



Think Ahead Independent External Evaluation: Invitation to Tender

1. Introduction

The purpose of this Invitation to Tender (ITT) is to invite proposals from organisations to deliver an independent external evaluation of the Think Ahead programme.

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1.1. About Think Ahead

The Think Ahead programme is a new scheme for high-potential graduates and career-changers to become mental health social workers. It was created to apply the successful fast-track model to the challenges facing mental health services.

Think Ahead has had extensive national media coverage, has received public support from across the political spectrum (including from the Prime Minister and current and former Ministers), and in October 2015 released a recruitment film narrated by Stephen Fry.

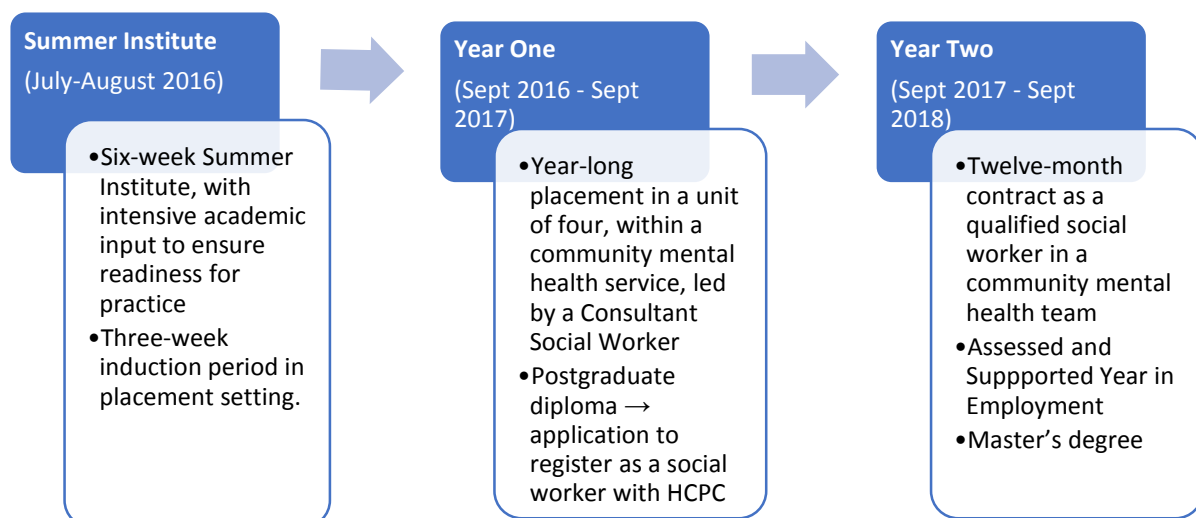
During Think Ahead’s first application season in autumn 2015, 2338 people applied for the 80 to 100 places available in our first cohort, starting the programme in July. At more than 23 applications per place, this makes Think Ahead one of the most competitive graduate programmes in the country.

Think Ahead is a charitable organisation currently incubated by the Institute for Public Policy Research (a charity), funded by the Department of Health, and overseen by a board of experts including: Professor Dame Carol Black, Baroness Claire Tyler, Dr Ruth Allen (Director of Social Work at South West London and St George’s NHS Mental Health Trust), Paul Farmer CBE (Chief Executive of Mind, and Chair of NHS England’s Mental Health Taskforce), Professor David Croisdale-Appleby OBE (author of *Re-visioning social work education: an independent review*), Professor Sir Julian Le Grand (Professor of Social Policy at the London School of Economics), and James Darley (Director of Graduate Recruitment at Teach First).

1.2. What we do

Think Ahead exists to improve outcomes for individuals experiencing mental health problems, as well as their families and communities, by strengthening social work in mental health services. We are seeking to attract high quality candidates to the profession, promote excellence in training, and build a community of leaders to champion social work and social approaches in mental health.

The Think Ahead programme is a two-year fast-track graduate programme. During the programme participants qualify as social workers, gain extensive experience working in mental health settings, complete a Master’s in social work, and receive leadership training. Our first cohort of 80-100 participants will be placed in 17 host organisations (Local Authorities/NHS Trusts). Academic elements of the programme will be delivered by our academic partner, the University of York. The first Think Ahead cohort will begin the programme in summer 2016:



Further information about how our programme works is available on request.

2. The project

We are seeking an organisation to deliver an independent external evaluation of the Think Ahead programme. In particular, the evaluation should examine:

- **Quality of training.** The extent to which training on the Think Ahead programme prepares participants to become excellent social workers.
- **Quality of practice.** The extent to which Think Ahead participants demonstrate high quality social work practice.

2.1. Background to this project

Robust evaluation of our programme is crucial to our success. Our evaluation work should fulfil a range of purposes, supporting us to:

- 1) Understand the impact our programme is having
- 2) Continue as a successful organisation:
 - Helping us to improve the programme and the way we work
 - Supporting us to secure funding in the future
 - Securing credibility with key stakeholders and delivery partners
- 3) Grow the evidence base, by:
 - informing the role social interventions and social work can play in mental health
 - informing the case for innovations in social work education

Over the past year we have been developing our monitoring and evaluation strategy. The basis of our evaluation plans is our Theory of Change which sets out the full range of our intended outcomes, including both those on which we want to have direct and indirect impact, as well as short and long-term outcomes. We have developed a plan for measuring the outcomes in our Theory of Change, encompassing plans for internal monitoring and evaluation as well as the scope of the external evaluation. Our internal monitoring includes plans such as: participant surveys, Consultant Social Worker surveys, host organisation surveys, recruitment data collection, and retention data collection. We are also exploring the possibility of regularly collecting data on service user outcomes. Further information on our internal monitoring and evaluation plans is available on request.

We have developed our Theory of Change and evaluation strategy in consultation with service users and carers, sector stakeholders, the Local Authorities and NHS trusts we are working with, Department of Health (our core funder), and New

Philanthropy Capital (NPC) who have supported us in developing our evaluation strategy.¹

A critical part of our monitoring and evaluation plan is an independent external evaluation. It provides an opportunity to:

- Gain an independent view of the programme, making our overall monitoring and evaluation plans more robust
- Undertake more thorough research that we would not have the capacity to deliver

Because of the independent perspective offered through external evaluation, the findings of the external evaluation will be particularly important to our core funders, Department of Health.

This will be the first external evaluation of Think Ahead. We anticipate having further external evaluations in the future but as yet have no detailed plans for what these will be.

2.2. Expected deliverables and outputs

This project is made up of the following deliverables:

- **Production of evaluation design and detailed project plan – by end June 2016.** The methodology and delivery plan for the evaluation will need to be defined before our programme begins in July 2016. To ensure feasibility, and that the evaluation is designed to meet key objectives, the evaluation should be designed in consultation with the Think Ahead team and board, Department of Health, our academic partner (University of York), our host organisations (the Local Authorities and NHS trusts who will be hosting our participants), our Service User and Carer Reference Group, as well as relevant sector experts.
- **Delivery of the evaluation study – by end Jan 2019.** The organisation should have the capacity to carry out the study itself. How and when this is delivered will depend on the methodology. We expect the evaluation to focus on the first cohort of our programme, and to be complete by the end of September 2018, so that learning can feed into programme development (evaluators could choose to include some examination of the first year of Cohort 2 if relevant). Findings should be analysed and drawn together into interim reports after each phase and an overall report at the end of the project. We would expect evaluation reports to include summaries of findings, analysis and recommendations about improvements that could be made to the programme. If the methodology aligns with our current assumptions about timescales (see below), we would expect the following reports:

¹ NPC have also advised us on the commissioning process for this evaluation. NPC are not intending to bid for this contract.

- **Interim Report - Evaluation of Summer Institute – by November 2016**
- **Interim Report - Evaluation of training in Year 1 – by November 2017**
- **Interim Report - Evaluation of practice in Year 2 – by November 2018**
- **Final summary report – by January 2019**

These deadlines could be amended if there is a strong rationale for doing so.

We would expect the evaluators to report to Think Ahead on a quarterly basis, providing updates on progress against specified deliverables.

2.3. Design and methodology ideas

At this stage we are not committed to any particular methodology for this evaluation, and we welcome proposals from evaluators setting out their view of the best way to evaluate the outcomes we are seeking to measure. In this document we have sought to provide as much detail on our early thinking as possible but we would consider proposals which take a different approach if there is a strong rationale for this.

As we have set out above, we have identified two outcomes that we would like to measure through our first external evaluation:

1. **Quality of training.** The extent to which training on the Think Ahead programme prepares participants to become excellent social workers. This might include examination of:
 - The quality of teaching during Summer Institute and teaching days across Year 1
 - How successfully academic learning and practice experience are integrated
 - The extent to which the model of four Think Ahead participants sharing a caseload with a Consultant Social Worker facilitates a quality learning experience
 - The quality of learning experience provided in our host organisations
 - The effectiveness of support and supervision provided by Consultant Social Workers, academic tutors and Think Ahead staff

2. **Quality of practice.** The extent to which Think Ahead participants demonstrate high quality social work practice. This might include examination of:
 - How Think Ahead participants perform against frameworks defining good social work practice (evaluators would need to identify an existing framework or develop a new framework)
 - Whether Think Ahead participants are delivering social interventions with fidelity

We did consider whether the external evaluation should focus on service user outcomes; we concluded that an evaluation of training and practice was most appropriate because:

- Findings from an evaluation of training and practice will be most helpful in supporting us to improve the programme.
- It will be more effective to measure service user outcomes at a later stage, when we expect to see greater impact (service user outcomes could be the focus of future external evaluations)
- There are other ways in which we can evaluate our impact on service user outcomes:
 - We are planning to collect our own evidence on service user outcomes (see below on internal monitoring)
 - Quality of practice will provide a powerful proxy measure for service user outcomes.

We are keen to understand attribution and causation wherever possible (perhaps through a control group, for example). We may also be interested in understanding how our programme compares to other social work training routes.

We expect this evaluation to focus predominantly on the first cohort of the programme. We would expect quality of training to be evaluated during Summer Institute and Year 1 of the programme, which is the stage in which most of the teaching takes place, and the training which prepares participants to gain a Post Graduate Diploma in social work and therefore qualify as a social worker. We would then expect quality of practice to be measured during Year 2 when participants are practising as qualified social workers. Evaluators may or may not wish to include examination of Summer Institute and Year 1 of the programme for the second cohort of the programme.

We would expect the evaluation to include primary research, primarily qualitative but would be interested in quantitative elements too. Methods may include interviews, direct observation, and surveys. Desk research may also be required.

2.4. Think Ahead's role in the project

It is vital that the external evaluation is delivered independently of Think Ahead, meeting standards of research and ethics that means the evaluation will offer a robust independent perspective on the programme. While the evaluators will work independently, Think Ahead will play the following roles:

- Provide important contextual information about the programme to enable the evaluators to design and deliver an appropriate study
- Monitor the contract and deliverables to ensure the project is being delivered to a high quality, on time and within budget

2.5. Budget

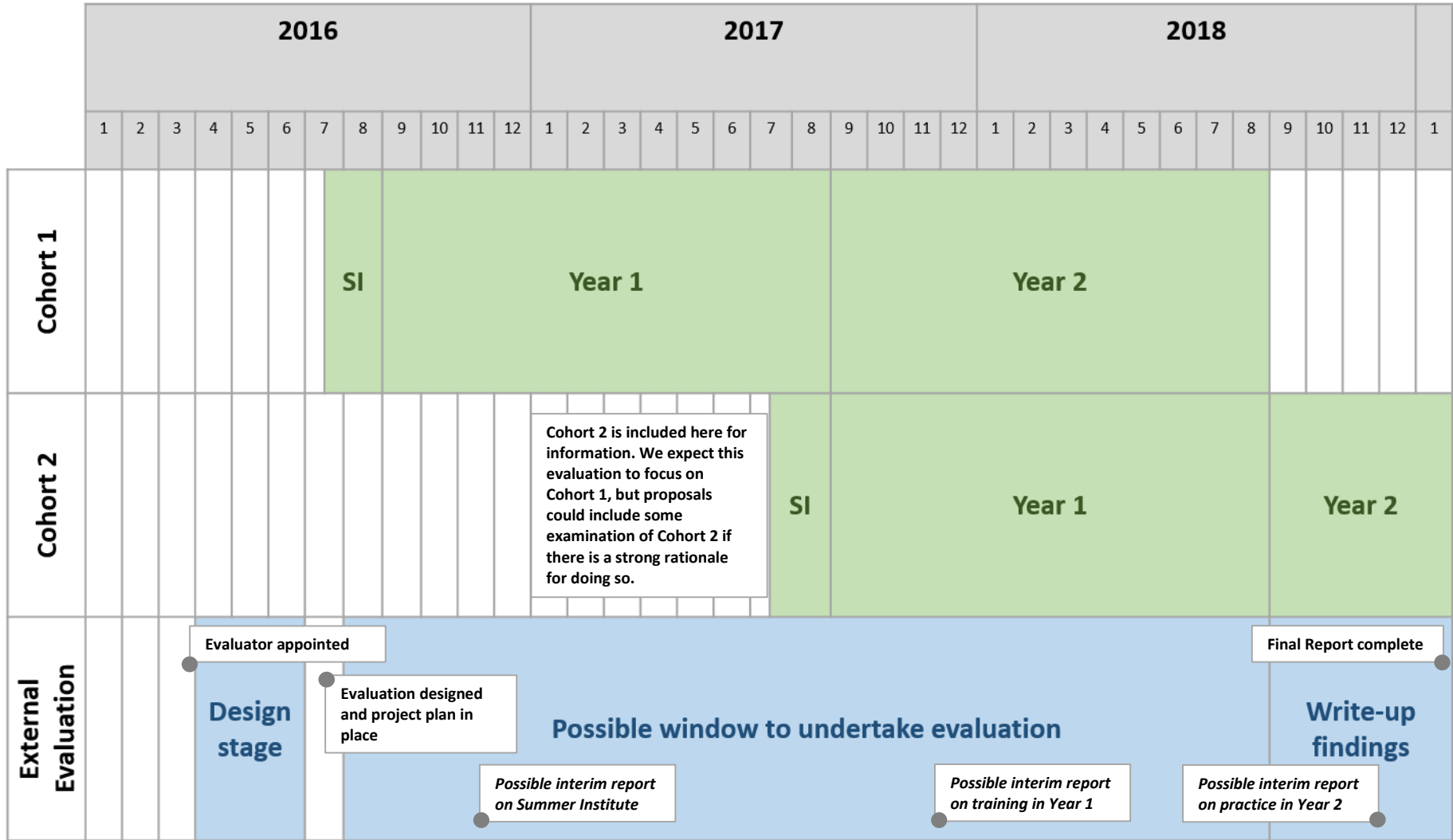
We expect costs for this external evaluation to be £100k-£180k. We would like bidders to provide two or more options with a range of costs, including a lower cost option. Proposed costs will need to include VAT and all expenses.

2.6. Evaluation Timescales

As we describe above we expect this evaluation to focus on the first cohort of the Think Ahead programme, with quality of training to be examined in Year 1 (2016/17) and quality of practice in Year 2 (2017/18). These are only our initial assumptions and we would welcome proposals that consider alternative approaches if there is a strong rationale for doing so. The only milestones which are fixed at this stage are:

- Evaluation should be designed with a project plan in place by July 2016.
- Final evaluation report to be complete by the end of January 2019.

Proposed timescales for external evaluation



3. What we are looking for

3.1. Proposal Criteria

We will assess proposals based on the following criteria:

- A. Understanding of Think Ahead and our evaluation needs.** Does the proposal demonstrate sufficient understanding of the Think Ahead programme? Does the proposal meet the brief?
- B. Evaluation approach.** Will the evaluation approach deliver a valid, robust evaluation of the outcomes we are seeking to measure? In particular, will it measure the right outcomes – i.e. does the proposal set out a convincing plan for measuring quality of training and quality of social work practice. Does the proposal propose a robust methodology that considers causation and attribution? Does the proposal include sufficient and appropriate plans for service user and carer involvement in the design of the study? Does the proposal address any anticipated ethical and data protection issues and how these will be dealt with?
- C. Relevant expertise and experience.** Do the team involved have a track record of delivering similar evaluations successfully? Does the organisation have experience and expertise in this type of evaluation, including making recommendations and writing reports? Does the team have expertise in social work training? Does the team have expertise in project management?
- D. Cost.** Does the proposal give a clear breakdown of cost and represent good value for money?
- E. Project plan and timescales.** Do the plans set out assure us that a high quality evaluation will be delivered on time and to cost? Has sufficient staff time been allocated?
- F. Risk.** Does the proposal identify key risks and set out effective mitigations and contingencies against these?

Bids will be evaluated according to the following model:

3.2. What to include your proposal:

Please include sections on each of the criteria areas:

- A. Understanding of Think Ahead and our evaluation needs
- B. Evaluation approach
- C. Relevant expertise and experience.
- D. Cost
- E. Project plan and timescales
- F. Risk

In the costs section, please provide a clear breakdown of the costs of each phase of the work. Please show expenses as a separate figure. You should also outline day

rates for each team member, the number of days they will spend on the project and total cost of their time.

Please also include the following in your proposal:

- Curriculum Vitae for the team members involved.
- Two references from organisations you have delivered similar projects with. These will be used to assess the relevant expertise and experience criteria.

Please also include basic information about your organisation, including a contact name, job title and contact details.

Bids can come from individual organisations, partnerships or consortia. Partnerships and consortia will need a clear lead contractor who will need to demonstrate evidence of successful project delivery as part of a similar vehicle. If you are bidding as part of a partnership or consortia, please provide details of governance arrangements between partners, how tasks and costs will be spread, the rationale for the partnership and any history of working together. Think Ahead may choose to encourage joint working between bidders.

Please ensure that your proposal, including any attachments, is no longer than 25 pages.

3.3. How to submit a proposal and timescales

Proposals should be submitted to Emma Hubball (e.hubball@thinkahead.org) by 5pm on **26 February 2016**.

Timescales for appointing evaluator	
15 Feb	Deadline for organisations to inform Think Ahead of their intention to bid
26 February (5pm)	Deadline for organisations to submit a proposal
5 March	Shortlisted organisations will be invited to interview
w/c 14 March	Interviews will take place (in London)
25 March	Successful organisation appointed
w/c 28 March	Kick off meeting with successful organisation

If you are interested in submitting a proposal, we can provide further information about how our programme works. Please contact Emma Hubball for this information, or if you have any other questions. We are happy to have informal conversations with interested organisations. We may share our responses to all bidders to common or critical questions that arise, but not to questions that could reveal an

organisation's methodology or approach. We request that any organisation planning to submit a proposal informs us of this by **15 February**.

You can also find further information on the programme at www.thinkahead.org

4. Document Terms

Think Ahead reserves the right to withdraw this tender at any time and may choose not to award a contract as a result of this process. In any event, Think Ahead will not be liable for any costs incurred by bidders in the preparation or submission of tenders, nor those which arise from attending interviews as part of the process.

Think Ahead may modify this ITT at any time prior to the deadline for receipt of tenders. To allow time for such an amendment to be taken into account, Think Ahead may, at its discretion, extend the deadline for receipt of tenders.

Any deviation from the successful supplier's proposal, including but not limited to those on timescales, delivery and performance, may result in rejection of the tender and termination of negotiations.

Think Ahead will treat all bidders' responses as confidential to it and its advisors during the procurement process. Think Ahead may use any information within a bidder's response to tender for any reasonable purpose connected with this ITT.

No publicity regarding the award of any contract will be permitted unless and until Think Ahead has given express written consent to the successful bidder, and approved the content of any such communication.