<div align="center">**Summary Report - Focus Groups**</div>

This document provides a brief overview of the main points discussed. If you wish to refer to any of the material below in your own research, please make sure you obtain permission to do so in advance, and that you reference our project appropriately.

Focus Group 1

BACKGROUND AND PROTOCOL:

The first focus group was held on Thursday 26 April at Bournemouth University, from 4-5.30 p.m. This was intended to invite students interested in reading to reflect on their own use of forums and digital devices for reading and research.

The participants were as follows:

10 Media School Undergraduates including 3 studying BA English (6 Females, 4 Males, age range 18-23)

1 Postgraduate student (Male, early 30s)

At the beginning of the focus group the researchers provided some context for the discussion by talking about the research project, its main aims and objectives, and giving a brief overview of the work conducted so far. Participants were asked to give their consent for the discussion to be recorded and used for the publication etc.

Prior to the focus group, the researchers drew up a list of questions based on the following main issues:

- Students' use of online sites and digital devices to consume literature and other texts
- Students' use of online sites and digital devices to comment on literature and other texts

During the course of the discussion, kindles and an ipad were circulated for participants to use. The researchers also put up on screen some examples of the forums and discussion groups used for the online survey.

MAIN THEMES AND FINDINGS:

Use of digital spaces and devices to consume texts:

The majority of students owned laptops but not ipads or kindles. Most held a strongly romanticist ideal of reading, and their self-definition as readers had a lot to do with image rather than practicality. Many (of both genders) were engaged with the idea of collecting.

The students didn't feel the kindle functions were very helpful to them (e.g. comment, dictionary) and didn't see any need to have 'thousands of books on the go'. They felt that 'reading is meant to be personal and immersive.

There was a clear divide in how they approached their critical reading (for study) versus their recreational reading: nobody read fiction online, but all of them did the majority of their academic reading in this way: 'Google Books is really handy'. 'I only ever read non-fiction stuff online. My academic stuff'.

They described it as a 'myth' that young people read less but acknowledged that they defined reading more widely than older generations (e.g. news sites, Wikipedia (all students)) and that the previous generation may have read more fiction.

Students who read comics disagreed on the use of online readers: some liked the colours and printing only found in originals whereas others liked the durability and portability of digital versions. Even those who used them acknowledged that there was a 'right' and 'wrong' way to display a comic and this differentiated between some software.

The students (mostly male) were keen to situate the kindle and digital publishing within a more longstanding tradition of digital development, e.g. radio to films to video and so forth. It was felt that the book needs to evolve and there was little point in digitising books into an identical format. However, it was acknowledged that social context played a part in this thinking: 'obviously I've been raised with books; there'll be a generation of people raised with Kindles not books and they'll think differently'. The students were not at all concerned about the emergence of publishing empires.

Use of digital spaces and devices to comment on texts:

Around half the students had used forums, the rest preferred to blog or similar and had a somewhat stereotypical view/mistrust of chatrooms ('I'd hate to label, but probably social recluses'). They perceived blogging very differently, mostly to do with issues of authority and ownership: 'Someone's following you for your personal opinion'; 'if someone is following you on Tumblr it's specifically for... a specific desire to know what you think'.

Of those who had visited forums, the majority had only lurked and they were aware that the majority of members of sites did the same. Only two of the students had used forums to comment regularly or post creative work and these students felt that they were a great aid to build confidence in both creative work and critical opinion. It was felt by several members of the group that forums were not at all democratic – that 'ring leaders' and cliques existed here just as much as anywhere else. This was teamed with mistrust about the people who posted on forums and it was generally felt that frequent forum posters were only concerned with boosting their egos and about 'craving self-affirmation'.

The social relationships that sprung up online were not felt to be constructive: 'You don't want to start arguments and it just kind of gets, rather than necessarily enjoying the book together, it kind of separates all the different sides and you can't enjoy it as the book. It has to be as these different relationships'. This was exacerbated by a feeling that commenting online could indicate disengagement with the book or activity itself: 'if something's good and worth doing, it should engross me so I don't have to pick up my phone.'

Focus Group 2

BACKGROUND AND PROTOCOL:

The second focus group was held on Thursday 3 May at Bournemouth University, from 4-5.30 p.m. This was intended to build on the first focus group, eliciting the views of active book club members and professionals working with young readers and students.

The participants were as follows:

2 university librarians and 1 local librarian
A local writer
A university English lecturer, who also writes novels and runs a New Media Writing competition
A FE lecturer working with students learning Foundation Skills, also a member of an all-male book club
2 local book club members

The group was composed of 5 men and 3 women. The age range was 30-70.

At the beginning of the focus group the researchers provided some context for the discussion by talking about the research project, its main aims and objectives, and giving a brief overview of the work conducted so far. Participants were asked to give their consent for the discussion to be recorded and used for the publication etc.

Prior to the focus group, the researchers drew up a list of questions based on the following main issues:

1. The Future of Reading and the impact of digital devices, particularly ereaders.
2. Activities surrounding reading: both on and offline.

During the course of the discussion, kindles and an ipad were circulated for participants to use. The researchers also put up on screen some examples of the forums and discussion groups used for the online survey.

MAIN THEMES AND FINDINGS:

 1. **The impact of new technologies on reading.**

Participants were asked whether they thought there was any truth in the claim that people read less these days. A discussion followed as to the likely extent and nature of young people's reading, and whether it mattered whether this might not meet with the approval of their elders, particularly their teachers. The University Lecturer commented that students read as much as ever, just not the stuff we think they should read, whereas the FE lecturer disagreed: 'I don't think many of them read continuous prose of more than two to three sentences … they can't sit down and concentrate'.

The local librarian reported on the success and popularity of local book clubs and reading groups and fed back on the books chosen: 'All the vampire books, anything to do with zombies, they go' . A falling off in interest amongst teenagers over the age of 14 was noted, and women over 65 were cited as most likely to be members of adult reading groups. From the university librarians, there was some positivity about footfall. All of the librarians talked about the importance of making libraries welcoming and social spaces for visitors.

Book club members offered some strong words of support for the print book ('we could never not have books'), while both the writers felt that print books would continue, but only so far as they 'complement' other forms and media. The reaction to the kindles was initially hostile, but the only kindle owner in the group (the local librarian) spoke about the physical 'feel' of the ereader: "this is a nice leather cover. I open it up and then I read my book. So that's the same feel'. As the kindles were passed around, reactions to size etc were offered and attitudes also seemed to soften: 'Kindles can do everything a book can do, can't they. And far more. And they're far cheaper. They're the future' (FE Lecturer). There was some discussion of how ereaders would work in libraries and concern was also expressed about market dominance and also anxiety that changes to the marketplace might affect the quality of books.

While there was support for independent booksellers there was also a recognition that they 'can't possibly compete with what you can find quite quickly by roaming around online' (University Lecturer). Although the book club members evoked the romantic appeal of the bookshop, all participants said they now bought most of their books online and the dearth of good bookshops on the high street was commented on.

One of the participants who was most positive about new technologies (University lecturer) expressed some concern over the future of long-form storytelling, supported by the local writer who commented that 'it's an age of Twitter fiction'. The potential to free up people's reading habits/preference was raised by the local librarian and kindle owner: 'what they're reading, the best-sellers, is romance and erotica. Because those are the sorts of things that people wouldn't go into a bookshop and the library and want to come up and say "I'm borrowing this"'.

2. Online discussion and book groups.

After a brief overview of a couple of examples of online discussion forums, the group talked about why people enjoy discussing their reading with others. The book club members spoke about what motivates people to join groups ('Like-minded people, we gravitate to them') and felt strongly that they had a special bond ('We care about each other'). The FE lecturer spoke about the value and benefits of group membership and how it changed his reading ('you read it differently cause you know you're going to be talking about it').

Considerable hostility was expressed by the book club members towards the idea of online groups, commenting they 'don't sound anything like a proper book club' (FE lecturer), and expressing some mockery of participants as 'sinister' (Book Club member). Only one member of the group (one of the University Librarians) spoke of his own experiences of visiting such sites as a 'lurker', saying that 'You can get some really good arguments' online, but also admitting that he felt 'intimidated' there. Again, more discussion tended to soften views and promote interest in the sites. The book club members felt that 'sincerity' and intimacy would be lacking online and also suggested that online groups were lacking in the 'energy factor', so that motivation to participate and keep up with the reading would be adversely affected.

Some interesting views were expressed about the cultural capital of these sites and the FE Lecturer felt that a newspaper related book group (*The Guardian*) was 'acceptable … cause it's got some status' (FE Lecturer); also that it was important to know the credentials of the people using the sites. However for others the value of any discussion lay closer to home: 'I care what my friends are thinking about reading' (Book Club Member). However, diversity was felt to be a possible benefit of online discussion (writer). The writers also expressed some interest in the blurring of the boundaries between writing and reading online.