the purpose of any changes or requests for new information.
- Behaviour that does not align with our values and may damage our reputation will be challenged and not tolerated.
- We will further develop our national infrastructure to realise efficiencies and better support groups and adults who want to learn to read.
- Nationally, we will work hard to strengthen our financial reserves, to ensure that our service is sustainable.
- We will not spend any more time considering calls to diversify learning by, for example, teaching English as an additional language, or numeracy. We coach adults who want to learn to read – that's it.

We hope that everyone will support Read Easy's growth and development over the next five years because it is only by working together that we can move forward with purpose and clarity towards turning our vision into reality.





Thanks

This strategy was developed with the input of many different stakeholders, and we are grateful to all of them for their wisdom, experience, frankness and insight.

References:

UK Government. (2011). 2011 skills for life survey: A survey of literacy, numeracy, and ICT levels in England. www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey

readeasy.org.uk