

The use of reading to improve student transition to university - and build the wider community. A case study within two universities

*Workshop: Empowering Learners*

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What unites our two institutions – and hopefully us all

*‘A paradox. The things you don’t need to live – books, art, cinema, wine – are the things you need to live.’*

Haig (2013, p. 273)

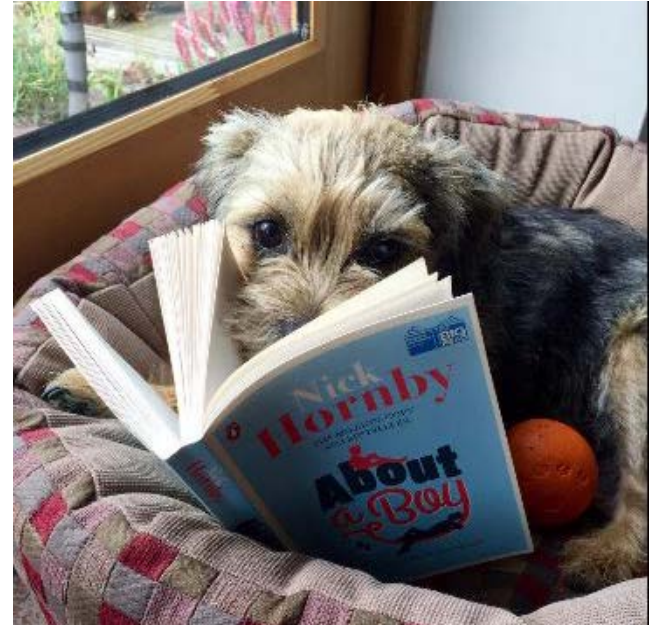
## Project origins

- Pre-arrival shared reading common in US universities
- Research stream 1: Widespread reporting of the **benefits of reading for pleasure**
- Research stream 2: **Engagement strategies for improving student retention**
- Research stream 3: How to **improve student transition, engagement and retention**, particularly among vulnerable communities
- Research among Kingston first years (2014-15) showed much greater interest than anticipated. Went ahead with a customised edition of Nick Hornby's *About a boy*
- Winnicott transitional object
- But managing this as a research project**



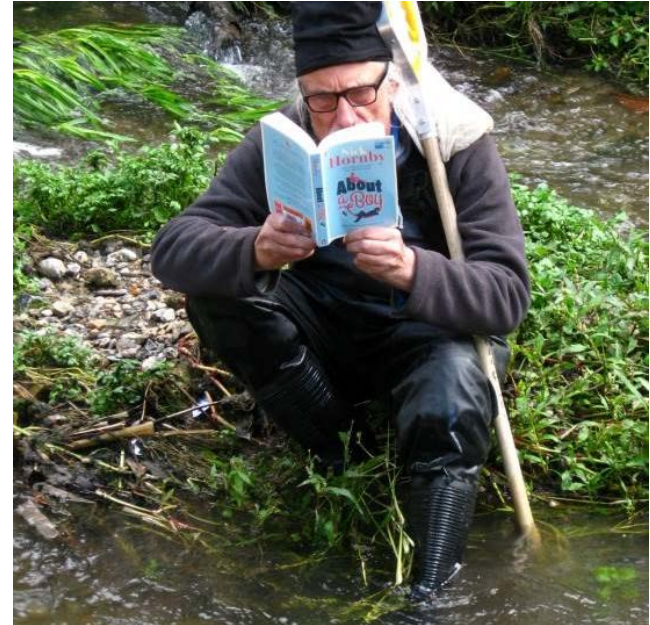
## Feedback from year one

- Very strong student response – those living at home
- How best to reach staff; let them *ask* not just *receive*
- Libraries offered a capillary network across the university
- Administrative/professional staff keen – reprinted 2x
- A water-cooler project - widely discussed
- Significant reduction in KU drop-out rate – down 24%



## The wider societal context - Kingston

- Many Kingston students commute
- 1:8 homes has a university connection
- Many administrative staff live locally
- Building on our active programme of civic engagement with Kingston Council
- Multiple contact points promote action!



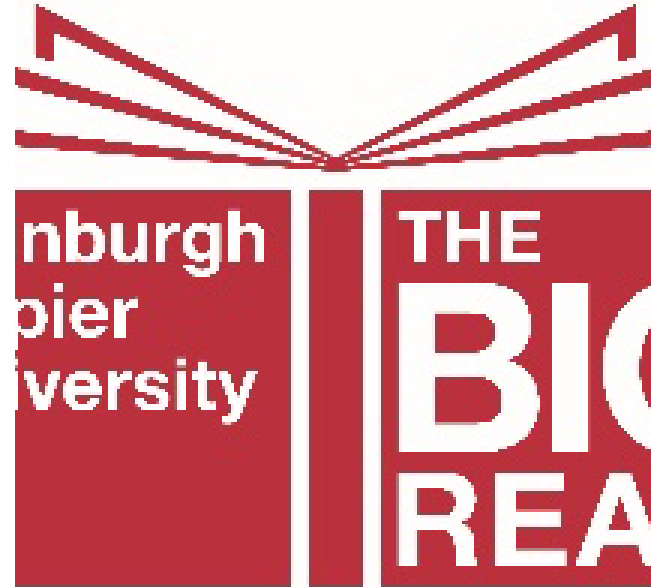
## Year 2: Edinburgh Napier University join us

- Similar student demograph
- Many first generation students who live at home
- But very different ethnicities
- Why did Napier want to take part?



## Establishing a working relationship between Kingston and Napier

- Visits to explain and explore the project
- Involving Napier in book choice
- 28,000 print run for *The Humans*
- Working with LRC staff at Edinburgh Napier
- What Napier did not get involved in



# What issues needed to be discussed between Kingston and Napier?

- Open up to audience discussion:
- Any anticipated problems?
- Anything to nip in the bud?



## Initial issues

- Personnel
- Choosing a book to suit two institutions
- Distance
- Origin as a senior-management project
- And one invented somewhere else
- Legal formalities
- How many books actually needed?
- Differences in approach
- Learning in both directions



## What we did differently

- When to launch the project – timing
- How many books are needed
- When to invite the author to speak
- Staff allocation
- Institutional processes for ethics



# The profiles of the ENU and KU staff respondents are very similar

	% of total			Number		
	2015	2016	NAPIER	2015	2016	NAPIER
Male	33%	31%	30%	76	71	36
Female	64%	66%	66%	147	152	79
Prefer not to say	3%	4%	3%	6	9	4
Under 30	10%	12%	10%	22	27	12
31-40	27%	23%	23%	60	53	26
41-50	24%	27%	31%	54	62	36
51-60	33%	30%	31%	73	69	36
60+	6%	9%	4%	14	20	5
Administrative staff	33%	33%	39%	76	74	45
Academic staff	39%	33%	29%	89	75	33
LRC staff	10%	16%	3%	23	36	3
Contracted staff	7%	5%	11%	15	11	12
Other	12%	14%	18%	27	31	21

## Staff at ENU and KU learned about the Big Read in similar ways

	2015	2016	NAPIER
General email from one of those involved in organising	47%	44%	49%
Targeted email sent specifically to you, from one of those organising	9%	14%	7%
Mention in VC's monthly newsletter	42%	31%	13%
Information from senior faculty management	7%	5%	7%
Information from faculty colleagues involved with teaching and learning	6%	8%	6%
Information from your head of department	10%	6%	14%
Heard of it at a staff meeting	11%	16%	12%
Coverage on Staff Space	60%	49%	
Via a Kingston External Events Calendar	3%	4%	
Casual conversation with academic colleagues	7%	9%	12%
Casual conversation with administrative staff e.g. LRC, administration team, or KU reception staff	12%	17%	16%
N	211	215	102

84% of staff thought the amount of information they had was about right

Q2: Did you get sufficient information on the KUBR?



- ENU figures 61% not enough, 20% about right, 1% too much

## Staff generally found it easy to find a copy

- 84% found it very easy to access a copy. (ENU 69%)
- Many comments about good availability at reception desks/ LRCs

‘The reception desks at PR were never without copies, making it very easy to get a copy.’

‘I liked the way that LRC and Reception staff were so keen to engage people in the scheme’

‘It is a fantastic idea to have books distributed at university reception and libraries. You're really going to reach most people that way.’

‘Perfect placement’

## ENU and KU similar in amount read

	Students		Staff		ENU
			2015	2016	2016
% of respondents	2015	2016			
Finished it	44	54	51	64	67%
More than half	16	10	8	5	6
Less than half	20	20	10	12	6
None of it	21	16	31	19	21
N	187	250	218	232	118
Average Score (out of 6)	4.1	4.3	4.0	4.5	4.6

## Again a similar profile between ENU and KU

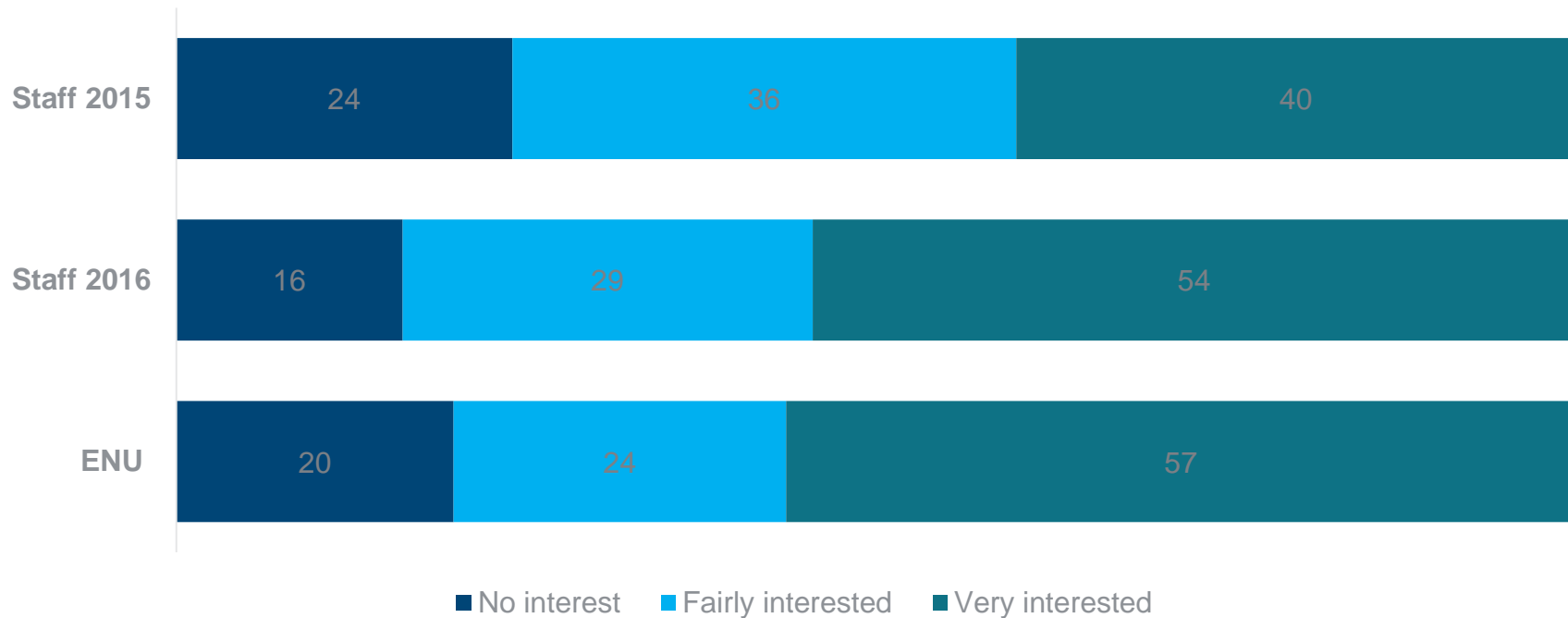
Q Did you discuss the book with anyone? Please tick all that apply

% of staff respondents	2015	2016	ENU
Family and friends (outside the university)	20%	53%	37%
Work colleagues	33%	53%	60%
Students	6%	15%	14%
Did not discuss with anyone	40%	25%	25%

*n=219 (2015, 228 (2016), ENU (118)*



## Staff interest in taking part again: ENU and KU results very similar



## What we learned

- The value of a tangible product
- Boost the vision with a simple statement of what you are trying to do
- Use all means of communicating *across* the organisation
- Ensure transparency of process
- Find project champions
- Leverage involvement by sharing information
- Encourage others to develop the idea – internally
- Administrative staff valued opportunity for increased visibility
- Find brand partners - externally



## What we gained from working together

- Shared experience
- Opportunity to compare notes on process/outcomes
- Inspiration from each others' ideas
- An impact case study across two institutions
- Competition entries
- References outside individual institutions



## Strategic rationale for library involvement

- Raising library profile across both institutions
- Learning hub of the university and so a central collection point
- Opportunities to network across community through committee structure
- Social media presence gives opportunity to reach out to students
- Encouraged user engagement with LRCs

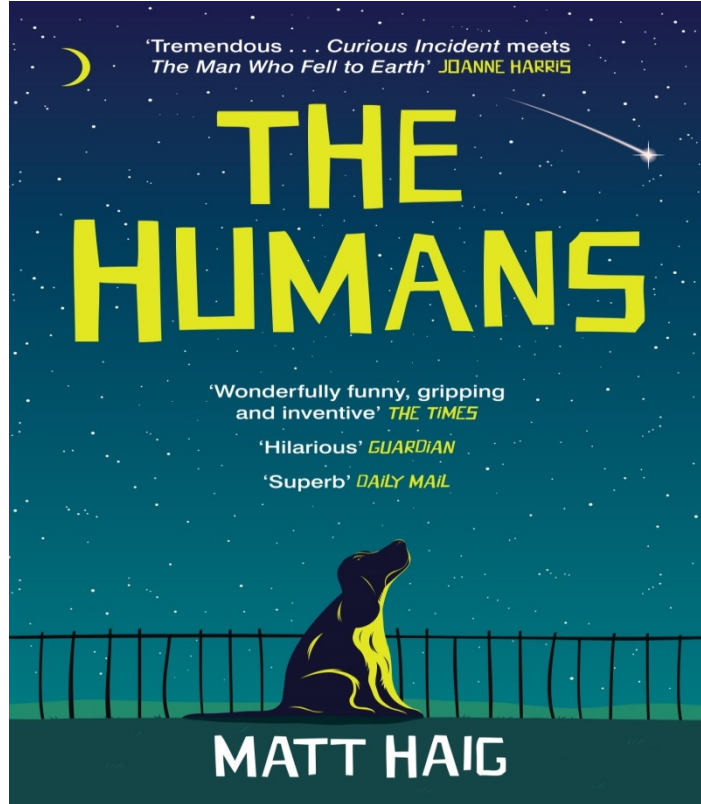


## Actual issues for the future

- Project funding
- Copyright for project
- Writing papers
- Giving presentations
- Acknowledging credit on both sides
- Involving new partners



## Bibliography



Haig, M. (2013) *The Humans*.  
Edinburgh: Canongate Books.