

ONLINE READING VOLUNTEERS

Impact Valuation Methodology

Programme Overview

Chapter One's Online Reading Volunteers (ORV) programme supports primary school children facing disadvantage in the UK, who struggle with reading and have low reading confidence and enjoyment.

Trained corporate volunteers use a bespoke online platform to give children aged 5 to 8 weekly one-to-one reading sessions across a full academic year. The sessions build reading and communication skills and help children enjoy reading. The goal is for every child to have the same chance to benefit from everything reading offers, so they can thrive in life.

The programme is designed around children, but many volunteers also report a benefit to their own wellbeing and higher overall life satisfaction. We measure that too.

How we approached the valuation

We worked with the social impact measurement organisation [Impact Advantage](#) to value the ORV programme's impact and to calculate its social return on investment (SROI), for both students and volunteers.

The programme rests on a large body of strong research showing that helping children early in their reading journey improves their life chances. Children who read are more likely to do better at school - both at the end of primary and the end of secondary - to have more job opportunities and higher lifetime earnings, and to enjoy better health and wellbeing.

Two principles shaped the work:

- We measure from the 'bottom up', using each student's and each volunteer's actual change, rather than estimating from the 'top down'.
- We are deliberately conservative. Where we had a choice, we took the option that understates rather than overstates the value.

The two impact pathways

We followed two routes from activity to value: one for children and one for volunteers.

The two impact pathways



For children, we used a longitudinal study by the Department for Education (DfE) that links reading skill, attitudes and behaviours at Key Stage 1 to reduced social costs, such as SEN provision, truancy and school exclusion, and to future earning potential, which gives us a monetary value. We added three longitudinal studies that link reading to future health literacy, valued by avoided health costs.

For volunteers, we used the established UK social value approach, linking life satisfaction scores to WELLBYs. A WELLBY is the monetary value of one year's change in life satisfaction, set out in government Green Book guidance.

Valuing the impact on each student

The value created for a student depends on how much that student changes. We capture each student's change, and based on this, they are categorised according to likely outcomes. These outcomes are based on DfE longitudinal research studies (adjusted for current day values) and we adjust them downward to remain conservative. The steps are below.

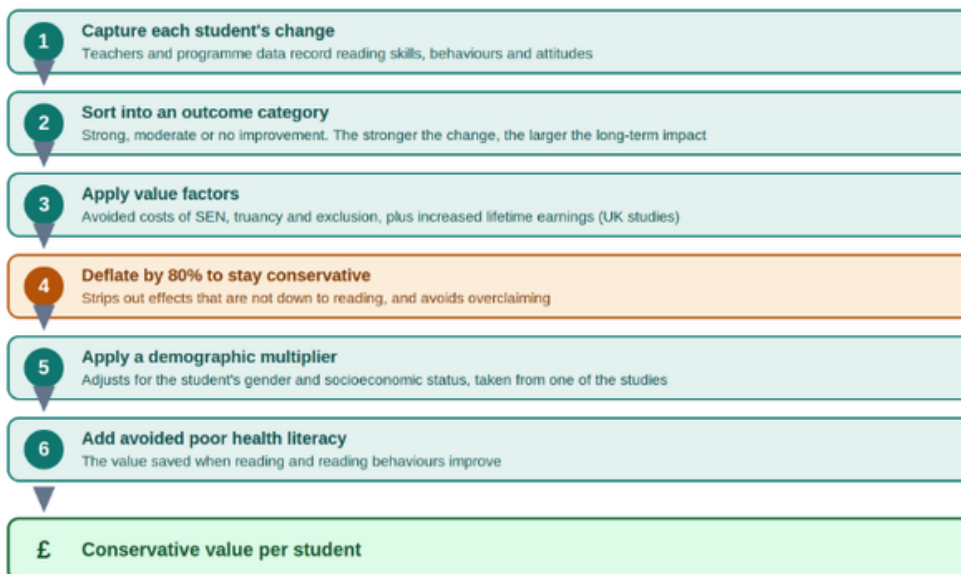
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How we value the impact on each student



Teacher survey and programme data record changes in each student's reading skills, behaviours and attitudes, and we use those changes to place students into outcome categories. Not all progress leads to the same long-term impact.

- Students showing the strongest improvement are far more likely to reach expected levels at Key Stage 1. That matters because it is strongly linked to less need for additional support such as SEN provision, lower risk of truancy and exclusion, a higher chance of achieving GCSEs and A levels, and higher lifetime earnings.
- More moderate improvement leads to proportionate, more conservative outcomes.
- Where there is no improvement, we assign no long-term impact.

Each outcome is then valued using value factors, drawn from both the UK longitudinal research and public data, that put a monetary value on the change. For students, these value factors capture the avoided costs of SEN provision, truancy and school exclusion, the value of increased lifetime earning potential and the value of avoided poor health literacy.

Two adjustments sit behind the 80% deflation. The source values combined avoided costs to the state and to the individual together with lifetime earnings, so we adjusted to isolate the impact per student. The source also valued full educational interventions rather than reading alone, so we deflated further. Together these reduce the value by 80%, to reach a figure we can stand behind.

We then apply a multiplier for the student's demographics, such as gender and socioeconomic status, taken directly from one of the longitudinal studies and applied to each outcome separately. Finally, we add the value of avoided poor health literacy, based on how likely this is to be avoided when reading attainment and reading behaviours improve.

In order to validate our results, we cross-checked the total value and the SROI against similar education programmes. Educational interventions similar to the Chapter One programme generally have an SROI above 4 and below 12. Our figures were therefore in line with those programmes but are more conservative. For example, the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) UK Government evaluations (2021 to 2023) and the Pro Bono Economics (PBE) study of educational interventions (2022) found impact per student of around £10,000 to £12,800, with an SROI of 6.58 in the PBE study.

Valuing the impact on volunteers

Volunteers can report their life satisfaction score at the end of the programme, as part of our annual survey. If volunteers do not complete the annual survey, an average (from previous years, or a smaller survey sample) is used to represent the predicted life satisfaction score. This is then used to calculate impact on volunteers.

We do not measure the change in each volunteer's score directly, to avoid survey fatigue. Instead, we take the difference between their score and the national mean life satisfaction score and multiply it by a WELLBY value factor (from the government Green Book) in today's prices.

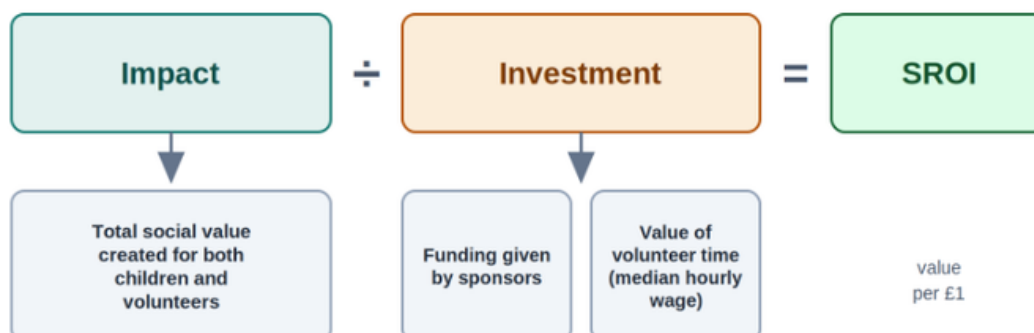
Valuing partner investment

The total investment figure for each partner combines their financial contribution to Chapter One with the value of their employees' volunteering time. Volunteer time is valued using sector-based hourly rates. We recognise these categories can be broad, and that using each volunteer's actual hourly rate would be more precise, but that data is personally sensitive and hard to collate, so we currently rely on standard, publicly available information.

Turning value into a return: SROI

Social return on investment shows how much social value the programme creates for each pound invested. The formula is simple: impact divided by investment.

Turning value into a return: SROI



Investment has two parts: the funding sponsors give to the programme, and the value of volunteer time. We value volunteer time using the median hourly wage for the volunteer's profession. Where that is not available we use their sector, and where that is not available we use the national median hourly wage. We then divide total impact by total investment to give the SROI.

Why you can trust these numbers

- Bottom-up measurement. Values are built from the real, recorded change for each student and volunteer, not from top-down estimates.
- Deliberate conservatism. We deflated the students' values by 80% and took the more cautious option throughout.
- Grounded in evidence. Every value traces back to UK longitudinal studies, government guidance and public data, listed in full below.
- Independently cross-checked. We validated our totals and SROI against comparable education programmes and came out more conservative.

Worked examples of the calculations are available on request.

References

Primary studies and guidance

- Study of Early Education and Development (SEED): The potential value for money of early education. Paull and Xu, 2017.
- Can holistic school readiness evaluations predict academic achievement and special educational needs status? Evidence from Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Atkinson et al., 2021.
- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Handbook. Department for Education, 2024.
- Early Literacy Matters: Economic impact and regional disparities in England. Pro Bono Economics, 2024.
- Children and Young People's Reading. National Literacy Trust, 2024.
- Health literacy levels of British adults: a cross-sectional survey using two domains of the Health Literacy Questionnaire (HLQ). Simpson et al., 2020.
- Are childhood factors predictive of adult health literacy? A longitudinal birth cohort analysis. Solis-Trapala et al., 2023.
- Health literacy and self-rated health: Analysis of the Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA). MacDonald et al., 2022.
- A Handbook for Wellbeing Policy-Making. Frijters and Krekel, 2021.
- Association of volunteering with mental wellbeing: a lifecourse analysis of a national population-based longitudinal study in the UK. Tabassum et al., 2016.
- Volunteering and health benefits in general adults: cumulative effects and forms. Yeung et al., 2018.
- Back to Edgeworth? Estimating the value of time using hedonic experiences. Krekel and MacKerron, 2024.

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- Statistical Appendix for 'Caring and sharing: Global analysis of happiness and kindness', Chapter 2 in World Happiness Report 2025.
- Chapter 8: Giving to Others. World Happiness Report 2025.
- The WELLBY: a new measure of social value and progress. Frijters and Krekel.
- Green Book Supplementary Guidance: Wellbeing. HM Treasury, 2022.
- How's Life in the United Kingdom? OECD, 2024.

Secondary data sources

- Gov.uk
- Office for National Statistics
- National Literacy Trust
- Explore Education Statistics
- Department for Education
- Public Health England
- House of Commons Library