



SEN Futures Value for Money Feasibility Study

Summary

Procurement is currently underway for a feasibility study seeking to inform a potential future value for money study of SEN provision for pupils with Education, Health and Care plans in England. The feasibility study will cover an investigation of the cost data available from local authorities (LAs) and educational settings, a review of relevant outcomes information and an outline of how value for money could be assessed. We envisage this including an evidence review as well as qualitative engagement with educational settings and LAs, resulting in a report that summarises the cost and outcomes information required to determine the value for money of SEN provision in England and the extent to which it is possible to obtain this. The feasibility study will aim to inform the Department's decision of whether to commission a larger scale value for money study of SEN provision in England in the future, and will inform the design of such a study if commissioned.

Background

14.6% of the school population in England are identified as having SEN, with 2.9% having an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan.¹ Outcomes for these pupils are poor: there is a wide gap in the headline attainment indicators between those with/without SEN at all key stages², and pupils with SEN are significantly more likely to be excluded from school³, to be NEET⁴, and to realise worse labour market outcomes than those without SEN⁵. However, there is currently little evidence to indicate why this is the case or how outcomes vary with different types of provision.

This lack of evidence is directly linked to a further evidence gap around the value for money of provision for pupils with SEN. The costs of provision for those with SEN can vary greatly, and yet we do not currently have robust evidence to help us assess whether or how spend is related to particular outcomes, or whether certain types of provision are better than others in supporting pupils with SEN.

Addressing the above evidence gaps is crucial in the context of the Department's aim to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and reduce the gap for those left behind.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2018>

² Source: National curriculum assessments: key stage 2, 2017 (revised) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2017-revised> Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2016 to 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2016-to-2017>

³ Source: Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2015 to 2016 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016>

⁴ Source: Destinations of KS4 and KS5 pupils: 2016 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/destinations-of-ks4-and-ks5-pupils-2016>

⁵ Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730977/FSM_and_SEND_outcomes-statistics.pdf

Research aims

This research will inform a potential future large scale study of the value for money of provision for pupils with EHC plans in primary, secondary and post-16 settings in England. If commissioned, the full value for money study would hope to compare pre-16 settings (mainstream with SEN unit, mainstream without SEN unit, independent, state-funded special and non-maintained special) and post-16 settings (mainstream school, special school, specialist college, further education college and sixth form college) separately. The study would be subject to a separate procurement exercise to the feasibility study, under fair and open competition, and would aim to:

- a) Provide information on, for a given type of special educational need, the cost difference between a mainstream placement and placements in other types of SEN setting for pupils with EHC plans.
- b) Determine the extent to which the outcomes of pupils with EHC plans depend on type of setting attended, once type of need, demographic and other relevant factors have been controlled for.
- c) Combine the above to assess the value for money of different types of SEN provision.

However, there are a number of unknowns and potential issues that the Department requires a feasibility study to explore before any potential future value for money study is commissioned. The research questions for the feasibility study, categorised by the element of the value for money study that they will inform, are outlined below:

1. Costs

- What information is available from LAs and settings regarding the per-pupil cost of different types of SEN provision? Can this be broken down by type of need?
- What methodological approach to the collection of cost data would be most appropriate?
- What are the limitations of this information and how is the quality of it likely to vary across setting types and LAs?
- Which individuals within LAs, schools and post-16 settings are best placed to provide this cost information?
- To what extent does the funding allocated to pupils by LAs differ from the actual amount spent on them by settings?

2. Outcomes

- What outcome measures should be considered in a value for money assessment of EHC plan pupils? Are some conventional outcomes (e.g. attainment) less relevant to this cohort than other pupils? What outcomes may be more relevant (e.g. independent living, wellbeing, self-esteem)?
- What information is available on outcomes that could inform a value for money assessment of SEN settings for EHC plan pupils? What are the limitations of this information?

- Which of the identified outcomes will it be possible to monetise? How can relevant but non-monetisable outcomes be incorporated into a value for money assessment?
- When determining the relative effect of different setting types on pupil outcomes, how best can additional relevant factors be controlled for (e.g. demographic factors, level of need etc.)?

3. Value for money assessment

- Given the available information on costs and outcomes, and consistent with Green Book⁶ principles, what are the potential ways of comparing the two to assess the value for money of different SEN setting types?
- Can the same approach be applied to both school-age and post-16 settings, considering we would like to assess them separately?

It should be noted that any future work that the Department chooses to commission following completion of the Feasibility Study will be procured via open tender, without prejudice or favour.

Methodology

The methodology for this project will be finalised with the appointed contractor, but the research design for this project is likely to include:

- A review of available evidence
- Case study visits with Local Authorities
- Telephone interviews with Local Authorities and educational settings
- An online survey of Local Authorities and educational settings

Further information on methodology and timescales for this work will be shared as the project progresses.

⁶[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/685903/The Green Book.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/685903/The_Green_Book.pdf)