Did the Department for Education imagine that the Christmas and New Year period would be a good time to bury bad news? On Friday 17 December the Department notified Booktrust that funding for all their English bookgifting programmes (Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up) would be cut by 100% from 1 April 2011. (This news applied to England only.) However, by 26 December, following furious protests from Philip Pullman (?sheer stupid vandalism?) and Andrew Motion (?an act of gross cultural vandalism?) as well as many members of the public, a quick U-turn had the Department for Education promising to ?continue to fund Booktrust book-gifting programmes in the future?. The joint DFE/Booktrust statement continued, ?Although the current contract will end in April, the Department are talking to Booktrust about how to develop a new programme which will ensure that every child can enjoy the gift of books at crucial moments in their lives while ensuring we develop an even more effective way of supporting the most disadvantaged families to read together. The Department and Booktrust will be working together, with publishers, in order to ensure that we can make every possible saving in developing an enhanced programme.? 

Viv Bird, CEO Booktrust, commented: ?I am delighted that Michael Gove (Secretary of State for Education) has acknowledged the immense value of reading for pleasure and our bookgifting programmes ? Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up ? by pledging to work with us to ensure that every child in England continues to receive the gift of books and the opportunity to develop a lifelong love of reading.? 

Let us be wary, however, about promises of an ?enhanced programme? being developed while making ?every possible saving?. Why not add your name* to the list of Bookstart, Booktime and Booked Up supporters to try to ensure that, come April, these invaluable schemes continue on a solid foundation.

?The most effective schools do much more than teach phonics?

The DFE?s confusion about the value of Booktrust?s book-giving programmes is particularly disturbing given that in its recent business plan, published in November last year, the government included the target of promoting ?systematic synthetic phonics in schools? to remedy low reading scores. It is also planning to introduce ?a simple reading test? for six-year-olds to help identify those who need extra help. This is likely to be a non-word reading test!

According to the UKLA (United Kingdom Literacy Association) a non-word reading test ?presents children with a list of letter strings to pronounce that follow the most straightforward spelling patterns of English, but are not words in actual use. The idea is to test whether children can work out the pronunciation of items such as mip, fack, glimp from their spelling.? The UKLA has ?grave reservations about the value of such a test?.

As readers of BfK are well aware, there is a lot more to reading than phonics and there is a lot of hard evidence showing that there is more to reading than phonics. See, for example, Henrietta Dombey?s article on p.3 in this issue of BfK.

UKLA has extensively researched the use of systematic synthetic phonics and says: ?While not denying the central role
of phonics, on the basis of a sober analysis of reputable and extensive research, UKLA concludes that there is much more to effective reading teaching than systematic phonics. Ofsted’s recent publication provides further evidence that the most effective schools do much more than teach phonics. But it is not clear that this message is getting through to government.

**Books for Keeps** strongly supports UKLA’s call for a research-informed alternative approach to the teaching of reading. Such an approach is clearly set out in their important new publication, **Teaching Reading: What the evidence says**. In the booklet, which has a foreword by Michael Rosen, Henrietta Dombey and colleagues in the UKLA and the International Reading Association draw on abundant evidence from both sides of the Atlantic to show that what actually works in the classroom is a more comprehensive, integrated and flexible approach. An accompanying statement gives five clear reasons to show why a ?nonword reading test? would be unproductive.

These two new publications are available in printed form from UKLA, University of Leicester, Leicester LE1 7RH for £5 (UKLA: [www.ukla.org](http://www.ukla.org) [3], [admin@ukla.org](mailto:admin@ukla.org) [4], tel: 0116 223 1664).

* The campaign Save Book Start is on Twitter. Sign up for Twitter to follow Save Book Start (savebookstart) and get their latest updates ([twitter.com/savebookstart](http://twitter.com/savebookstart)).

There is also a petition to sign at [www.petitionbuzz.com/petitions/savebookstart](http://www.petitionbuzz.com/petitions/savebookstart) [5]

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