
TRAC

How to Encourage Reading for Pleasure amongst Teenagers

A Pilot Survey. June 2015

About TRAC

TRAC (Teen Reading Action Campaign) is a small charity created in 2014 to promote reading for pleasure amongst teenagers.

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How to Encourage Reading for Pleasure amongst Teenagers

A Pilot Survey

Background to the research

Research commissioned by the National Literacy Trust (NLT) has clearly shown that young people who do not enjoy reading and who do not read very often are likely to miss out on the benefits of reading, including better skills and better life opportunitiesⁱ.

Although the most recent NLT findings (*Children's and Young People's Reading in 2013*)ⁱⁱ has shown an increase in reading for pleasure for the first time since their research began in 2005, it remains to be seen as to whether this increase "marks the beginning of improvements in young people's enjoyment of reading or whether it is just a 'blip'"ⁱⁱⁱ. There is also still cause for concern regarding the gap in reading enjoyment between boys and girls (a percentage point gap of 12.7%), and that of decreasing levels of enjoyment as children get older. The NLT research is conducted amongst pupils in three key stages (KS2: 8-11 year olds, KS3: 11-14 year olds and KS4: 14-16 year olds) and shows huge differences in reading for pleasure with only 36.7% of 14-16 year olds saying that they enjoy reading very much or quite a lot compared to 49.5% of 11-14 year olds and 65.8% of 11-14 year olds.^{iv}

The data referenced above is robust (a sample size of 29,422) and so does not need replicating. At TRAC (Teen Reading Action Campaign) we are now concerned to explore how levels of reading for pleasure can be increased, identifying and exploring resistances and barriers to pleasure reading amongst teenagers and how these can be overcome. Anecdotal evidence and our own preliminary qualitative research has suggested that time constraints (real or imaginary) and difficulties in identifying relevant and appealing books to read are issues for even motivated readers, and therefore as part of our wider pilot survey into the reading habits of teenagers we have begun to quantify these factors and consider how they might be addressed.

The Research Method

This pilot survey was conducted by online self-completed questionnaires^v and administered by SmartSurvey^{vi}. The questionnaire was developed following qualitative research (exploratory face-to-face interviews with teenagers). The questionnaire that will be used in the main survey will be developed in light of these preliminary findings.

The Sample

This pilot survey was completed by a random cross-section of 186 school children aged 12-18 years in West Berkshire, Sussex, Oxfordshire, Greater London and Liverpool. 47% were male and 53% female. The majority (74%) attend state day schools/academies, 20% independent boarding school and 6% independent day school.

Key Findings

- 84% said that they enjoyed reading, yet over half also agreed that they find it hard to find books to read that 'really interest me' (52%).
- Two-thirds feel that they find it difficult to find time to read for pleasure during term time and a half consider that they 'never' seem to find the time to read.
- Teenagers were ambivalent about the notion that 'the best' way to find a good book is to have it recommended to them.
- Usage of book recommending web-sites was low, other than for Amazon/Kindle. Of the social media options only Facebook had been used by +10%.
- 34% had never looked for a book recommendation on-line.
- 64% said they would be very/quite likely to use a dedicated book-finder app for teenagers.

Some Preliminary Conclusions

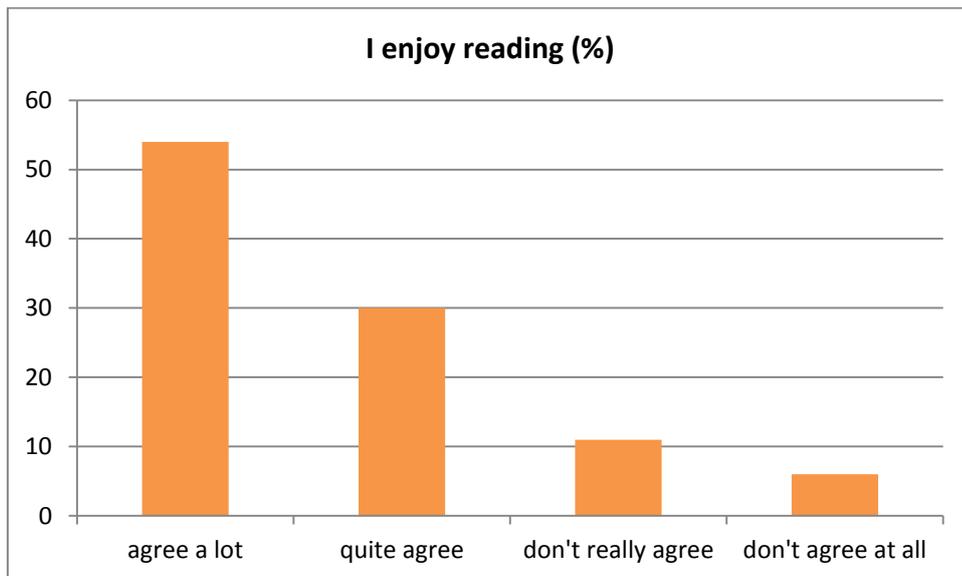
Our research was conducted amongst relatively motivated teenaged readers, yet even amongst this group, the process of finding a good book to read for pleasure was not an easy one. Time pressure was perceived to be an issue both as a reason for not reading more books, and was raised as a factor regarding finding books to read.

Finding interesting books to read is an issue and clearly a barrier to greater reading for pleasure. Teenagers quite like to have books recommended to them, but a significant minority voiced the idea that they want to feel that they have found something for themselves (they are after all teenagers and don't want to be told what to do or read!). So how to find the next good book and where to go for recommended reads? We know from other research^{vii} that the majority of teenagers are not natural habitués of bookshops and libraries, but are avid users of mobile devices (phones and tablets). They are technically savvy yet they have not used the book-finder sites and apps currently available. There is clearly a need to be addressed and TRAC will continue to develop the BOOK app concept utilising the findings from this pilot research in order to ensure that both the content and tone of voice of the proposed app is appealing and appropriate for the target user.^{viii}

Summary of Findings

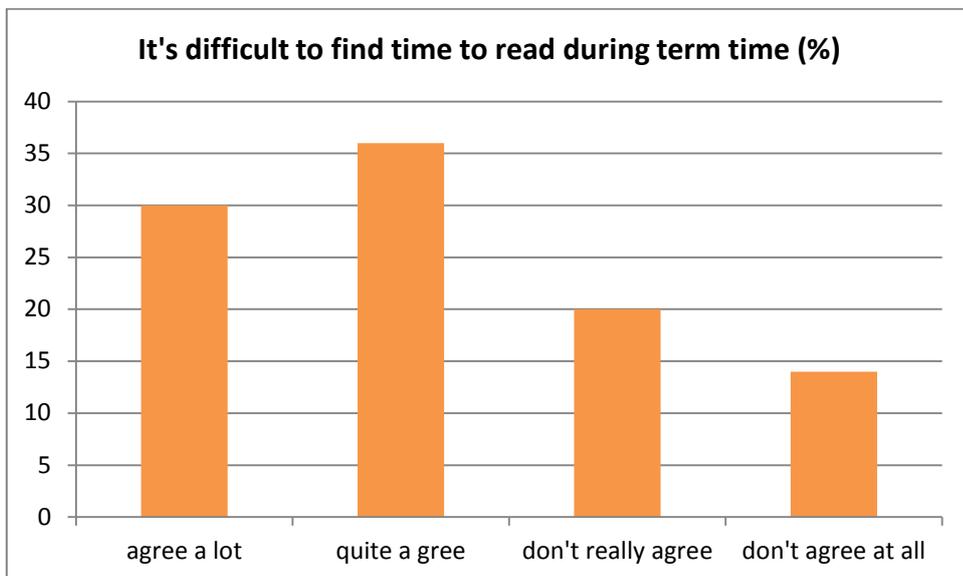
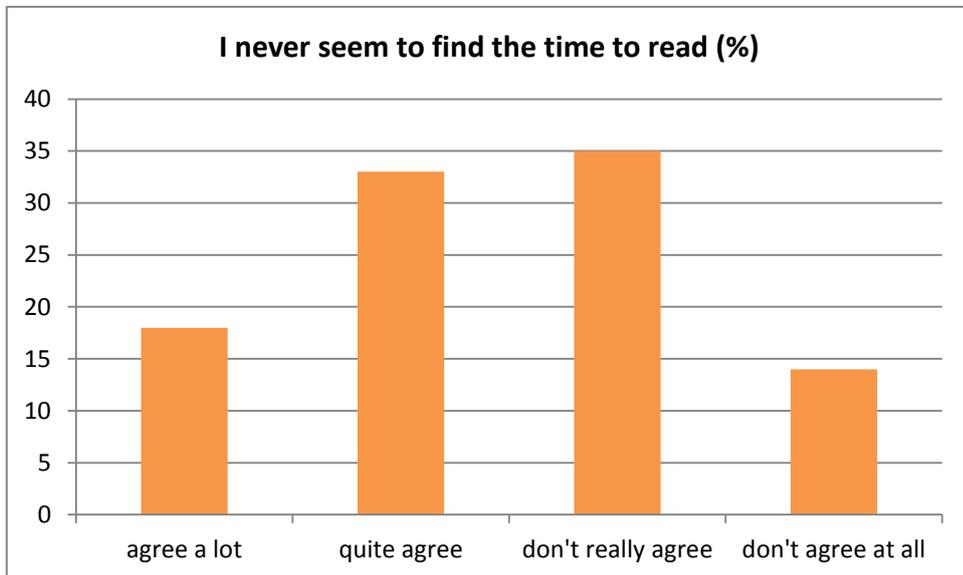
Enjoyment of reading

- Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements regarding their reading habits.
- As can be seen in the chart below, 84% of our respondents said that they enjoyed reading (54% a lot, 30% quite).
- It should be noted that these findings contrast with those from the much larger NLT survey previously referenced^{ix}, in which 53.3% said that they enjoyed reading a lot/quite a lot. Our respondents have therefore an above average enjoyment of reading, and this should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.
- Reflecting NLT results, girls were more likely than boys to agree with the statement (94% cf 71%).



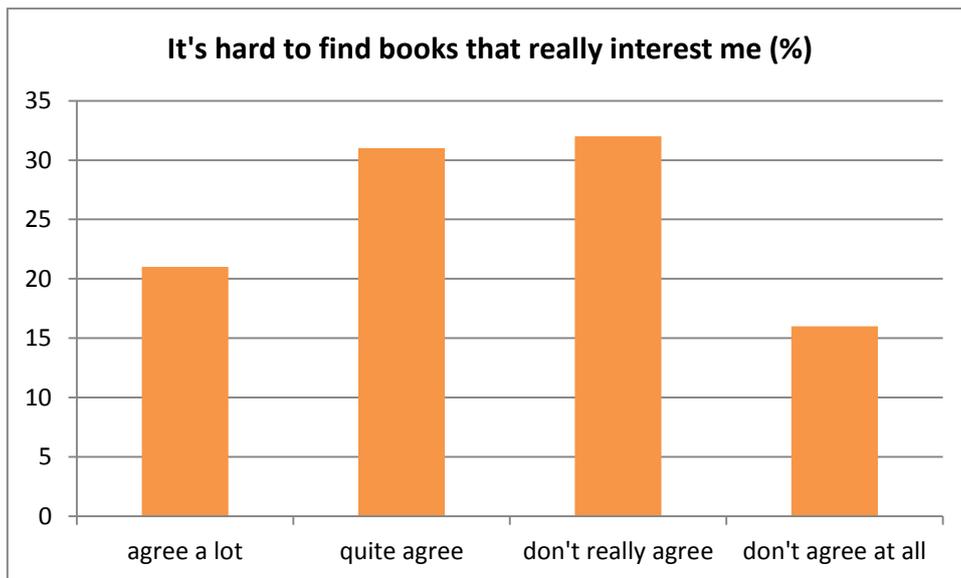
Time

- In our preliminary exploratory interviews, not having enough time to read was often mentioned and so we sought to quantify this issue with two questions: regarding time pressure generally and during the school term specifically.
- As can be seen in the following charts, teenagers were split 50:50 regarding their agreement or not with the statement that they ‘never seem to find the time to read’. Perhaps what is most telling is that only 14% completely disagreed. Time is clearly perceived to be an issue, and particularly so during the school term: two-thirds agreed that ‘it’s difficult to find time to read during term time’.
- It is of note in context that in the NLT *Children’s and Young People’s Reading in 2013* survey only 25% of 14-16 year olds read outside class every day.^x

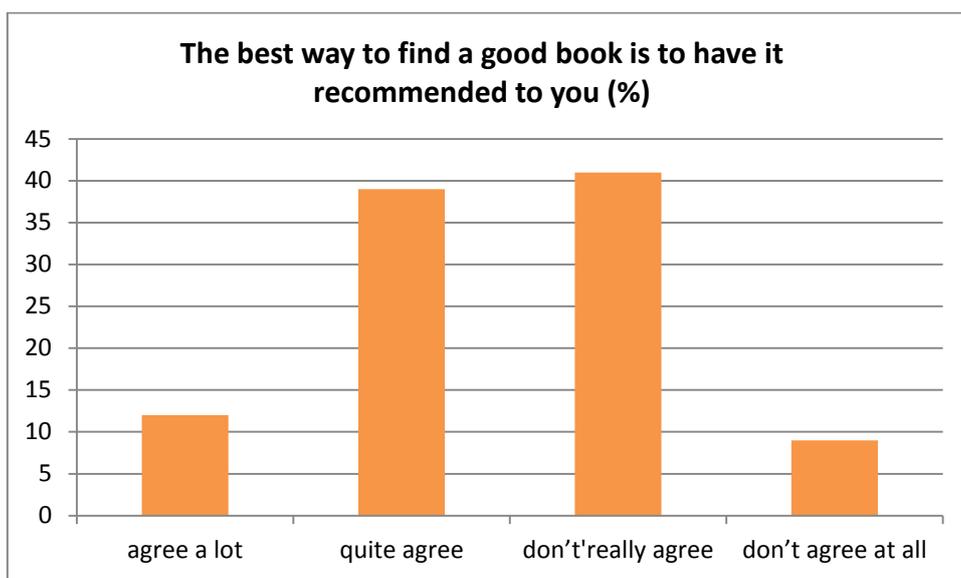


Finding books to read

- Over half (52%) agreed that they find it hard to find books to read that 'really interest me', with just under a third not really agreeing with the statement (and these tended to be girls and the most motivated readers).

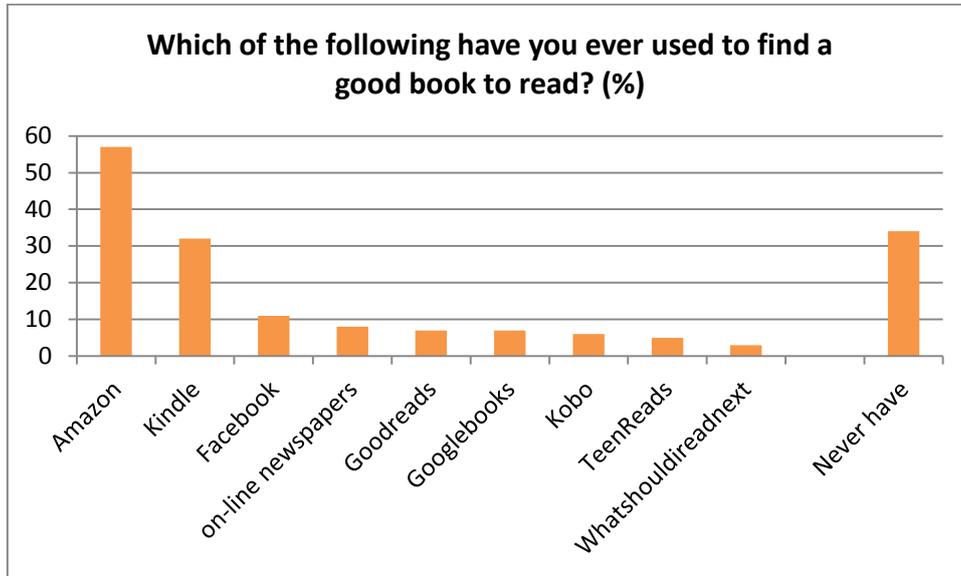


- 51% agreed that the best way to find a good book is to have it recommended to them, 41% didn't really agree and 9% did not agree at all.

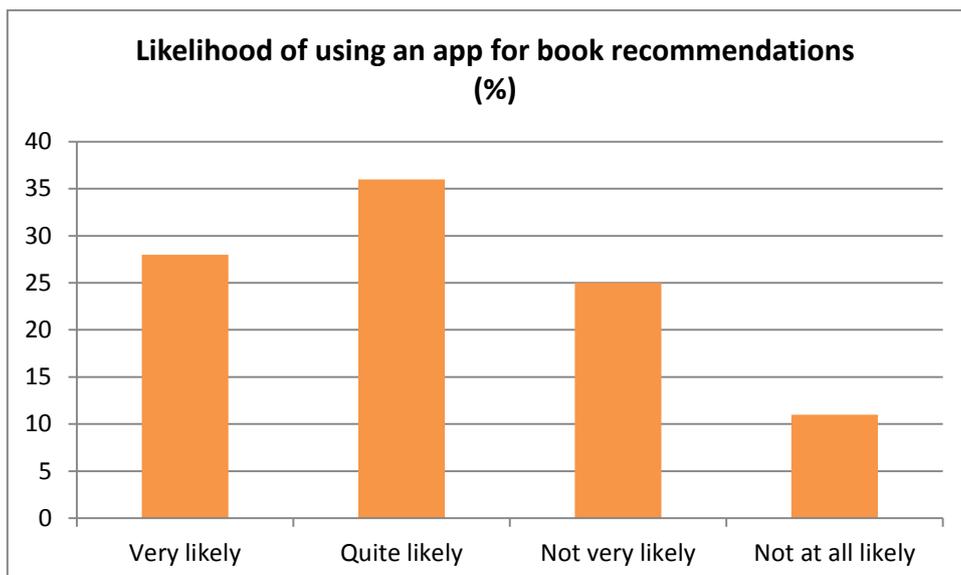


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- When asked which of a number of web sites and apps they had ever used to help find a good book to read, over a third (34%) said that they had never looked for a book recommendation on-line.
- Of the specified resources, Amazon was clearly the one most likely to have been accessed (57%), followed by Kindle (32%).

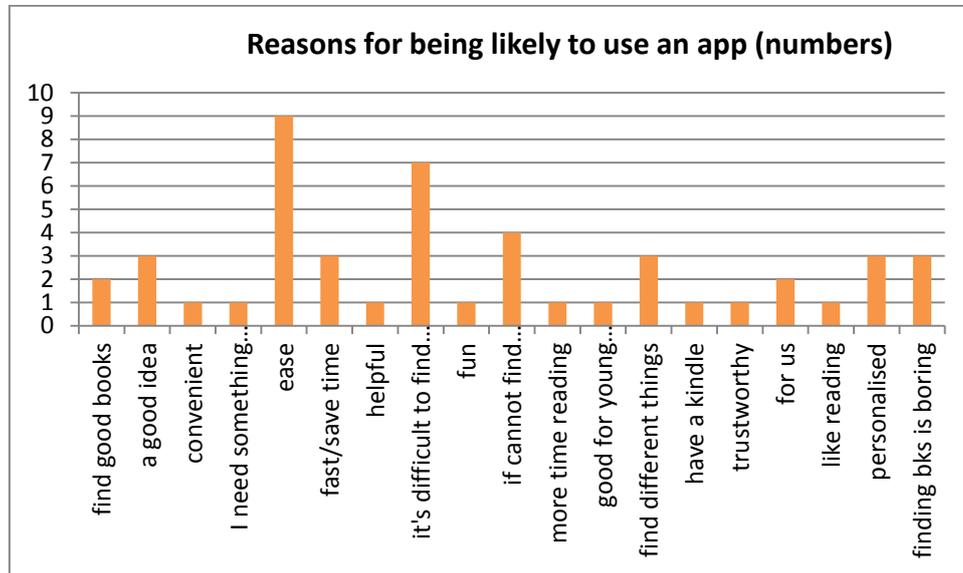


- When asked to consider how likely they would be to use a web-site or app specifically tailored to their age group which would give targeted book recommendations based on their age and interests, which would also help them find the books from booksellers or libraries, the majority (64%) said that that would be very or quite likely to do so.



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- The reasons given for a positive response to the likelihood of using the app highlighted the apparent ease of the idea. Respondents re-stated that they found looking for books to be difficult and time consuming: time that could be better spent in actually reading.



“Means finding books would be easier, so less time to get bored looking for books which don’t interest me”

“Because it would be quite helpful to know the recommendations of other people the same age with the same interests”

“Because I find it hard to find books unless somebody has recommended them to me”

“I love to read and I can’t normally find books that I like”

“I could try new books that I wouldn’t have (tried) in the past”

“You would spend more time reading and less time looking”

“Easier than trying to see if you like it (a new book) from the first paragraph”

“I find it hard to find books that interest me so this would be good”

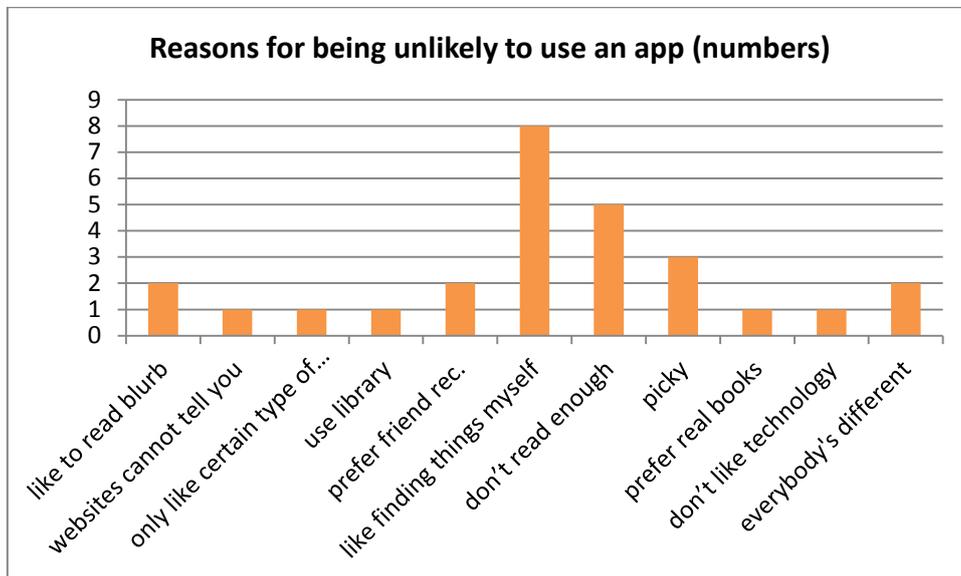
“It would be efficient to quickly find books that I may be interested in, rather than spending hours trawling through Amazon”

“I use the internet a lot and it would be good to discover new books”

“Because it (looking for books) takes up so much of my time and I just want to be able to pick up a book and start reading”

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- The reasons given for being unlikely to use such an app fell into two broad groupings: the most highly motivated readers' commented that they preferred to find books for themselves, and the less motivated commented that it was because they didn't want to read or didn't read enough to make it worth-while.



"Because everyone at this age likes different things"

"Because I prefer choosing my own books"

"Don't need it"

"I like to stumble upon good books"

"I like to pick my own choices in a book as I have mixed opinions on books, I am very picky"

"I'd prefer to pick out my own books; I won't like to have a computer tell me what books I would like to read"

"I find my aged books boring so I like to read a bit of a book that looks good and if I like it then continue"

"Because I find my own books in the school library or ask a friend to recommend it to me"

"I normally find books I like by reading the blurb not via other people as they might not have the same interests as me.....I normally go on my own thoughts"

For further information about this pilot research survey
please contact TRAC at info@tracbook.com

References and Notes

ⁱ For an in-depth analysis of these inter-relationships see the NLT report published in 2011 at http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/0025/Attainment_attitudes_behaviour_enjoyment-Final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Clark, C. (2014) *Children's and Young People's Reading in 2013*. Findings from the 2013 National Literacy Trust's annual survey. London: National Literacy Trust.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid p9

^{iv} Ibid p13

^v Links to the survey were offered to the participating children via teachers and parents (MRS Code of Conduct)

^{vi} www.smartsurvey.co.uk

^{vii} *Library E-book Services for Teenagers* which can be accessed at

<http://tracbook.com/assets/components/files/documents/Library%20research%20doc%20final%20version.pdf>

^{viii} For further information on BOOK, please visit <http://www.tracbook.com/projects/book.html>

^{ix} Clark, C. (2014) as above, p7

^x Ibid p31