**Multiply (adult numeracy) RCTs and ‘What Works’ programme of RCTs and trials**

**Supplier pre-market engagement discussion**

***Summary***

As part of the Multiply programme, DfE is interested in procuring two pieces of research:

1. Project 1: a number of Randomised Controlled Trials/Quasi-experimental designed trials in order to improve understanding of what works in improving adult numeracy.
2. Project 2: a process and impact evaluation of the Multiply programme

We would like to invite potential suppliers to a virtual meeting on **Friday 10 June at 3pm** to gauge the level of interest in these projects, to hear their views on what is needed to make it a success, to answer questions and to support potential suppliers to link up.

***What is the Multiply programme?***

Multiply is a new adult numeracy programme that will boost existing efforts to address low levels of adult numeracy across the UK. It is the first priority of the new UK Shared Prosperity Fund[[1]](#footnote-1), with up to £559 million funding available over three years (FY 2022/23; 2023/34 and 2024/25). More information on the Multiply programme can be found here: [Multiply: funding available to improve adult numeracy skills - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multiply-funding-available-to-improve-numeracy-skills)

The overarching objectives for Multiply are to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population across the UK and improve labour market outcomes, such as increased employment and higher wages.

There are three core strands to the programme:

1. Funding will be distributed to local areas to deliver innovative numeracy interventions that meet local need.
2. A digital online platform will be launched, allowing learners to develop their numeracy skills in their own time and at their own pace.
3. A programme of evaluation and randomised control trials to build the evidence base on what works to improve adult numeracy (the focus of this discussion document).

***Project 1: the Multiply ‘What works’ RCT/trials project***

Understanding ‘what works’ to improve adult numeracy is a core part of the Multiply programme. We are seeking evidence and ideas about approaches to improving adult numeracy, up to and including Level 2 (GCSE Grade C/4 or equivalent), that can be robustly tested to help us build this evidence base, as well as help inform delivery.

These can be approaches that are already in operation, either funded through Multiply, or ones that pre-existed before the Multiply programme, in order to robustly assess the effectiveness of current practice. Alternatively, the trials could test new ideas and suggestions that have not yet been implemented, to understand what kind of impact they could have.

Ideas could include (but are not limited to) approaches that …

* identify adults with potential numeracy issues, including working with employers, other public services, the voluntary sector etc and diagnosing learning difficulties such as dyscalculia
* engage with, motivate and support people to take their first steps to improve their numeracy skills, including those who have maths anxiety and co-existing learning difficulties such as dyslexia
* understand and address barriers to learning, including the use of rewards, flexible and blended learning
* deliver curriculum content in a compelling and relevant way for adult learners, contextualised to different life scenarios and industries, including co-designing courses with employers and public sector partners
* test different pedagogical approaches to teaching adult numeracy
* encourage learners into additional education, employment or training after their Multiply course
* addressing the numeracy needs of specific cohorts of learners, e.g. those leaving the prison and care systems.

The results of these trials will be fed back to local authorities, providers and practitioners throughout the duration of the Multiply programme, so the evidence generated from them can be used to inform the design and enhancement of their provision.

***What kind of trials are you hoping to undertake?***

Wherever possible, we hope to undertake Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs), as these are the 'gold standard' of research. However, in some cases, full randomisation isn’t possible or appropriate. In this instance, quasi-experimental trials will be considered.

***What are you seeking to procure?***

We want to procure:

* c. 15 separate RCT/QED trials across the UK in 2023/24 and 2024/25

* A further 10-15 smaller trials to support communication and outreach activity over the same time period
* Quality assured individual reports on each trial, to include all technical information
* A high-quality, accessible written report, in the DfE house-style, identifying which of the tested approaches were the most and least effective and the implications of this for policy makers, practitioners, providers and commissioners.

It is important that these trials are robust, replicable and stand up to scrutiny. We expect them to be undertaken in a transparent way and to the highest possible standards i.e. using the CONSORT framework or similar. Part of achieving this is ensuring that all activity is co-ordinated and run in as standardised way as possible. As such, we also want to procure:

* Programme management to oversee the delivery of each trial, and to co-ordinate them and across the project as a whole, to include monitoring and reporting on progress to DfE on a regular basis
* Quality assurance, to include: a) working with researchers delivering the trials to review and refine trial protocols, to ensure they are of a consistently high quality; b) developing and implementing a peer review process of trial design and analysis and c) undertaking quality assurance on all research instruments, data collection methods, data analysis, interpretation and reporting, to ensure that all conclusions drawn are robust
* Fieldwork management, to include: a) engaging with Multiply local authorities and providers to secure willingness to participate in trials and b) working with local authorities and providers to develop a staggered fieldwork timeline to avoid saturating them and distracting from core delivery

***What kind of organisation are you looking for?***

We would like our supplier to have extensive experience and expertise in running and quality assuring RCT/QED trials, a track record of managing large and complex primary research projects, good knowledge of adult education and excellent written and verbal communication skills.

Our initial assessment of the market is that few organisations will have all of this at the level of expertise we require. We are keen to encourage suppliers to form consortiums to deliver this project, in order to make the procurement process as competitive as possible.

**Project 2: the Multiply programme evaluation**

The overarching objectives for Multiply are to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population across the UK and improve labour market outcomes, such as increased employment and higher wages. The following success measures have been identified for the whole programme at a national level:

* **More adults achieving maths qualifications** (up to, and including, Level 2 – with GCSEs and Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) or equivalent as the qualifications of choice) and an **increase in participation in numeracy courses.** We expect local areas to evidence improvements in functional numeracy, rather than solely participation in Multiply interventions.
* **Improved labour market outcomes** e.g. fewer numeracy skills gaps reported by employers, and an increase in the proportion of adults that progress into sustained employment and / or education.
* **Increased adult numeracy across the population** – this overall impact, which goes beyond achieving certificates or qualifications, will track both the perceived and actual difference taking part in the programme makes in supporting learners to improve their understanding and use of maths in their daily lives, at home and at work - and to feel more confident when doing so.

The Multiply Investment Prospectus[[2]](#footnote-2) also sets out a series of additional delivery requirements.

***What are the core objectives for the programme evaluation?***

1. Understand how effectively those involved in Multiply think it is being delivered and how this could be improved, in order to improve delivery in the latter years of the programme;
2. Assess the impact and value of the Multiply programme, including whether it has achieved its aims and delivered against its success metrics;
3. Summarise lessons learnt and identify best practice, especially at the local level, to feed into the evidence base and inform delivery.

***What is the scope of the programme evaluation?***

Multiply is a UK wide programme. Local delivery in England is overseen by DfE, whilst delivery in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (SWNI) will be overseen by DLUHC. The programme-wide evaluation needs to cover the UK and is thus, in part, dependent on significant amounts of data sharing between DLUHC and DfE. What data it is possible to capture in SWNI, at what level of depth and by whom is still being worked through.

Multiply courses are scheduled to begin from September 2022 onwards, meaning that the evaluation supplier also needs to be in place by this time in order to start collecting data from those involved in the programme (learners, practitioners, providers, employers and local areas in receipt of Multiply funding). As such, procurement for the supplier will need to occur in parallel to decisions being made about what data it is possible to gather from SWNI.

To manage this, we will ask suppliers to cost for a) England only and b) additional options that combine to produce a UK wide approach, broken down by years 1, 2 and 3 of the programme. By the time the contract with the suppliers is signed, agreement on SWNI data should have been reached.

***What are you seeking to procure?***

The exact details of what we want to include in the evaluation are still being worked through, but we expect it to include 3 strands of work: primary data collection; analysis of monitoring data from local, national, digital and communications strands of the programme and secondary data analysis.

Primary research

* Surveys with a sample of Multiply learners (plus possibly a control group of learners funded by the Adult Education Budget); practitioners; employers and providers
* Learner pre and post numeracy assessment, administered to a sample of learners via their teachers
* Depth interviews with a sample of learners who left their Multiply intervention before it ended; employers and Multiply stakeholders
* Focus groups with learners and practitioners
* Case studies with local area commissioners, taking a value for money approach (based on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness model) approach
* Learner journey reflective diaries

Secondary data analysis

* Data extraction and analysis of quarterly narrative monitoring reports provided by the local area commissioners back to DfE
* Dataset analysis of ILR data (and it’s equivalent in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland); user data from the Multiply digital platform and Multiply comms data
* Social Media analysis

Reporting

* Dashboard production: production and maintenance of an interactive data dashboard, for an audience of senior officials and Ministers, that shows anonymised results for key programme metrics such as the number of starts, stops, completions and achievements for Multiply learners by core demographics, level of course, delivery channel and geographic location. Data will flow into this dashboard from multiple sources and will need to be linked and quality assured as part of the maintenance process
* Interim reports: 6 monthly updates to the policy team on what is emerging from the data
* Attendance and presentation at local area commissioner roundtables during the project, to talk them through the findings to date
* A high-quality, accessible written report, in the DfE house-style, answering the evaluation and research questions in a clear way identifying which of the tested approaches were the most and least effective and the implications of this for policy makers, practitioners, providers and commissioners

It is important that this evaluation is robust and stands up to scrutiny. To support this, the project will be supported by a Delivery Steering Group, which will include colleagues in the Cabinet Office Evaluation Taskforce and the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth.

In addition, part of achieving this is ensuring that all activity is co-ordinated and run in as standardised way as possible. As such, we also want to procure:

* Programme management to oversee the delivery of each part of the programme evaluation, to include monitoring and reporting on progress to DfE on a regular basis
* Quality assurance, to include: a) working with researchers in DfE to design, review and refine research instruments and data analysis approaches, to ensure they are of a consistently high quality and b) undertaking testing and quality assurance on all research instruments, data collection methods, data analysis, interpretation and reporting, to ensure that all conclusions drawn are robust
* Fieldwork management, to include: a) developing sampling frames and using a stratified random approach; b) ensuring surveys, interviews et al are accessible; c) adhering to all data protection regulations and principles

***What kind of organisation are you looking for?***

We would like our supplier to have extensive experience and expertise in running and quality assuring social policy process and impact evaluations; a track record of managing large and complex primary research projects, good knowledge of adult education and excellent written and verbal communication skills.

Our initial assessment of the market is that a number of organisations will have all of this at the level of expertise we require. However, we are keen to encourage suppliers to form consortiums to deliver this project, in order to make the procurement process as competitive as possible.

***What is the timeline for delivery?***

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|  | ***Project 1: What Works RCTs and trials*** | ***Project 2: programme evaluation*** |
| Invitation to Tender issued | July | June/July |
| Supplier in place | October | Beginning of September |
| Research instruments developed, reviewed, refined and signed off | November 2022 – March 2023 *(Trial protocols)* | September and October *(surveys, topic and interviewer guides etc*) |
| Fieldwork begins | April 2023 | ASAP *(ideally the pre/post assessments will start in September)* |
| Interim report | November 2023 | March 2022 *(Dashboard in place)* |
| Interim report | November 2024 |  |
| Final report | July 2025 |  |

1. The 2021 Spending Review launched the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, totalling £2.6 billion by March 2025. Delivered by the Department for Levelling Up, the UKSPF replaces EU structural funds and is intended to better tailor funding to local needs in three priority areas (communities and place; people and skills; and supporting local business) across the UK. The 2021 Spending Review announced that the UKSPF’s first priority would be Multiply – a new £559 million UK-wide adult numeracy programme. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Multiply: funding available to improve adult numeracy skills - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/multiply-funding-available-to-improve-numeracy-skills#:~:text=The%20investment%20prospectus%20provides%20guidance,the%20allocation%20methodology) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)