

No to Age Banding

Library Professional Association Comments

CILIP supports the aims of the “No to Age Banding” campaign. It believes that the age banding of books is unhelpful and potentially harmful to the enjoyment of reading by children for the following reasons:

1. Children and young people develop at different ages. By banding books with an age it could make reluctant readers think that a book that is actually appropriate for their reading ability is too young for them, thus putting them off reading altogether. Equally a strong confident reader may feel that a book that is appropriate for their reading ability is too old for them.
2. Personal reading experience shows that children take out of their reading what they need, and many books can be read at different levels. Parents and others who are uncertain about appropriate books can ask at bookshops and libraries where staff are experienced and knowledgeable.
3. It is much more important that the needs and tastes of the individual child be considered - in libraries, in bookshops and by teachers - in line with the present educational commitment to a personalised approach, than applying a banding system that will either necessarily be too rigid or will have to be so encompassing to be too vague to be of any point.

We wish the campaign success and assure you of the support of the library community.

Statement issued on behalf of the [Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals](#)

The Association of Senior Children's & Education Librarians (ASCEL) Response to the ‘Age Ranging’ debate

- ASCEL regrets that Librarians were not consulted in the early stages and hopes that this debate will lead to a modification of the proposals
- ASCEL is also interested in understanding more about the research that led to this proposal. With whom was it undertaken, what was the sample size and what precise questions were asked?
- Every child and young person is unique; reading is not hierarchical & progressive, although adults can present it to children and young people in that way. We all develop as readers by reading a wide range of material. The approach proposed reinforces reading as a mere process and diminishes the view of reading as a creative activity in which the young reader interacts with the text.
- Children read up and down the age range and not always correlating directly to their chronological age. Children can read at a level higher than their apparent reading level, if they are motivated by the subject matter
- A danger in this proposed approach is that all books for children and young people end up classified as if a part of some grand reading scheme. Children really start to fly as independent readers once off their designated reading scheme and are able to make genuine choices about what they read. Whilst it may appear helpful, this current proposal will potentially reduce choice as parents & carers will be led to a defined, limited range of age related titles
- Children whose ability level is greater or lesser than their chronological age will be put-off from reading titles apparently ‘badged’ not for them. Anecdotally, staff in public and school libraries report the impact of this factor time and again. The proposals will effect the support and advice that staff in public or school libraries and in bookshops can give to parents/carers

and children, especially those who are gifted and talented or less able. An age indication on the cover cannot replace the engaged and interested adult (parent/carer, teacher, librarian) who knows the child and the books and can bring the two together meaningfully. As children's librarians, many of us were trained with the mantra – 'the right book for the right child at the right time'. It is an adage that still holds true today.

[The Association of Senior Children's & Education Librarians](#)

The Library Association of Ireland expresses its support for the “No to Age Banding Campaign”.

1. The age banding scheme is a brake on individual reader development, it attempts to put a permanent series of imposed categories on what should be a continuum of development.
2. The blanket approach of age banding does not allow enough flexibility for reader-led purchasing policies.
3. Weaker readers are discriminated against and further marginalised by the age banding approach. These readers may make wrong choices or be discouraged from making book choices at all by being stigmatised by low age bands.

[The Library Association of Ireland](#) / Cumann Leabharlann na hÉireann

SLA has reservations – many in line with the statements above from ASCEL and CILIP - about the current proposal to have age bands prominently displayed on the covers of books for children.

School Librarians working in school libraries across the country can be placed in extremely difficult positions when they have, in accordance with best practice, allowed children and young people a free choice in their reading material, for other youngsters or their parents then to notice the age band on the book and comment on it – either that this is too young or too old for you! This can create a barrier for children to actually enjoy the books they need at any specific time in their lives.

We would urge the publishers to reconsider their age banding – and devise a more subtle system that does not 'brand' the book whilst still providing guidance and support to those book buyers who are in need of advice.

[The School Library Association](#)

Other organisations

Nasen supports the 'No to Age Banding Campaign'

- The age-banding of books for children and young people is unhelpful and detrimental to the encouragement of reading for pleasure
- All children and young people should be encouraged to read but by banding books we are reducing the accessibility of the audience we are trying to engage
- The self-esteem of reluctant readers will be reduced if they are not able to read the book labelled with their chronological age. A book labelled with a much younger age will only reinforce their negative feelings towards reading
- A more confident reader may be discouraged from reading a book if the age band is too high
- Parents and other adults will be encouraged to buy books because of the age not because of its appropriateness for the individual this could lead to parental misconceptions about their child's reading ability and cause problems for teachers who have established appropriate reading materials in their classrooms

- Children and Young people should be encouraged to read for pleasure, this often means including titles from popular authors or following TV series or films. The age banding of these books will not always reflect the interest level of the topic, a very important factor was trying to engage the dis-engaged in reading
- Vulnerable children and young people could become even more exposed to bullying from their peers if they are perceived to be reading a 'babies' book
- If we are trying to establish an inclusive society where all are valued then we should not be allowing this very exclusive strategy to continue

NASEN (formerly the National Association for Special Educational Needs)

The enjoyment of books is about so much more than the mechanical process of reading. A good children's book is a friend – sometimes transporting us to safe and cosy places from our younger days, sometimes challenging us by introducing new ideas, testing our thinking and understanding of the world.

Seven Stories shares the concerns of the authors who are leading this campaign. Age banding ignores the fact that children's reading choices slide up and down the "age range" – and so they should. It runs the risk of "pigeon-holing" children, discouraging less confident or emotionally developed readers and limiting the potential of ambitious readers. We feel that the only good case for guidance is on some teenage fiction where the subject matter is unsuitable for younger readers. As many campaign supporters from the book retail and library services prove on a daily basis, good booksellers and librarians will imaginatively display and categorise books to help readers make their choices.

Kate Edwards

Chief Executive

[Seven Stories](#), the centre for children's books

We at the The Oxford Story Museum have added our name to the campaign because we agree that age-banding will turn off as many kids as it attracts. It is impossible to age band many books meaningfully and accurately (for example, *Harry Potter*, *Northern Lights*, even *Cat in the Hat*), because it makes books seem like developmental hurdles to climb. We think it's fine to age-recommend books in other ways (e.g. to have shelves for different age groups) but not to brand this all over the books.

[The Oxford Story Museum](#)

NAWE supports the 'No to Age Banding' campaign. Many of the association's 1000+ members are children's authors who do not want their work to be limited in its reach and believe that such limitation does readers of all ages a profound disservice. All NAWE members are involved in sharing the writer's craft and its product - books - with readers and writers of all ages. As a result, they are especially well placed to know how positively young people respond - both as readers and as creative writers themselves - to a very wide range of literature, certainly beyond the prescriptive diet associated with a narrow 'age-appropriate' approach. NAWE therefore urges the dismissal of any proposal to introduce such an age banding scheme.

[NAWE](#), the National Association of Writers in Education, issued the above statement at its Annual General Meeting, November 2008