

Tender Brief: Evaluation of the National Year of Reading

1. Background

1.1 The challenge: a decline in reading engagement

The UK is experiencing a profound generational decline in reading engagement. A recent survey of parents and carers of children aged 0 to 7 found that more than 1 in 3 (35%) said they didn't enjoy reading ([BookTrust, n.d.](#)). This is important as strong links were found between family reading attitudes and children's reading environments and experiences. If parents enjoyed reading themselves, children were 25% more likely to be read to every day and 40% more likely to enjoy reading themselves ([BookTrust, n.d.](#)). Similarly, a recent survey of parents of children aged 0 to 13 found that just 2 in 5 (40%) agreed that reading books to their child was fun ([HarperCollins, 2025](#)). At the same time, National Literacy Trust surveys of parents of children aged 0 to 5 have found a steep decline in the number of parents who say they read daily with their child over the last five years, decreasing from 2 in 3 (66.1%) in 2019 to 1 in 2 (50.5%) in 2024 ([National Literacy Trust, 2024](#)).

Evidence from the National Literacy Trust's Annual Literacy Survey ([2025](#)) reveals that only 1 in 3 children and young people aged 8 to 18 reported enjoying reading in their free time, while just 1 in 5 read something daily. International comparisons further highlight this challenge: according to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2021), only 29% of pupils aged 9 to 10 in England said they "very much like reading", which is significantly below the international average of 42%.

This pattern of disengagement extends beyond childhood. Recent research from The Reading Agency ([2024](#)) underscores a lack of reading among adults, many of whom cite barriers such as time pressures, low confidence and limited access to relevant reading materials. Evidence consistently shows that independent agentic reading is a powerful enabler, and is linked to outcomes such as improved educational performance, greater mental wellbeing, and stronger employment prospects (see, e.g., OECD, [2002](#), [2021](#); Sullivan & Brown, [2015](#); Sun et al., [2023](#); WPI, [2021](#)). Against this backdrop, the decline in reading is far-reaching; undermining cognitive development, language and critical thinking skills; and contributing to widening social and economic inequalities.

1.2 The National Year of Reading: a sector-wide response

To address this challenge, a consortium of organisations supported by the Department for Education and a broad coalition of funders will deliver a UK-wide campaign in 2026: the National Year of Reading (NYR) is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shift the reading

culture of the UK. It is not simply another literacy initiative but a movement to motivate people everywhere to see reading as modern, social, and personally meaningful to boost skills, empathy and benefit wellbeing (see Appendix A for a draft Theory of Change).

The campaign will span the whole year and reach into every corner of society – schools, communities, libraries, workplaces, the justice system and early years settings – and it will be delivered through local stakeholders and cross-sectoral partnerships across business, media, government and civil society. Importantly, it is underpinned by extensive audience research and a disruptive consumer-facing marketing campaign to promote reading for everyone, as well as among key target audiences: parents in the early years, parents in disadvantaged areas and teenage boys aged 10 to 16.

2. Evaluation scope and focus

We are looking for a research partner to undertake a full, systematic and independent evaluation of the NYR, which should be underpinned by a mixed-methods approach to explore its effectiveness, reach and long-term impact. This evaluation will involve collaboration with third-sector organisations, academic institutions, polling agencies and commercial partners as well as international learnings to build a comprehensive picture of the impact of the National Year of Reading.

The purpose of this independent evaluation is to assess the impact of the NYR in 2026 in line with its theory of change. The evaluation should generate robust evidence on the difference made by the campaign at individual, community and system levels, and provide insights into the foundations laid for longer-term legacy.

The evaluation is not expected to provide a detailed account of implementation processes. Instead, it should focus on assessing outcomes and impacts, and on understanding the contribution of NYR to observed changes alongside other contextual factors.

2.1 Evaluation objectives

The evaluation should:

1. Assess the short-term outcomes achieved by the end of 2026 for individuals, families, communities and the literacy sector.
2. Identify early signals of medium- and long-term change, and assess the extent to which NYR has created conditions for a sustained shift in the national reading culture.
3. Examine the equity and inclusivity of impact: who benefited, who did not, and whether NYR helped reduce inequalities in access to reading opportunities.
4. Generate formative learning on the processes, partnerships and campaign approaches underpinning NYR, including the effectiveness of cross-sectoral collaboration and the resonance of the campaign proposition to inform ongoing delivery during 2026 and strengthen practice across the sector.

5. Assess the extent to which NYR provides a replicable model of mission-led policy delivery, including transferable lessons for other policy domains.
6. Provide a balanced assessment of NYR's contribution and value for money relative to the resources invested.
7. Generate actionable learning to inform future national literacy campaigns and investments.

While the NYR is designed as a universal campaign for everyone, the evaluation must also assess its impact on priority groups, including parents in the early years, parents in disadvantaged areas, and teenage boys aged 10-16, and report disaggregated findings for these cohorts wherever data permit. This should be framed within the campaign's broader aim of fostering an inclusive reading culture across all communities.

2.2 Key evaluation questions

The evaluation will be guided by the following questions (to be refined during the inception phase):

Impact on individuals

- To what extent did NYR change perceptions of reading as personally meaningful, modern and social?
- Did NYR increase participation in reading among new and underrepresented groups?
- Did the campaign proposition (framing reading through personal interests/motivations) resonate with target audiences?
- What motivations drove engagement with NYR activities, and how do these differ from traditional 'reading promotion' appeals?
- Are there observable shifts in awareness, access, culture and systems by the end of 2026 that collectively enable a more inclusive, supported and celebrated reading culture?

Impact on social aspects of reading

- Did NYR strengthen the role of reading as a shared family and community activity?
- In what ways did NYR create visible and relatable examples of reading as a connector to people's existing passions and identities?
- Did it make reading more visible and celebrated in everyday community and cultural life?

Impact on the reading and literacy sector and systems

- To what extent did NYR strengthen collaboration and attract new partnerships and investment?
- How did publishers, libraries, schools and other partners adapt their strategies as a result of NYR?

- To what extent did NYR foster new commercial and cultural collaborations, and what conditions enabled or hindered this?
- Is there evidence that reading has gained increased recognition and advocacy among public figures and institutions?
- Have more schools embedded a more supportive reading environment?
- What processes of collaboration and partnership-building proved most effective, and how can these be sustained or replicated in future mission-led initiatives?

Cross-cutting theme: Equity and inclusion

The evaluation should conduct equity audits of participation and outcomes, systematically examining who benefits and who is left behind. This should include analysis by:

- **Geography** – regional variation, rural/urban, areas of disadvantage
- **Socioeconomic status (SES)** – income, parental education, deprivation indices
- **Ethnicity** – representation and differential outcomes across groups
- **Gender** – particularly teenage boys, but also intersectional insights

The equity audit should:

- Track representation and reach across datasets (who engaged with NYR, where, and how).
- Assess differences in attitudes, behaviours and outcomes across groups.
- Identify structural barriers to participation.
- Highlight examples of good practice in inclusive and equitable engagement.

This theme should cut across all levels of analysis – individual, family, community and system – and feed directly into recommendations for sustaining NYR’s contribution to the DfE’s Opportunities Mission and for informing future mission-led policies.

Early signals of legacy

- Are there indications that NYR laid the groundwork for sustained behaviour change, continued collaboration, or systemic policy and funding commitments?
- To what extent does the National Year of Reading (NYR) campaign appear to represent value for money in relation to its intended legacy, including the durability of partnerships, scalability of approaches, and potential long-term benefits relative to investment?
- How might ‘value’ and ‘impact’ be meaningfully defined and evidenced for cultural or behaviour-change initiatives of this kind?
- What frameworks or methodologies would best support ongoing assessment of value for money and legacy outcomes?
- The evaluator should scope and propose a forward-looking plan for assessing VfM over the next five years, including recommendations on:
 - relevant data to track

- potential indicators of return on investment (quantitative and qualitative)
- options for proportionate light-touch follow-up evaluation
- Does NYR demonstrate a distinctive UK model of whole-society literacy promotion, and how does this compare with international literacy campaigns?

2.3 Illustrative impact indicators and data sources

There is a rich ecosystem of data in the UK that this evaluation can leverage, and we see the role of the evaluator to connect and interpret these **alongside bespoke quantitative and qualitative data collection**. Bidders should assess the sensitivity of existing surveys (e.g. NLT ALS, TRA, BookTrust, Farshore) in detecting the types of changes NYR seeks to influence, and propose any supplementary data collection needed to fill gaps.

Key data sources for the evaluation should include (but aren't limited to):

- **Booktrust** – parental engagement in the early years
- **The National Literacy Trust** – annual literacy surveys tracking children and young people's engagement with reading since 2005; tracking of parental engagement in home learning activities, including reading, annually since 2019
- **The Reading Agency** – annual adult reading behaviour and engagement data
- **Farshore** – annual children's reading habits and commercial trends
- **Libraries Connected** – membership, borrowing patterns, community participation
- **DCMS** – cultural participation and audience segmentation
- **Renaissance's 'What Kids Are Reading'** report – data on children's reading preferences)
- **The Open University** – teacher and early years engagement
- **Polling agencies such as YouGov** – attitudinal and behavioural tracking
- **International comparisons** via **PIRLS**, **PISA** and **PIAAC**, helping place the UK's progress within a global literacy landscape.

The following indicators and data sources are provided as a guide. Bidders are invited to propose their own framework and methods.

1. Individual impact

Indicator	Relevant Existing Sources	Possible Supplementary Methods
People recognise reading as relevant to their interests, choices and everyday life	NLT (children and young people; reading in free time and school), TRA (adult reading engagement), Booktrust (parents) and Farshore (parents and children's commercial trend), Polling agencies	NYR-specific baseline & endline surveys; focus groups
Access to new opportunities (books, spaces, formats)	Libraries Connected, DCMS – membership, borrowing, participation; NLT survey (self-reported access)	Case studies of communities, user feedback
Wellbeing, empathy, confidence benefits	NLT (children and young people), TRA (adults), Booktrust and Farshore (parents), Polling agencies	In-depth interviews; short validated scales

2. Social/cultural impact

Indicator	Relevant Existing Sources	Possible Supplementary Methods
Reading as a shared family activity	Booktrust, NLT and Farshore – family reading habits	Household surveys; parent focus groups
Community engagement in events	Libraries Connected, DCMS (participation survey)	Partner monitoring data; local media analysis
Visibility of reading in everyday life	DCMS cultural participation data; Farshore (market trends in children's publishing)	Observational studies; social media analysis
Reading as connector of belonging/identity	NLT qualitative studies; OU early years/teacher engagement research	Community case studies; interviews with practitioners
School practice changes	NLT survey (children/young people) – reading in free time and in school	Interviews with practitioners; school case studies

3. System and sector impact

Indicator	Relevant Existing Sources	Possible Supplementary Methods
New partnerships formed	<i>No single dataset – requires bespoke collection</i>	Partnership mapping; key informant interviews
New funding streams & investments	<i>No single dataset – requires bespoke collection</i>	Funder reports; contract & grant analysis
Sustained collaboration in the literacy sector	OU engagement studies (teachers/early years networks); Libraries Connected (sector collaboration data)	Network analysis; partner surveys
Visibility of reading in public discourse & institutions	DCMS segmentation & cultural participation; polling agencies (tracking cultural attitudes)	Media analysis; policy document review
Volunteer engagement and capacity	Volunteer sector data; partner organisation records	Volunteer surveys; interviews/focus groups; analysis of volunteer recruitment, retention and training data

4. Early signals of legacy

Indicator	Relevant Existing Sources	Possible Supplementary Methods
Continuity of partnerships & investments	<i>No single dataset – requires bespoke tracking</i>	Follow-up interviews; funder monitoring
Policy or institutional commitments	Policy tracking	Document review; policymaker interviews
Reading framed as culturally/socially/economically important	Polling agencies (attitudes); International comparisons (PIRLS, PISA, PIAAC) – global benchmarks	Contribution analysis
Replication/embedding of NYR approaches	<i>No single dataset – requires bespoke tracking</i>	Case studies in schools, libraries, workplaces

5. Cross-cutting themes

Theme	Relevant Existing Sources	Possible Supplementary Methods
Equity of impact (by SES, gender, ethnicity, geography)	All datasets	Targeted surveys; place-based case studies
Contribution of NYR vs. other initiatives	<i>No direct dataset – requires contribution analysis</i>	Triangulation of NLT, TRA, DCMS, Libraries Connected + stakeholder interviews
Value for money (impact relative to investment)	No direct dataset	Cost-effectiveness analysis using combined reach/impact data

2.4 Data access and responsibilities

The National Literacy Trust and campaign partners will work with the appointed evaluator to facilitate access to existing datasets and research/evaluation insights that are critical to the evaluation.

Responsibilities

- **NLT:**
 - Broker introductions and, where appropriate, secure high-level agreements with partner organisations for access to relevant datasets or unpublished research/evaluation insights.
 - Provide timely access to NLT-managed data (e.g. ALS 2026 and 2027).
- **Evaluator:**
 - Establish data-sharing agreements as required and comply with all conditions of use.
 - Identify and fill evidence gaps with bespoke data collection (e.g. targeted adult polling, community case studies, system-level interviews).
 - Ensure compliance with GDPR and all relevant data-protection regulations.

The evaluator should assume responsibility for managing and resourcing the analysis of all insight, and should budget accordingly for any additional costs (e.g. licensing, access fees or supplementary polling). NLT will support facilitation but cannot guarantee free or unrestricted access to third-party data.

2.5. Indicative project structure and timeline

The timeline below includes indicative evaluation activities, both those drawing on existing (secondary) data sources and those involving bespoke research. These are provided for illustration only. Bidders may adapt, refine or propose alternative approaches, sequencing and timings as part of their evaluation design, provided these remain aligned with the overall

project phases and deliverables. The timings for the interim report (June 2026) and final report (April 2027) are fixed and must be adhered to.

Date	Activity & Deliverables	Data Sources Leveraged	Bespoke Data Collection Opportunities
Oct 2025	ITT published	–	–
Nov 2025	Tender submission deadline	–	–
Dec 2025	Shortlisting & bidder interviews	–	–
Dec 2025	Contract award	–	–
Jan 2026	Kick-off meeting	–	–
Jan–March 2026	Inception phase: evaluation framework finalised; access to secondary datasets agreed; bespoke data needs to be confirmed Given that NYR activities will have begun in January 2026, the evaluator should consider whether a light-touch rapid baseline in early 2026 or retrospective questions within baseline surveys could strengthen the ability to detect early effects	TRA, Farshore, Libraries Connected, DCMS, OU, Renaissance, polling agencies	Co-design of bespoke instruments (adult surveys, case studies, interview protocols)
Mar–May 2026	Baseline analysis: review of ALS 2026 (children & young people) and other sector datasets (TRA adult 2025, Farshore, DCMS, Libraries Connected, Renaissance)	ALS 2026 + sector datasets	Baseline adult polling (attitudes, behaviours, underserved groups not well covered by ALS/TRA)
June 2026	Interim report	All data collected to date	-
Jun–Sep 2026	Ongoing monitoring: sector data (Libraries Connected membership/participation, OU teacher engagement, TRA adult updates); fieldwork in selected communities	Partner datasets	Community case studies & longitudinal interviews (families, teachers, libraries, workplaces, digital engagement)
Oct 2026	Mid-Year Learning Workshop + Learning Brief	Synthesise partner data + case study insights	Reflection focus groups with practitioners/partners
Nov–Dec 2026	Collection of endline 2026 data (TRA adult, Libraries Connected, Farshore, Renaissance)	Secondary datasets	Endline adult polling to track shifts in attitudes/behaviours; complements ALS for C&YP
Jan–Feb 2027	ALS 2027 (endline) fieldwork – post-NYR outcomes for children & young people	ALS 2027	–
Jan 2027	System-level interviews with funders, policymakers, literacy leaders	–	Key informant interviews
Mar 2027	Integration of ALS 2027 findings with all other datasets;	ALS 2027 + sector data	–

	contribution analysis; draft findings shared with commissioners		
Apr 2027	Final Evaluation Report & Presentation: full impact synthesis, recommendations for future national campaigns	All datasets integrated	–

3. Stakeholder Engagement Plan

The independent evaluator will be expected to work in close collaboration with the National Literacy Trust (as contracting authority), its campaign partners and wider stakeholders throughout the evaluation. This is to ensure the evaluation is not only methodologically robust but also relevant, inclusive and useful to those delivering and supporting the NYR.

3.1 Core expectations

The appointed evaluator will be required to:

- Engage regularly with the Evaluation Steering Group (comprising the National Literacy Trust and key sector partners).
 - Attend quarterly meetings to provide progress updates and discuss emerging findings.
 - Present interim and final deliverables for feedback and sign-off.
- Facilitate learning workshops at key stages of the evaluation (e.g. mid-year 2026 and draft findings in March 2027). These should enable stakeholders to reflect on emerging insights and consider implications for practice and policy.
- Maintain clear and timely communication with designated contacts at the National Literacy Trust, including early notification of risks, challenges or delays.
- Engage with delivery partners and stakeholders in a respectful and inclusive manner, ensuring that their experiences and perspectives inform the evaluation design and findings.

3.2 Participation of stakeholders in data collection

The evaluation should explicitly engage with commercial partners, particularly publishers, to understand their perspectives, motivations and shifts in practice. Outputs should be tailored to this audience, providing compelling evidence and stories that encourage continued investment in collaborative approaches to engaging new readers.

The evaluator should design an approach that:

- Includes input from a broad range of stakeholders – funders, delivery organisations, educators, libraries, cultural partners, community organisations and participants.

- Provides opportunities for underrepresented groups (e.g. families in disadvantaged areas, teenage boys aged 10-16, adults with lower literacy confidence) to share their views.
- Minimises the burden on delivery partners by making effective use of existing data and coordinating engagement activities.

3.3 Principles for engagement

Stakeholder engagement should be guided by the following principles:

- Transparency: clear communication about purpose, methods and use of findings.
- Collaboration: working with partners as co-owners of the learning process.
- Equity and inclusion: ensuring diverse voices are represented in evidence and reporting.

4. Budget

Bidders are asked to provide proposals that outline what the evaluation of the NYR could look like at three indicative budget levels:

- **£130,000 (inc. VAT)**
- **£150,000 (inc. VAT)**
- **£175,000 (inc. VAT)**

Each proposal should describe how the scope, design, and methodological robustness of the evaluation would vary across these budget levels, including implications for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

The tender response must provide a detailed cost breakdown for each level, including staffing, data collection, analysis, reporting, and VAT.

4.1 Deliverables and payment schedule at a glance

The evaluator will be expected to produce the following deliverables. Each deliverable must be submitted in draft for review and sign-off before being finalised. All outputs should be written in clear, accessible English, with supporting data tables and technical annexes provided as appropriate.

Not included in the table below but expected would be quarterly Pulse Notes (1-2 pages) summarising rapid insights from ongoing monitoring, sense-making workshops, or stakeholder reflections. These should highlight practical lessons emerging in real time to inform delivery partners and policy stakeholders.

Deliverable	Due Date	Indicative Payment	Description
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Interim report	June 2026	30%	Presents baseline analysis using NLT ALS 2026 (children and young people) and other sector datasets supplemented by bespoke adult polling. Establishes benchmark indicators against which progress will be assessed.
Mid-year learning brief & workshop	Oct 2026	20%	Concise synthesis of emerging evidence from sector data, case studies and process learning. This should include formative insights into campaign resonance, cross-sectoral collaboration, and early signals of sectoral or commercial impact (e.g. publisher engagement). Shared with commissioners via a written brief (max 15 pages) and an interactive learning workshop.
Draft findings report	End Mar 2027	20%	Draft synthesis of all available datasets, including ALS 2027 preliminary findings. To be shared with commissioners for feedback before finalisation.
Final evaluation report & presentation	Apr 2027	30%	Full report integrating all relevant sector/bespoke data. Includes: executive summary, policy briefing note and slide deck for funder/policy audiences. Delivered alongside a final presentation to NYR steering group and stakeholders. Alongside the final report, the evaluator will produce a 4- to 6-page Policy Learning Brief specifically designed for government stakeholders, highlighting key lessons for mission-led delivery, system alignment, and opportunities for sustained policy and funding commitments

Payments will be made in line with satisfactory submission and sign-off of deliverables.

5. Who should apply

We are seeking a research partner with the creativity, rigour and empathy to deliver this evaluation project successfully.

You should have:

- Proven experience in large-scale programme evaluation, ideally in education, literacy or cultural engagement.
- Expertise in mixed-methods research and impact evaluation.
- Capacity to deliver to tight deadlines and work collaboratively with multiple stakeholders.
- Independence and impartiality.

5.1 Tender submission requirements

Submissions must include:

1. **Technical Proposal** – approach, methodology, work plan.
2. **Management Plan** – staffing, roles, project-management arrangements.
3. **Experience & Track Record** – examples of similar evaluations.
4. **Risk-Management Plan** – anticipated risks and mitigation strategies.
5. **Budget Proposal** – full costings and assumptions.

The deadline for submissions is Friday 28th November 2025. Interviews are expected to take place in the week beginning 8th December 2025. An appointment will be made no later than 17th December 2025, with an immediate start. The project deliverables will be due on Friday 10th April 2027.

5.2 Evaluation process

All proposals will be assessed by a panel using the criteria below. Proposals will be evaluated on the following weighted criteria:

Criterion	Weighting
Understanding of the brief	20%
Quality of methodology	25%
Expertise and track record	20%
Value for money and clarity of budget	20%
Delivery capacity and feasibility	5%
Innovation and added value	10%

We are committed to fair and transparent procurement processes. If you have any questions about this tender, please submit them in writing to research@literacytrust.org.uk by 21st November 2025.