



SEN Futures Longitudinal Study Discovery Phase

Procurement is currently underway for a research project seeking to examine survey response and retention amongst children and young people (CYP) with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in England. This work will be used to inform the viability of a potential future longitudinal study of CYP with SEN currently being considered by the Department.

Background

14.6% of the school population in England are identified as having SEN, with 2.9% having Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.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. There is also a dearth of evidence on outcomes other than academic attainment for CYP with SEN, including on educational engagement, character and resilience, happiness and wellbeing and preparation for adulthood.

Securing positive outcomes for disadvantaged CYP and supporting those with SEN to live happy and fulfilled lives is a DfE priority. In order to take an evidence-based approach to achieving this aim and to fill the evidence gaps outlined above, the Department is considering designing a longitudinal study of CYP with SEN in England (and their parents/carers) to track participants over the course of their journeys through education and to gather evidence on a wide range of topics including happiness and wellbeing, independent living and experiences of different types of provision.

Research aims

The Longitudinal Study Discovery Phase is intended as a standalone project seeking to inform the design of the potential future longitudinal study described above.

CYP with SEN are under-researched on a national and global scale, and there are few examples of longitudinal studies or other large-scale pieces of research focussing specifically on this population. This means that we do not currently have a robust evidence base to inform estimates of response and retention for a possible future study, and that we do not have good evidence on which

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

strategies are effective in engaging and retaining participants (CYP with SEN and their parents/carers). The Discovery Phase will seek to fill these evidence gaps in order to ensure that any future work commissioned by the Department is methodologically robust and offers good value for money.

Within this overarching aim, the Discovery Phase will address four key objectives:

- (1) To allow us to **test different interventions** for increasing survey response and retention among our target population (CYP with SEN and their parents/carers)
- (2) To provide us with **evidence on the response / retention rates** we can expect for this population
- (3) To **test the viability of different questions and question topics** ahead of a potential future longitudinal study
- (4) To **provide rich evidence on outcomes and experiences of education** for CYP with SEN

It should be noted that any future work that the Department chooses to commission following completion of the Discovery Phase 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 Department are provisionally suggesting a research design comprised of two key strands of work:

Strand 1: A randomized control trial (RCT) to test the effect of different interventions on response rates among the hardest-to-reach members of the SEN population.

Strand 2: An online survey of the wider SEN population, in order to further explore patterns of non-response and to provide a larger sample from which to gather policy-relevant evidence.

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