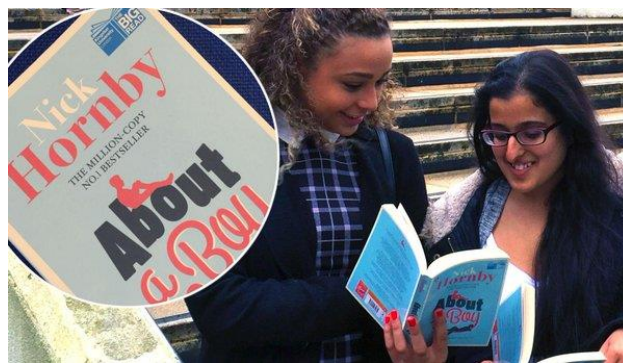




## The KU Big Read

*“It makes every student feel welcome and wanted; they all start at the same level on this particular task. [It] crosses all boundaries and gives a common starting point for conversations with strangers” - Student*



Kingston University has a really strong sense of community and we are seeking to build on this through development of *The Kingston University Big Read*.

First offered in 2015, *The Kingston University Big Read* is a project which aims to make those coming to the university feel welcome before they arrive, and create links between them and the staff and students already here.

On meeting their offer, each new student (undergraduate and postgraduate) **will receive a copy of that year's KU Big Read title to share**. Current students and staff will be invited to help themselves to a free copy from one of the many locations across each of the university's five campuses – and they will be available by the end of June, so they can be taken away on holiday and discussed with wider family and friends.

The scheme is based on similar projects in the US which have shown that creating a community through shared reading *before* students arrive helps them feel welcome, settle in quickly – and adjust to their new life as a student. Whereas a few universities in the UK have experimented with reading schemes linked to specific types of books (e.g. prize winners) within particular faculties, **Kingston is the first UK university to establish a scheme on such a wide scale, and to involve both the full university as well as the local community.**

The potential relevance of the project was explored through questionnairing first year students in 2015 and having had a very positive response, we trialled the scheme for those joining the university in autumn 2015. Students loved it, and talked of their excitement at receiving a 'gift' from their university – as well as feeling 'expected' and 'welcomed'. One of the most interesting findings however was the impact the project had within KU staff; with many more eager to participate than had originally been anticipated. The title chosen for the first KU Big Read was Nick Hornby's *About a Boy*. Hornby is a Kingston alumnus.

This year, the process for choosing the book has been much more complex – the starting point was the almost 100 suggestions made by staff and students. All were carefully analysed according to a number of criteria considered important for a book all would read, and a shortlist is being drawn up and made available by January 31<sup>st</sup> – which a panel of volunteers will then read and make a final selection.

Once the book has been chosen, a special Kingston edition will be commissioned and the book made available to staff and incoming students. Varying events relating to the chosen title will be held in the early weeks of the new academic year, which all are welcome to, students, staff and the wider community. Our first *Big Read* came with a series of discussion groups being held throughout 'Welcome Week', as well as two invigorating talks from Nick Hornby, and a widely attended balloon debate about how the themes of the book relate to the roles and teaching/research/personal interests of KU staff.

To find out more about the project, the selection process or staff and student reactions, please contact Alison Baverstock or Laura Bryars at [A.Baverstock@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:A.Baverstock@kingston.ac.uk) [Laura.Bryars@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:Laura.Bryars@kingston.ac.uk) or alternatively by telephone on 020 8417 6902.

More information about our collaboration with Penguin Random House in producing a *Kingston University Big Read* special edition of Nick Hornby's *About a Boy* can be found at; <http://www.penguinpartnerships.co.uk/kingston-university-s-big-read.html>

*“Personally it made me more excited about uni, feel more welcomed and feel like I'd chosen the right uni before I even started. Meeting Nick Hornby was really a great experience too” - Student*