

# *The KU Big Read*

*The Humans* by Matt Haig

<http://kubigread.kingston.ac.uk>

*‘One life form’s gold is another life  
form’s tin can’*

Haig (2013, p. 272)



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

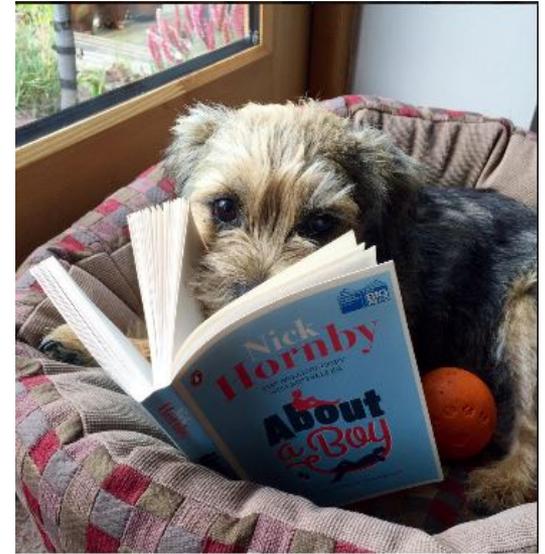
Haig (2013, p. 273)

## Project origins



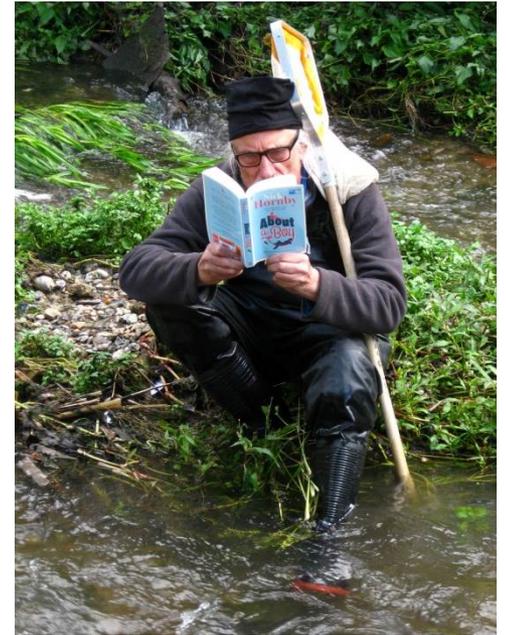
- Widespread reporting of the **benefits of reading for pleasure**
- A research project looking at **how to improve student transition, engagement and retention**, particularly among vulnerable communities
- Pre-arrival shared reading common in US universities
- Research among first years (2014-15) showed much greater interest in reading for pleasure than anticipated. We went ahead with a customised edition of Nick Hornby's *About a boy*

## *Feedback from Year One*



- Very strong student engagement – particularly from those living at home
- How best to reach the staff; let them *ask* rather than just *receive*
- How libraries offered a capillary network across the university
- Administrative/professional staff particularly keen
- A water-cooler project. Widely discussed – even by those not taking part!

## *The wider Kingston context*

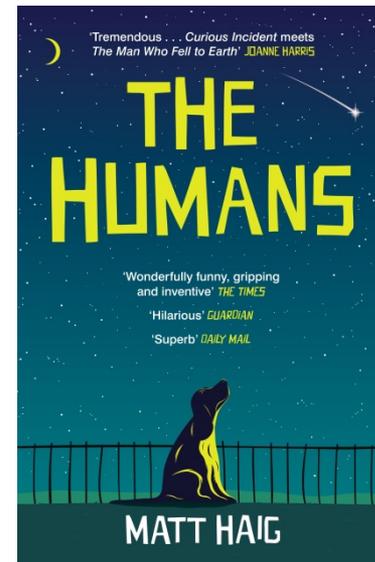
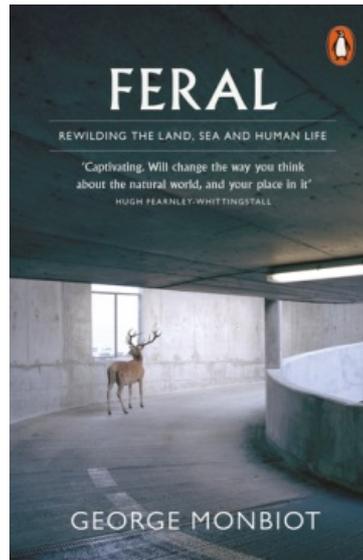
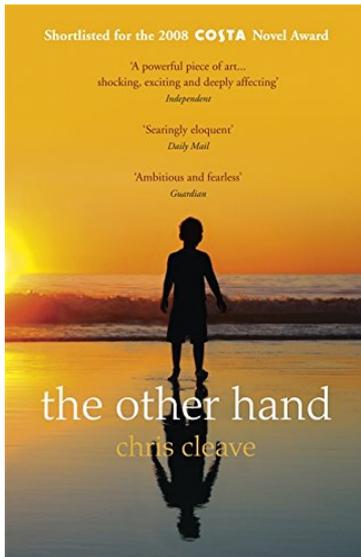
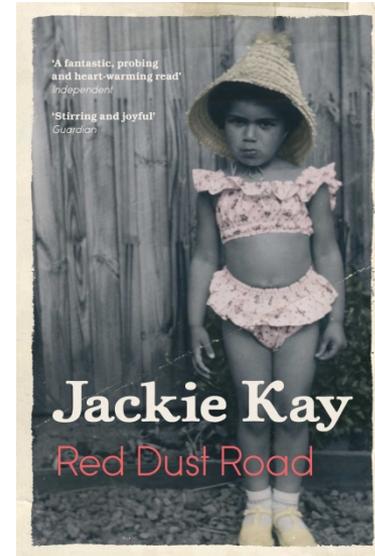
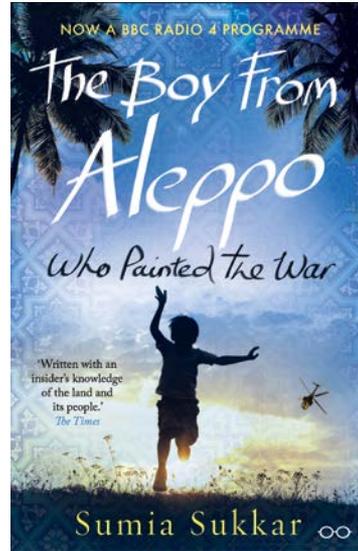
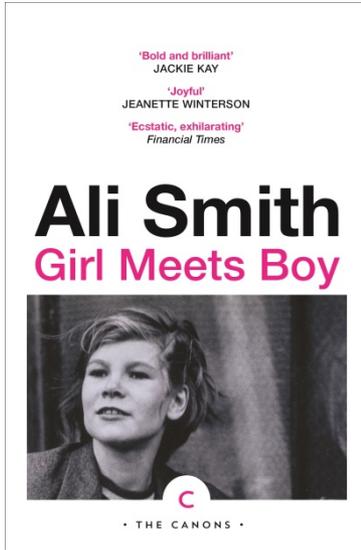


- Many students commute
- 1:8 homes in Kingston has a KU connection
- Building on our active programme of civic engagement with Kingston Council
- Many administrative staff live locally
- Multiple contact points promote action!

## *The next year*



- Choosing the book, involving the whole institution
- Using an algorithm and then letting humans make the choice
- Rolling out the shortlist across the institution – key library role
- How this developed into other workshops



## *Partners come on board*

- Similar student demograph, different ethnicity
- 35,000 print run for *The Humans*
- Working with LRC staff at Edinburgh Napier



## *Community involvement*



- U3A
- The Joel Project, centre for those experiencing homelessness
- Sale of books to Kingston Council

## What we learned



‘You have really created a buzz. I feel I want to take part.’  
Corridor conversation with Senior Lecturer in Pharmacy

- 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
- Share the outcomes

## *Unexpected Benefits*



- Staff response
- Raised institutional profile nationally - articles published by academic and library staff in academic and professional press (3) and conference papers (4)
- Students now with a Publications section on their CV
- Rose Award

## *KU Library – Why?*



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

## *KU Library – How?*



- Money to buy books
- LRC Induction sessions – practical examples e.g. referencing
- Reading groups in Welcome Week
- LRC staff training: Annual Summer Refreshers and Night Team

## *Wider library sharing*



- Sofa sessions in the university library cafes
- Public Libraries/KU summit on good practice



## *Spin-offs involving the LRC*



- Hillcroft Women's College – through a helpdesk library contact
- Youth groups on local Council Estate
- The Big Economics Read – for all new KU economics students!

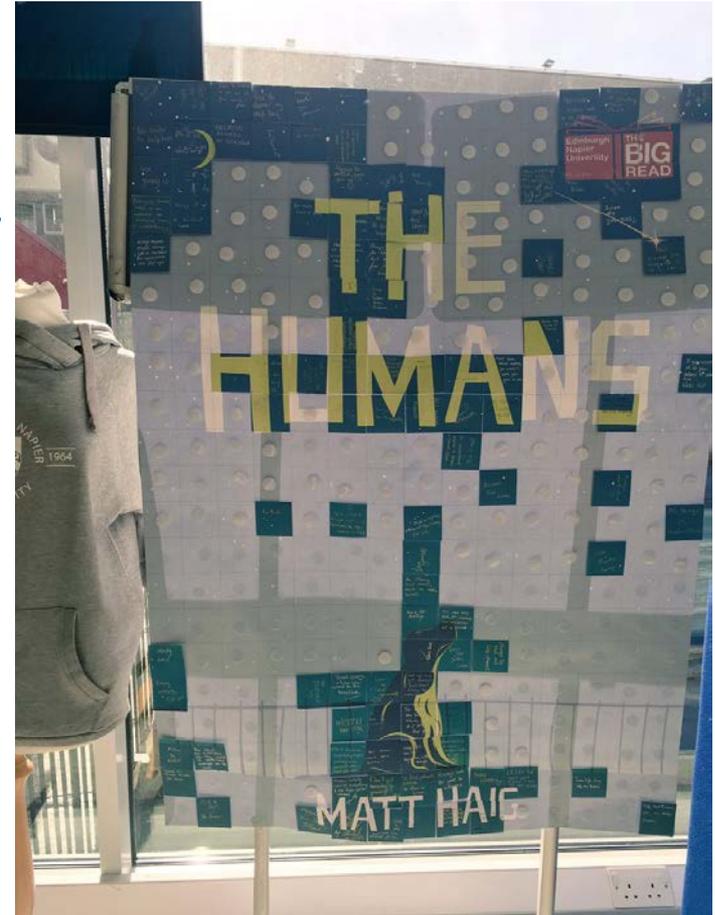
## *Further collaboration*



Source: DC Comics

- Contribution to Customer Services Excellence Award – Kingston and Napier
- RBK joint seminars: World Book Night and Cityread
- The Kingston Award – a possible model for Council staff development

# Edinburgh Napier University Events





## *Sharing experiences*



‘Thought it was a well-chosen book due to the themes complementing the transition to a new environment very nicely’

# Edinburgh Napier University Digital Outreach





## *Wider library sharing*



- Sale of books to Kingston Council
- Rolled out across 7 public libraries in the borough
- Surbiton Library event
- Public Libraries/KU summit on good practice

## *Community involvement*



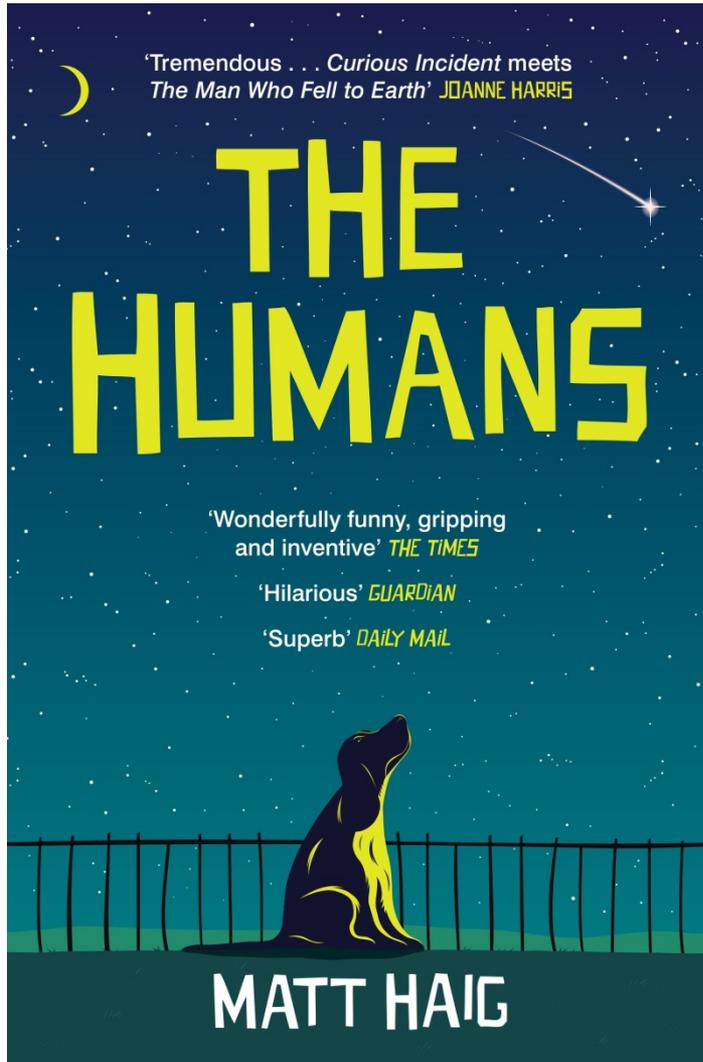
- All based on promoting **community and inclusiveness**
- Sharing attempts to chart our effectiveness
- Strategy and evaluation development

## *What was learned in the process?*



- Expanding on 2016
- Reaching more people – residents and across the Council
- Involvement in university’s research plans and other cross over

# Bibliography



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