

9 May 2020

Weir confirms funding for BookTrust's Bookstart programme

An initiative to encourage parents to read with their babies and young children is to be part-funded by the Department of Education.

The Bookstart programme, run by the UK's largest children's reading charity BookTrust, provides books to families with very young children and encourages positive home learning environments from an early age, in line with Departmental policy.

In announcing the Department's support, Education Minister Peter Weir acknowledged the difficulties being faced by new parents during the Covid-19 crisis and the benefits of providing books directly to families.

Minister Weir said: **"I am pleased to confirm that my Department will be contributing to the Bookstart programme in Northern Ireland this year.**

"It is recognised that many new parents may not have access to the same support networks during this very difficult period, or access to books for their children due to libraries being closed.

"Encouraging a love of books in children from an early age is important to the development of their social and communication skills.

"I have therefore decided to part-fund this programme, run by BookTrust NI, to ensure that parents are encouraged to read with their babies and young children."

The Department will contribute £50,000 towards the delivery of BookTrust's Bookstart programme in Northern Ireland in 2020/21.

Liz Canning, Head of BookTrust Northern Ireland, said:

"We are absolutely delighted to be working with the Department of Education to fund our flagship programme Bookstart Baby across Northern Ireland. This support means that we can now extend our vital programme to all families in Northern Ireland, helping them to start their reading journey, by sharing books, stories and rhymes from an early age.

"At BookTrust we know that children who are read to are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative; it's never been a more important time for us to reach families, who may be lacking the support and access to books they would normally have.

“Northern Ireland is clearly committed to changing the lives of their children and young people through reading and understand how important reading is to improving their life chances.”

It is expected that book packs will be delivered to 24,000 families with young children this year.

Notes to Editors

1. BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity; each year they reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading. Their books are delivered via health, library, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. For further information visit: booktrust.org.uk