

Summer Reading Challenge Evaluation: Invitation to Tender

Introduction

[The Reading Agency](#) is a UK-wide charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. The organisation works closely with its many partners to deliver tailored programmes to more than a million people per year, of all ages and backgrounds. The Reading Agency's vision is for a world where everyone is reading their way to a better life. The Reading Agency is funded by Arts Council England.

The [Summer Reading Challenge](#) is one of the country's biggest reading for pleasure programmes reaching children aged 4-11 years across the socio-economic spectrum, supporting equality of opportunity and giving all children, no matter their ability, the same chance to participate. It is not a targeted literacy intervention but an effective reading for pleasure tool that offers children and families an enjoyable, free activity in the six-week summer break from school when reading skills and confidence can dip, commonly known as the 'summer slide'.

We would like to commission an expert research partner to design and deliver an evaluation of the 2019 Summer Reading Challenge. The study should include both impact and outcome evaluation, and we anticipate that qualitative and quantitative methods will be required. We would like to measure impacts on the 'summer slide' in relation to both reading skills and reading enjoyment. With a robust evaluation, we hope to have a strong evidence base in place to help secure the local and national funding needed to maintain and grow the Challenge. We welcome proposals for how this can be achieved.

Background

The Summer Reading Challenge uses a fun, personal challenge to motivate children to read six books within a given time frame, providing incentives designed to appeal to children's collecting instincts along the way. A medal and a certificate at the end provide a sense of achievement, confidence and pride.

The Summer Reading Challenge features a new theme and guest illustrator each year. Consultation with children and libraries helps ensure we have popular themes and high-quality designs, many of which are linked to key anniversaries and centenaries. Recent themes include:

- 2015 Record Breakers
- 2016 Big Friendly Read
- 2017 Animal Agents
- 2018 Mischief Makers

Reach

- In the last four years (2014-17), between 96% and 99% of library services in England, Wales and Scotland have taken part in the Summer Reading Challenge.
- An average of 750,000 4-11-year-olds have participated each year.
- The completion rate (reading 6 books or more) in 2017 was 57%, and 43% were boys.
- 27,206 pre-schoolers under 4 have taken part in the 'Mini Challenge'. (NB: A separate Mini Challenge runs alongside the Summer Reading Challenge, but this programme will not be evaluated in this study and so should not be considered in tender bids.)



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Governance

The Summer Reading Challenge is a core programme of The Reading Agency. The Challenge is overseen by a strategy group whose stakeholders include Libraries Connected, the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), Arts Council England and the School Library Association, in addition to strategic representatives from Scotland and Wales (Welsh Books Council).

We will also appoint a Summer Reading Challenge Steering Group to inform project development. The successful tenderer will be asked to attend four meetings with this group, as set out in the timetable.

Current evaluation practice

The Reading Agency collates quantitative data annually provided by all participating library services via a survey questionnaire. This offers headline results regarding numbers of participants, completion rates, gender, age breakdown and general feedback about the Challenge model. An annual family audience survey, completed online by approximately 1,000 parents each year, presents a further snapshot of consumer feedback.

Every four years, a formal Summer Reading Challenge Review is carried out with leaders of library services, teachers, parents/carers, young people who act as volunteers, and the child participants themselves, as well as organisations with whom we collaborate to extend reach. The latest review was carried out in 2017-18; the full report is attached as appendix 1.

There has been no independent external impact research of the Challenge since 2009, conducted by the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA). For reference, the executive summary and full UKLA report are attached as appendix 2.

Research Specification

A key recommendation from the 2017-18 Summer Reading Challenge Review was to prioritise an evidence-based research study investigating the impact of taking part in the Challenge. Enabled by a grant from the Arts Council England, we would like to commission a team of researchers to conduct this study, which will be used to help shape the future development and delivery of the Challenge and to make the case for continued investment nationally and locally, as well as to develop a framework for school partnerships.

From a critical perspective, we would use this opportunity to ascertain if participation in the Summer Reading Challenge can help to tackle the widespread problem of the 'summer reading slide'.¹ We are particularly interested in exploring the role a reading experience like the Summer Reading Challenge can have on the educational attainment and attitudes of Key Stage 1 and 2 children and in assessing the impact participation in the programme is having in some of the most deprived areas of the country, where the research shows that the 'summer slide' is worse.

Overarching Research Aims

The overarching goals of the evaluation are to investigate the following:

¹ As documented by H. Stewart, N. Watson and M. Campbell, 'The cost of school holidays for children from low-income families', *Childhood* (2018); C. Blazer, 'Summer Learning Loss: Why its effect is strongest among low-income students and how it can be combated', *Information Capsule* (2011); A. Forsey, 'Hungry holidays: A report on hunger amongst children during school holidays', All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger (2017), among others.

- the impact taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge has on the ‘summer reading slide’
- the impact taking part in the Summer Reading Challenge has on participants’ enjoyment of and engagement with reading
- the role a public library-based reading activity like the Summer Reading Challenge can have on building wider school and family engagement with reading
- potential strategies for increasing the reach of the Summer Reading Challenge

We will work with the commissioned researchers to refine and prioritise a comprehensive list of research aims, objectives and partners.

Methodology

We envisage this study will require mixed-methods research to capture both qualitative and quantitative evidence and data and to enhance the breadth and depth of our understanding and evaluation. Suppliers tendering, however, are invited to be bold and innovative in their methodology. If they have recommendations for an enhanced or alternative approach for the current evaluation that is robust and can be accommodated within the budget, this should be presented in the proposal.

1. Standardised testing

- Compare existing data schools have on children’s reading levels both before and after the six-week summer holiday.
- Use existing standardised reading tests used by schools, rather than bespoke, to ensure teacher familiarity with context. We further propose that researchers use existing anonymised test scores from children participating in the study. This will ensure that measures, while not directly comparable across all schools, are highly relevant to measures in place for each individual school, thus providing a more effective benchmark and mapping of results. We do, however, welcome recommendations from proposals on methods for collecting test data most robustly and cost-effectively.
- The standardised reading tests used should explore complex reading comprehension and confidence rather than decoding and phonics.

2. Surveys

- Design and deliver a parent/carer survey to explore and evaluate what families perceive as the impact and benefits of participation in the Summer Reading Challenge.
- We would also like to gain a clearer understanding of the Challenge’s particular impact in disadvantaged areas and any resulting benefits for families, financial or otherwise, of reducing the breadth and depth of the ‘summer slide’.
- The evaluation should take into account the Reading Outcomes Framework Toolkit recently published by The Reading Agency. More information is available [here](#).

3. Interviews

- Conduct interviews with children in the selected schools both before and after the Challenge to evaluate and analyse the impact on children’s attitudes to reading. Interviews should approach, in particular, children’s perceptions of their own enjoyment of reading, reading skills, reading confidence and feelings of wellbeing. The commissioned team may also want to consider the Challenge’s changing theme as a potential variable in their research.
- Conduct interviews with teachers in the selected schools both before and after the Challenge to explore and evaluate what teachers perceive as the impact and benefits of participation in the Summer Reading Challenge, with emphasis on the particular impact

of participation in the Challenge in disadvantaged areas. Interviews should also include discussion of teacher perceptions of effective strategies for promoting the Challenge to parents and carers.

- Conduct interviews with head teachers in the selected schools to gain a clearer understanding of the Challenge's particular impact in disadvantaged areas and any resulting benefits for schools, financial or otherwise, of reducing the breadth and depth of the 'summer slide'. Interviews should also include discussion of teacher perceptions of effective strategies for promoting the Challenge to parents and carers, and the support, materials and resources needed to help embed the Challenge in school engagement plans.

4. Focus groups

- Create at least four focus groups with parents/carers who have not taken part in the Challenge to evaluate and understand how to better promote the Challenge to families and support family participation and engagement.
- Create at least four focus groups with young people (13-24 years old) who act as volunteers for the Challenge to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits they gain from supporting delivery of the programme and to identify areas of growth.

We would also like to assess and analyse the relationships and interactions between the library, the school, the child and the parent/family, in part to further understand broader attitudinal changes to reading and library use. Suggestions from researchers on the most effective way to capture this data are welcome.

Sampling

Researchers, supported by our library partners, will identify a total of 20 primary schools, made up of at least two schools in each of the nine English regions, that are prepared to take part in the evaluation, that have a track record of having children who take part in the Challenge, and that are based in deprived areas as defined by DfES's index of multiple deprivation.²

Our view is that we will not prioritise the 12 DfES Opportunity Areas where there is already an intense focus on intervention and evaluation. Instead, we aim to select schools in the next 'tier-up' where there is still an enormous need for effective interventions but where reasonable, manageable, cost-effective input through the Summer Reading Challenge could have a positive effect in supporting attainment and family learning.

We know it can be challenging to ensure school participation with this type and level of in-depth research. Therefore, we will provide schools with a fully anonymised report of the data that is gathered from their school to incentivise participation. The successful bidder will need to provide this in the form of a data output, rather than a bespoke analytical report for each school.

Researchers should advise on numbers needed to have a statistically representative sample from which to draw robust conclusions. Children from 4-7 years old make up the greatest percentage of participants (49.3%), closely followed by children 8-11 years (42%). We therefore envisage that the children involved in the research will be between 6-8 years old (moving from Years 2 and 3 to Years 3 and 4). However, it would be useful if tenderers could propose a number of options that you feel we should consider, outlining the corresponding costs and highlighting the approach that you feel will balance providing reliable data with delivering the research for a cost-effective price.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>

We are also exploring the possibility of extending this evaluation to cover additional sites in Wales (1 region) and Scotland (2 regions). This research would be funded by an additional budget beyond that set out in this tender. Proposals are not required to address this directly or factor into costs, but we would welcome suggestions for feasibility and an indication of whether researchers would be open to an extension of the study, either directly or through collaboration with sub-contracted research teams based in Scotland and/or Wales.

Project Timetable

The commissioned research team will need to provide progress updates, in the form of four meetings with the Steering Group as outlined on the timetable below, and in regular calls with The Reading Agency.

Timetable	Milestone	Activity Required	Responsibility
11 Feb 2019	Award of tender	Contract awarded and researchers commissioned	The Reading Agency
Feb-March 2019	Progress report	Discussion of project scope and selection of schools	Successful bidder and Steering Group
March 2019	Refine sampling; work with regions to identify schools match	Criteria checklist and briefing pack for interested schools delivered	Successful bidder, with support from library partners
March-April 2019	Secure schools (20 total)	Longlist of schools confirmed	Successful bidder
<i>6-28 April 2019</i>	<i>Spring Holiday</i>	<i>No schools access (exact dates vary by location)</i>	
May 2019	Research schools confirmed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters of agreement with Head Teachers Parental/carers permissions in place for subjects/control group Schedule for on-site research in schools for after half term confirmed 	Successful bidder
<i>25 May-2 June 2019</i>	<i>Half term</i>	<i>No schools access</i>	
w/c 3 June through mid-July 2019	Collect pre-Challenge test data and interviews with children and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research carried out in test schools Data collection, video/audio capture 	Successful bidder
<i>20 July-2 Sept 2019</i>	<i>Summer Holiday</i>	<i>No schools access</i>	
July 2019	Progress report	Discussion of progress after collection of pre-Challenge test data	Successful bidder and Steering Group
July-Aug 2019	Focus groups and library-user research	Research carried out in and in relation to library settings	Successful bidder, with support from library partners
Sept 2019	Progress report	Discussion of progress after focus groups	Successful bidder and Steering Group

Sept-Oct 2019	Collect post-Challenge test data and interviews with children, teachers, Head Teachers and parents/carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research carried out in test schools • Data collection, video/audio capture 	Successful bidder
Oct-Nov 2019	Process data; analysis and review of findings	Attend Strategy Group meeting to share early findings and challenges	Successful bidder and Strategy Group
Nov 2019	Progress report	Review first draft of report	Successful bidder and Steering Group
Dec 2019	Agree reporting format	Format for reporting confirmed and signed off	Successful bidder and Steering Group
Jan 2020	Produce final report	Hard and digital copies of final report and executive summary available	Successful bidder
Jan/Feb 2020	Stakeholder event to announce findings	Presentation of final report and executive summary by commissioned research team	Successful bidder

Intended Outputs

The following outputs are required from the appointed research team:

- A robust final evaluation report
- A free-standing executive summary
- Data output reports for each participating school detailing their anonymised pupil data
- Presentation of key findings to stakeholders at the end of the project
 - The Reading Agency will organise this national stakeholder event aimed at showcasing the findings, disseminating the learning and raising the profile of the challenge. There is an independent budget for this event, but preparation for and attendance at this key event should be considered in the proposal.

We would also like to explore other visual methods of presenting research findings and welcome creative and innovative ideas for research dissemination.

Final Report

The final report should include:

- Executive summary
- Full analysis of all findings
- Focus group and interview evaluations and quotations
- Visual material (to be determined by commissioned research team)
- Conclusions and key recommendations

It is the expectation that the final report will be made freely and publicly available post-publication on The Reading Agency's own and other partner websites.

Budget

The total maximum budget available for this research project is £65,000, inclusive of VAT. Tenders will be evaluated on the basis of best value for money.

Costs

Project costs should be itemised including the following information:

- 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 administrative costs
- Fieldwork costs
- Travel and subsistence
- Overheads (if applicable)

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

Tenders should set out a payment schedule related to key milestones, as set out in the project timetable under Research Specifications.

Timetable

The timetable for the tendering process is as follows:

- Tenders invited: w/c 17 December 2018
- **Submission deadline: 21 January 2019 (5 p.m.)**
- Interviews: 5 and 6 February 2019
- Project commissioned: 11 February 2019

The closing date for receipt of tenders is at 5 p.m. on 21 January 2019. A full electronic copy of the tender including any annexes and supplementary material as part of one document, in MS Word or PDF format, should be emailed to Chris Cherry, Programme Support & HR Manager, Chris.Cherry@readingagency.org.uk. It is requested that tenders do not exceed 20 pages in length in total (this is a maximum rather than a target length).

The contract will be awarded by 11 February and work will commence immediately.

Any enquiries should be directed to:

Dr Carina Spaulding, Research & Evaluation Manager

Carina.Spaulding@readingagency.org.uk

Shortlisting procedure

We will appoint an expert agency, i.e., university, organisation, or research body, to evaluate the impact of the 2019 Summer Reading Challenge. We would look to work with a research group based in a relevant discipline and/or with an existing track record of research on children's reading for pleasure.

Tenders will be evaluated on best value for money. A scoring system is in place, which is based on a set of key criteria under three main headings: research proposal, experience and cost. The key criteria for scoring the tenders within these headings are:

- How well the tender responds to the brief, including understanding of aims and objectives
- The robustness and suitability of the proposal
- The adequacy and quality of proposed project management and risk management arrangements
- Quality of reporting and dissemination proposals
- Relevant skills and experience of the research team, including track record of producing similar work of a high quality and to deadline
- Level of specialist knowledge and understanding of the research topic and methods
- Overall costs, including value for money and comprehensiveness of costing

Tenders should therefore provide the following details:

- An elaboration of the project aims and outputs
- Details of the proposed methodology and approach
- Relevant information about the organisation/institution
- The names and relevant experience, in terms of subject knowledge and skills, of those involved
- Staff time commitment to the project (in days)
- Detailed timetable
- Arrangements for administration and management of the project
- Project budget detailing costs, including research time and day rates
- Plans for an effective dissemination strategy

It is requested that tenders do not exceed 20 pages in length in total (this is a maximum rather than a target length).

Tender Requirements

Staff: The research team should have a high level of expertise and significant experience in conducting similar pieces of work, with relevant or transferable knowledge about the evaluation of the impacts of children's reading for pleasure. Tenders should describe the skills and experience of each individual (attach brief CV) and their expected contribution.

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

Ethics: Tenders should address any anticipated ethical issues and problems and how these will be dealt with.

Data protection and informed consent: Contractors shall comply with all the provisions and obligations under the Data Protection Act (2018), including the principles set out in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other related legislation.

Contractors shall have an awareness of safeguarding in a school environment, have a safeguarding policy in place or be prepared to adopt ours, and use rigorous methods in obtaining informed consent from both parents/carers and children.