

Market Engagement Notice: Difference Matters Youth Voice Partner

This notice is being published to inform the market of the VRU's intention to run a market engagement session with the interested parties for the service of Difference Matters Youth Voice Partner.

The Violence Reduction Unit would like to run a market engagement exercise on the **Tuesday 27th May 2025**. This will be an opportunity for potential bidders to hear more about the opportunity and ask the VRU any questions relating to the scope of work disclosed in this notice.

Background

The VRU has allocated £1m to pilot a new programme that will promote inclusion and support neurodivergent (ND) children and young people in mainstream secondary schools as part of its education work. The new programme, Difference Matters, is a key intervention delivered as part of the [London Inclusion Charter](#), which was launched by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan in February 2024.

[Difference Matters](#) is a new initiative that aims to improve the experiences of ND pupils in mainstream secondary schools in order to reduce disproportional exclusions, absence and suspensions, tackling the over-representation of young people with unmet special needs in Alternative Provision (AP), Pupil Referral Units (PRU) and Youth Offending Institutions (YOI). The programme will champion asset-based approaches, empowering ND pupils; improving understanding of their needs; raising awareness of neurodiversity; and making schools more inclusive environments.

The set up of the Difference Matters programme is taking place now until July 2025, with delivery scheduled over 2 academic years from September 2025-July 2027.

Between April-August 2024 the VRU conducted a robust consultation and co-development exercise to develop the model for Difference Matters. Please refer to the links below to read this initial research.

- [Read the research with ND young people here](#)
- [Read the research with professionals here](#)

Description of the Service for Difference Matters Youth Voice Partner:

The VRU recognises that the views and experiences of neurodivergent students are essential to understanding how schools can become more neuroinclusive. To ensure young people's voices are central to the **Difference Matters** programme, the VRU will commission a **Youth Voice Partner**.

The commissioned partner will be responsible for developing a range of tools to support mainstream secondary schools in capturing and responding to student experiences of inclusion. These tools will include:

- A needs assessment
- A student voice survey

- An action plan template

Working collaboratively with a dedicated school staff team, the Youth Voice Partner will establish and support a **neurodivergent youth voice group** within each school. The partner will equip these young people with the skills and confidence to **co-create a Difference Matters school action plan**, ensuring they are empowered to lead and shape positive change in their school communities, in collaboration with the Difference Matters school staff team.

This pilot will be delivered across **14 mainstream secondary schools** located in the London Boroughs of Bexley, Havering, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark, Sutton, and Waltham Forest. The pilot will also involve a Muti Academy Trust who will be delivering the programme in **2 further mainstream secondary schools** in Lambeth and Southwark respectively.

Key components of this work will likely include:

- **Supporting school staff to embed youth voice and co-production:** Provide guidance to schools about how to set up and support Difference Matters Youth Voice Groups, facilitate some of the Difference Matters Youth Voice Group sessions in participating schools (e.g. at key points), support communication between the Difference Matters Youth Voice Group and Difference Matters Staff Team and support coproduction activities.
- **Developing tools to support schools in identifying areas for development in supporting ND students:** Develop a Difference Matters Audit or Needs-Assessment Tool for schools to identify strengths and areas for development in their approach to neurodiversity and inclusion of ND pupils, develop a Difference Matters Framework of themes and resources to support schools to improve their approaches to neurodiversity and inclusion of ND pupils, develop a Difference Matters Action Plan template that will help schools to set out priorities for change, action that will be taken, by who, by when, and how impact will be reviewed. Collaborate with the Learning Partner to develop a template Difference Matters Youth Voice Survey that enables young people from across a school cohort to share their views on the school's approach to neurodiversity and inclusion of ND pupils, develop a suggested Difference Matters Comms Plan to promote and raise awareness of neurodiversity.
- **Supporting Difference Matters Youth Voice Group Members:** Support the development of communication and leadership skills in Difference Matters Youth Voice Group members so that they are empowered to make changes in their school community, provide some opportunities for Difference Matters Youth Voice Groups from different schools to meet and learn from one another (online or in person), provide an annual celebration event for young people from the Difference Matters Youth Voice Groups, co-produced with some of them to ensure this meets their needs, signpost Difference Matters Youth Voice Group members to youth voice progression opportunities.
- **Collaboration with other commissioned partners:** Working closely with the commissioned training partner and evaluation and learning partner to share good practice around inclusion of neurodivergent pupils with participating schools and boroughs.

Core capabilities:

- Demonstrable expertise of Youth Participation and co-production approaches.
- Demonstrable expertise in upskilling adult professionals in co-production practices and supporting them to empower young people to play a pivotal role in change.
- Knowledge and understanding of supporting neurodivergent young people.
- Knowledge and understanding of education settings.
- The Youth Voice Partner should demonstrate that they can design and implement facilitation and training approaches that are sensitive to the experiences, needs, and communication preferences of neurodivergent young people.
- The ability to apply a trauma-informed lens throughout the process, recognising the potential intersection of neurodivergence and past experiences of exclusion.
- An understanding of the Public Health Approach to violence reduction and prevention.
- Experience/ ability to work in London.
- Capacity to meet the stated timeframes and deliverables

Timeframe and Budget:

The allocated contract value is up to £180,000 over the total contract term of 22 months, subject to internal governance and approvals. The anticipated start date for the contract is **September 2025 to July 2027**.

Response:

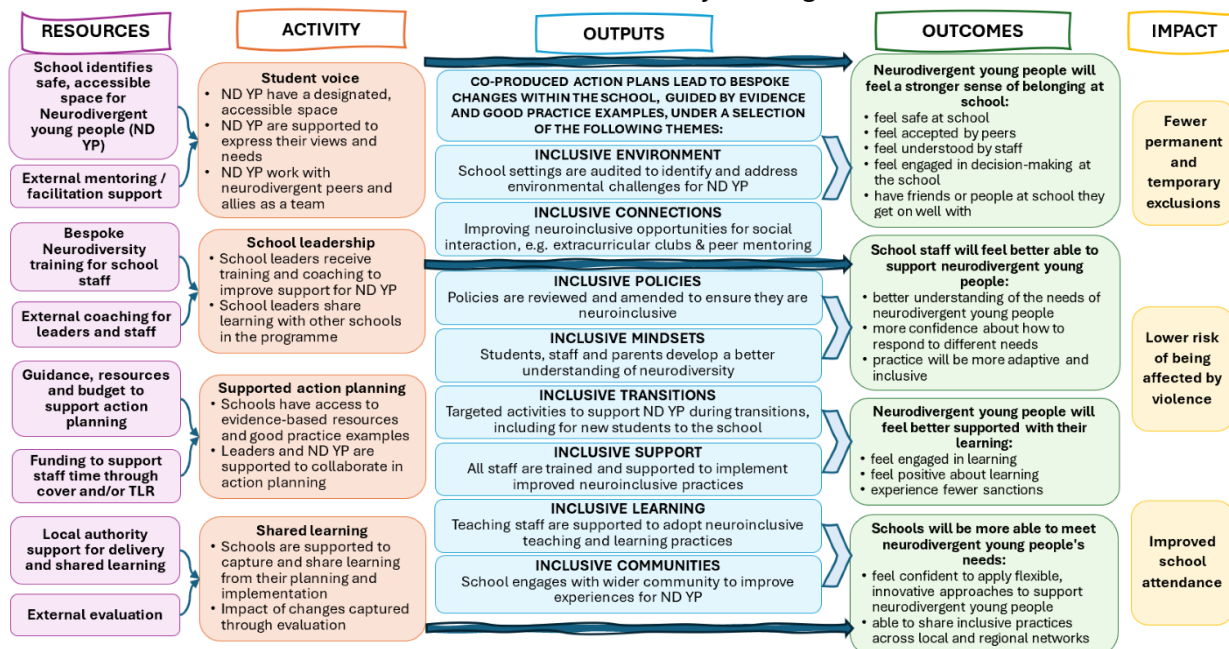
If you are interested in the opportunity and meet the core capabilities as set out above, then please sign up to attend the market engagement session via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/difference-matters-youth-voice-partner-tickets-1371050963339?aff=oddtcreator>

Please note that this exercise is in no way a call for competition and will not result in the award of a contract to any respondents to this notice.

Appendix 1: Theory of Change

Difference Matters: a theory of change



The diagram above shows how key activities within the Difference Matters programme are intended to lead to improved outcomes for neurodivergent young people and the participating schools. The pilot programme is based on consultation with young people, their families and expert stakeholders working to support neurodivergent young people. A report presenting the evidence from the consultation and a full rationale for the proposed model is available [here](#). As highlighted in the diagram, an external evaluation will be commissioned that will seek to test this theory of change and assess the impact of implementing the model in schools.