

Invitation to Tender:

Research with foster carers about reading with their children

Introduction

Tenders are invited for research with foster carers on their experiences and engagement with their foster children around reading. This specification sets out the background and requirements for the research, and details of the tendering process.

Background

BookTrust

BookTrust is the largest reading charity in the UK. We work to inspire a love of reading in children across the country because we know that reading changes lives. We are national in scale, working in every region and ward in England. Our programmes provide books, tools, advice and guidance to support everyone on their reading journey, giving additional support to those who need extra help. There are still children across the country that live in households without a single book, or in environments where reading simply isn't part of their lives. We break down these barriers to reading, and champion books that can capture young imaginations and open doorways to a new path in life.

To make this happen we act as the lynchpin for an extraordinary set of partnerships where publishers, authors, local authorities, health visitors, early years settings, libraries and schools all contribute to support children and their families to experience the life changing effects of developing a love of reading.

In 2014-15, through our programmes, we gave out over 5 million carefully chosen books to children throughout the UK, supported by guidance and resources to encourage reading for pleasure.

For more information on BookTrust's programmes, please visit our [website](#).

Letterbox Club

Letterbox Club is a targeted programme, run by BookTrust in partnership with the University of Leicester, which provides educational support to looked-after children aged 5-13 years across the UK. In 2015, 10,451 children took part in Letterbox Club in 124 local authorities across the UK. Personalised parcels containing carefully selected books, stationery and tailored maths games are sent to children's home address once a month for six months from May to October. BookTrust works with a designated coordinator in each local authority to manage delivery of the parcels to the children taking part.

The intended outcomes of Letterbox Club include the short and medium term outcomes of: increasing the amount of time children spend reading for pleasure, writing, drawing and doing maths activities; improving children's literacy and numeracy; improving children's confidence and self-esteem related to reading and their relationships with carers; and increasing carers' confidence in sharing educational activities with their child. In the long term, the programme aims to help children develop a love of reading and maths, improve their academic attainment and provide more stability in their foster placements.

Previous research has found that children taking part in Letterbox Club have subsequently achieved significant improvements in reading and numeracy. Additionally, the programme has experienced considerable success in encouraging children and their foster carers to read and play games together at home, and increasing children's enjoyment and confidence with reading and maths.

For more information about the programme and previous research, please visit the [Letterbox Club website](#).

Research and evaluation requirements

Focus

Whilst previous evaluations have focused on the impact of the Letterbox Club programme on children and families, the aim of this research is to improve our understanding of how we can better support carers to help them to engage with reading with their children, both generally and through the Letterbox Club parcels.

In order to achieve this aim, we require:

1. A brief introductory literature review of relevant existing research.
2. A UK-wide survey of foster carers.

The research should aim to find out more about:

- Carers' own educational experiences and their views on these.
- Carers' levels of engagement with reading for pleasure, e.g. confidence, enjoyment, motivation, etc.
- How carers currently engage with their children around supporting their child's learning, particularly reading, and any challenges they face.
- What support carers currently receive and anything that they feel is missing, particularly related to supporting their child with reading.
- What additional support BookTrust could offer to help carers with reading with their child.

The survey should also collect demographic data in order to determine whether there are any differences between different carers' responses and, therefore, differences in the support they may benefit from.

We would welcome recommendations on the focus of the survey, and we would also expect the literature review to inform the development of the survey questions.

Bids should outline suitable methods for contacting and inviting carers to participate in the research, as well as methods to ensure a high response rate from a broadly representative sample

of carers across the UK. Please note: Due to data protection, BookTrust does not have access to any contact details for foster carers whose children take part in Letterbox Club.

Incentives

In the past we have incentivised participation in research through books or vouchers as appropriate. Any incentives for this research would need to come out of the allocated budget so please consider what you may be able to offer.

Timetable and outputs

The following outputs are required:

- A report of no more than 30 pages detailing the results from the literature review and survey. Conclusions and recommendations should also be included where appropriate. The report should be presented in accessible language.
- A standalone four page executive summary detailing the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the research. The executive summary should be presented in accessible language.
- A fully anonymised dataset.
- A presentation of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations at BookTrust's head office.

A possible timetable is detailed below:

Activity	Date
Inception meeting	w/c 14 th March 2016
Literature review	March-April 2016
Identification of foster carer sample	March-April 2016
Research tool design	April 2016
Survey period	April-May 2016
Analysis and write-up	May-June 2016
Draft report due	10 th June 2016
Final report due	24 th June 2016

The contractor will be required to submit regular progress reports to a nominated Booktrust Project Manager. It is expected that the contractor will also consult with the University of Leicester, who founded the Letterbox Club and have conducted several evaluations of the programme, as well as having wider research experience with looked after children and their families.

It will be expected that contractors will raise areas of concern as soon as they arise. A draft report should be made available by 10th June 2016 and the final report should be agreed and delivered by

24th June 2016.

Staffing

The research team should have a high level of expertise and significant experience in designing and undertaking similar pieces of work, preferably including research with foster carers and looked-after children.

Tenders should outline how the skills and experience of the research team will cover these areas, as well as describing the skills and experiences of each individual (please attach brief CVs) and their expected contribution.

Risk factors

Tenders should clearly set out the key risk factors for the success of the project and a proposed risk management approach.

Ethical issues

Tenders should address any anticipated ethical issues and explain how these will be dealt with.

Ownership of data and outputs

All data collected for the project should be provided electronically to BookTrust on completion of the contract or when requested. Data ownership will be in accordance with our standard research contract, which is available on request.

Research contract conditions

The contract will be commissioned under BookTrust's standard research contract terms and conditions.

Data protection and informed consent

Contractors shall comply with all the provisions and obligations under the Data Protection Act (1998), including the eight data protection principles and all subordinate legislation.

Costs

The budget for this evaluation is £15,000. However, organisations are encouraged to contact BookTrust if they are interested in bidding but feel the research requirements are not achievable

within the specified budget. Tenders should outline the costs required to fulfil the research requirements.

Costs should be itemised under the following headings:

- Salary costs for each project team member to be involved in fulfilling the contract (along with the daily rate and number of days input for each project team member)
- Other staff costs (e.g. secretarial support)
- Other administrative costs
- Fieldwork costs
- Travel and subsistence
- Overheads (if charged)
- Other costs (with details)

Costs should be exclusive of VAT but should state whether VAT is chargeable. Full cost details of any proposed sub contracts and how these will be managed should be included.

Tendering procedure

Tenders will be judged on the basis of:

- How well the tender responds to the brief and the objectives
- The robustness and suitability of the proposed approach
- Relevant skills and experience of the research team
- The adequacy and quality of proposed project management and risk management arrangements
- Level of understanding and experience of research with foster carers and looked-after children.
- Level of skill and experience in producing literature reviews.
- Level of skill and experience in conducting surveys and quantitative research.
- Innovativeness of the proposed approach
- Track record of producing similar work of a high quality
- Track record of producing similar scale of work to deadline
- Overall costs

Tenders should therefore provide the following details:

- An elaboration of the issues for study
- Details of the proposed methodology
- Relevant information about the organisation
- The names and relevant experience, in terms of subject knowledge and skills, of those involved
- Examples of, or links to, previous relevant research conducted by those involved
- Staff time commitment to the project (in days)
- Timetable
- Arrangements for administration and management of the project
- Costs

BookTrust will notify candidates if they have been shortlisted by 26th February. Shortlisted candidates will be required to give a Skype presentation during the week commencing 29th February. The successful contractor will be required to attend an initial inception meeting in March.

The timetable for the tendering process is as follows:

- Tenders invited: Monday 1st February 2016
- Submission deadline: Friday 19th February 2016
- Skype presentation of research proposal (from shortlisted organisations): w/c Monday 29th February 2016
- Project commissioned: Friday 4th March 2016

The closing date for receipt of tenders is **5pm on Friday 19th February 2016**. A full electronic copy of the tender including any annexes and supplementary material in MS Word or PDF format should be emailed to research@booktrust.org.uk. If you have any questions on any details of the research brief, please contact Cathy Harris at research@booktrust.org.uk or on 020 7801 8811.