**Prior Engagement Notice: Difference Matters Evaluation & Learning Partner**

This notice is being published to inform the market of VRU’s intension of engaging with the interested parties for the services of Difference Matters Evaluation and Learning Partner.

The Violence Reduction Unit would like to run a market engagement exercise on the 20th February 2025. This will be an opportunity for potential bidders to ask the VRU clarification 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](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/londons-inclusion-charter), which was launched by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan in February 2024.

**Difference Matters Programme** 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**](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/our-programmes/difference-matters)
* **Read the research with professionals** [**here**](https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/londons-violence-reduction-unit-vru/our-programmes/difference-matters)

**Service scoping for Difference Matters Evaluation & Learning Partner**

The allocated contract value is up to £100,000 over the total contract term of 24 months, subject to internal governance and approvals. The anticipated start date for the contract is June 2025 to July 2027.

As an evidence-based organisation, the VRU uses research and analysis to help inform our decisions and work. This involves conducting or commissioning research and evaluation to help understand how commissioned services are working, and whether services are delivering the results we expect.

The commissioning of an Evaluation & Learning Partner is integral for the VRU to understand the implementation and key learning from the Difference Matters programme. The provider will need to work with participating schools, local authorities, training / service providers and the VRU to evaluate this programme successfully.

**Key components of this work will likely include:**

* **Evaluation set-up / inception:** Develop the foundation for the evaluation through a robust framework and methodology. Activities will include reviewing the feasibility of assessing program impact, updating the theory of change if required, and establishing a detailed evaluation timeline. Deliverables may include a comprehensive evaluation framework and an initial impact feasibility review.
* **Performance monitoring:** Advise on the types of monitoring data that should be collected to best understand the reach and impact of the programme. Support the analysis of termly monitoring data and produce termly reach and impact performance summary reports using VRU monitoring data.
* **Process Evaluation:** Conduct a mixed-methods evaluation to assess the implementation fidelity of the program. This could include stakeholder interviews and focus groups, as well as observing program activities such as youth voice group meetings and training sessions. Potential outputs include a mid-point process evaluation report, highlighting lessons learned and providing recommendations for improving program delivery and sustainability. These findings will also be incorporated into a final evaluation report.
* **Impact Evaluation:** Measure the program's effectiveness and impact of the programme in relation to its desired outcomes at individual and organisational levels. Suggested methods include; baseline and follow-up surveys with pupils and staff, alongside the analysis of school- and borough-level data, such as attendance, exclusions, and behavioural metrics. Deliverables will include an interim and detailed final impact evaluation report and findings presented in a range of formats for different audiences, including visual summaries of key outcomes for stakeholders.
* **Shared Learning:** Facilitate cross-borough collaboration and knowledge sharing. For example; organizing bi-annual share-and-learn events and / producing visually engaging good practice case studies for school leaders.

**Core capabilities:**

* Capacity, experience, and expertise to lead complex evaluation programmes that will incorporate a range of stakeholders and partners at strategic and operational levels.
* Strong commitment to ethical research and data protection.
* Expertise and capacity to deliver both quantitative and qualitative research simultaneously.
* Demonstrable experience of delivering similar evaluations, particularly with participatory methods, ideally involving young people and education settings.
* Knowledge and understanding of education settings.
* Ideally the Evaluation & Learning Partner should demonstrate that they can design and implement evaluation approaches that are sensitive to the experiences, needs, and communication preferences of neurodivergent audiences.
* The ability to apply a trauma-informed lens throughout the evaluation process, recognising the potential intersection of neurodivergence and past experiences of exclusion.
* An understanding of the Public Health Approach to violence reduction and prevention.
* Strong data protection systems and processes.
* Experience/ ability to conduct fieldwork in London.
* Strong data visualisation skills.
* Capacity to meet the stated timeframes and deliverables

**Response**

If you are interested in the opportunity and meet the core capabilities as set out above, then please email vruprocurement@london.gov.uk. You may then be asked to fill in a short questionnaire.

**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**

