

**SEN POLICY RESEARCH FORUM:**

**Policy Paper**

**Research in special needs and  
inclusive education:  
the interface with policy and  
practice**

**March 2014**

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction to Policy Paper**

This Paper marks the 30<sup>th</sup> Policy Paper in this series. It is based on a whole day seminar held on 19 November 2013 at the Institute of Education, London University on:

#### ***Research in special needs and inclusive education: the interface with policy and practice***

This seminar aimed:

- i. to explore the implications of some recent research for policy and practice in the special needs and inclusive education field,
- ii. to identify an agenda for enhancing the relationship between policy, practice and research.

With these aims the seminar addressed these questions:

- I. What are the implications of research studies (funded by different organisations) for enhancing policy and practice in the special needs and inclusive education fields?
- II. How can the use of research be improved in this field?
- III. What current and future issues and questions can research projects be asked to address?
- IV. How can the research - policy and practice interface be improved in the SEN/ disability field?

The seminar was organised into two connected parts:

- i. Researchers involved in recent research projects examined the research-policy/practice interface,
- ii. There was an opportunity to develop an agenda for future research and research-policy/practice interaction. What issues and areas require further research and development work?

There were 44 participants at the seminar representing educational researchers and academics and representatives from local Government, voluntary sector, policy makers and consultants.

#### **SEN Policy Research Forum**

The SEN Policy Research Forum, which organised this seminar, incorporates the aims and work of SEN Policy Options group in a new format and with some expanded aims. The Forum's website is at:

<http://www.sen-policyforum.org.uk/index.php>

The aim of the Forum is to contribute intelligent analysis, knowledge and experience to promote the development of policy and practice for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The Forum will be concerned with children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities from preschool to age 25. It will cover the whole of the UK and aims specifically to:

1. provide timely policy review and critique,
2. promote intelligent policy debate,

3. help set longer term agendas – acting like a think-tank,.
4. deliberate over and examine policy options in the field.
5. inform research and development work in the field.
6. contribute to development of more informed media coverage of SEND policy issues.

The uncertainties over what counts as 'special educational needs' and 'disabilities' in relation to a wider concept of 'additional needs' are recognised. These will be among the many issues examined through the Forum.

The Forum, as with the SEN Policy Options group, appreciates the generous funding from NASEN and the Pears Foundation to enable it to function, though it operates as an independent forum.

#### **Lead group and coordination of the Forum:**

Professor Julie Dockrell - Institute of Education, University of London  
 Niki Elliott, Sheffield Hallam University; Chair SEC,  
 Dr Peter Gray - Policy Consultant (co-coordinator)  
 Brain Lamb - Policy consultant  
 Professor Geoff Lindsay - University of Warwick  
 Professor Brahm Norwich - University of Exeter (co-cordinator)  
 Dr Liz Pellicano, Institute of Education  
 Linda Redford - Policy Consultant  
 Penny Richardson - Policy Consultant  
 Chris Robertson, University of Birmingham  
 Professor Klaus Wedell - Institute of Education, University of London

#### **Membership:**

If you would like to join the Forum go to the website and follow link to registering as a member. You will be invited to future seminars and be able to participate in discussion through the website blog.

For further information please contact the co-coordinators of the Forum, Brahm Norwich, Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU (b.norwich@exeter.ac.uk) or Peter Gray (pgray@sscyp) .

#### **Past Policy Options Papers (see website for downloadable copies)**

- 1. Bucking the market:** Peter Housden, Chief Education Officer, Nottinghamshire LEA
- 2. Towards effective schools for all:** Mel Ainscow, Cambridge University Institute of Education
- 3. Teacher education for special educational needs:** Professor Peter Mittler, Manchester University
- 4. Resourcing for SEN:** Jennifer Evans and Ingrid Lunt, Institute of Education, London University
- 5. Special schools and their alternatives:** Max Hunt, Director of Education, Stockport LEA
- 6. Meeting SEN: options for partnership between health, education and social services:** Tony Dessent, Senior Assistant Director, Nottinghamshire LEA
- 7. SEN in the 1990s: users' perspectives:** Micheline Mason, Robina Mallet, Colin Low and Philippa Russell

**8. Independence and dependence? Responsibilities for SEN in the Unitary and County Authorities:** Roy Atkinson, Michael Peters, Derek Jones, Simon Gardner and Phillipa Russell

**9. Inclusion or exclusion: Educational Policy and Practice for Children and Young People with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties:** John Bangs, Peter Gray and Greg Richardson

**9. Baseline Assessment and SEN:** Geoff Lindsay, Max Hunt, Sheila Wolfendale, Peter Tymms

**10. Future policy for SEN: Response to the Green Paper:** Brahm Norwich, Ann Lewis, John Moore, Harry Daniels

**11. Rethinking support for more inclusive education:** Peter Gray, Clive Danks, Rik Boxer, Barbara Burke, Geoff Frank, Ruth Newbury and Joan Baxter

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**12. Developments in additional resource allocation to promote greater inclusion:** John Moore, Cor Meijer, Klaus Wedell, Paul Croll and Diane Moses.

**13. Early years and SEN:** Professor Sheila Wolfendale and Philippa Russell

**14. Specialist Teaching for SEN and inclusion:** Annie Grant, Ann Lewis and Brahm Norwich

**15. The equity dilemma: allocating resources for special educational needs:** Richard Humphries, Sonia Sharpe, David Ruebain, Philippa Russell and Mike Ellis

**16. Standards and effectiveness in special educational needs: questioning conceptual orthodoxy:** Richard Byers, Seamus Hegarty and Carol Fitz Gibbon

**17. Disability, disadvantage, inclusion and social inclusion:** Professor Alan Dyson and Sandra Morrison

**18. Rethinking the 14-19 curriculum: SEN perspectives and implications:** Dr Lesley Dee, Christopher Robertson, Professor Geoff Lindsay, Ann Gross, and Keith Bovair

**19. Examining key issues underlying the Audit Commission Reports on SEN:** Chris Beek, Penny Richardson and Peter Gray

**20. Future schooling that includes children with SEN / disability:** Klaus Wedell, Ingrid Lunt and Brahm Norwich

**VI. Policy Options Papers from sixth seminar series**

**21. Taking Stock: integrated Children's Services, Improvement and Inclusion:** Margaret Doran, Tony Dessent and Professor Chris Husbands

**22. Special schools in the new era: how do we go beyond generalities?** Chris Wells, Philippa Russell, Peter Gray and Brahm Norwich

**23. Individual budgets and direct payments: issues, challenges and future implications for the strategic management of SEN**

Christine Lenehan, Glenys Jones Elaine Hack and Sheila Riddell

**24. Personalisation and SEN**

Judy Sebba, Armando DiFinizio, Alison Peacock and Martin Johnson.

**25. Choice-equity dilemma in special educational provision**

John Clarke, Ann Lewis, Peter Gray

**26. SEN Green Paper 2011: progress and prospects**

Brian Lamb, Kate Frood and Debbie Orton

**27. A school for the future - 2025: Practical Futures Thinking**

Alison Black

**28. The Coalition Government's policy on SEND: aspirations and challenges?**

P. Gray, B. Norwich, P Stobbs and S Hodgson.

**29. How will accountability work in the new SEND legislative system?**

Parents from Camden local authority, Penny Richardson, Jean Gross and Brian Lamb

**Copies of most of these papers can now be downloaded from the website of the SEN Policy Research Forum as well as the NASEN website look for SEN Policy Options public pages for downloading these past copies.**

<http://www.nasen.org.uk/policy-option-papers/>

<http://www.sen-policyforum.org.uk/>

## **Chapter 2: Context, interests and methodologies**

Brahm Norwich  
*Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter.*

### **Introduction**

In this brief introductory presentation I will set the scene for this policy seminar. Research has informed much of the content of this long series of SEN policy seminars. But, this is the first seminar in the 20 years of this group that has focused on the research-policy interface. In choosing the title, context, interests and methodologies, I aim to set research in the special needs and inclusive education field into the wider context of educational research and professional practice more generally. I will argue that some of the continuing debates about the nature and quality of research in the field and its interface with policy and practice is about research methodology and assumptions. And, these differences reflect basic questions about epistemology and the interests that drive assumptions about the kind of knowledge that research produces.

Martyn Hammersley has argued that there are three basic tensions in educational research that reflect tensions in the wider social sciences (Hammersley, 2003). These tensions according to him are about:

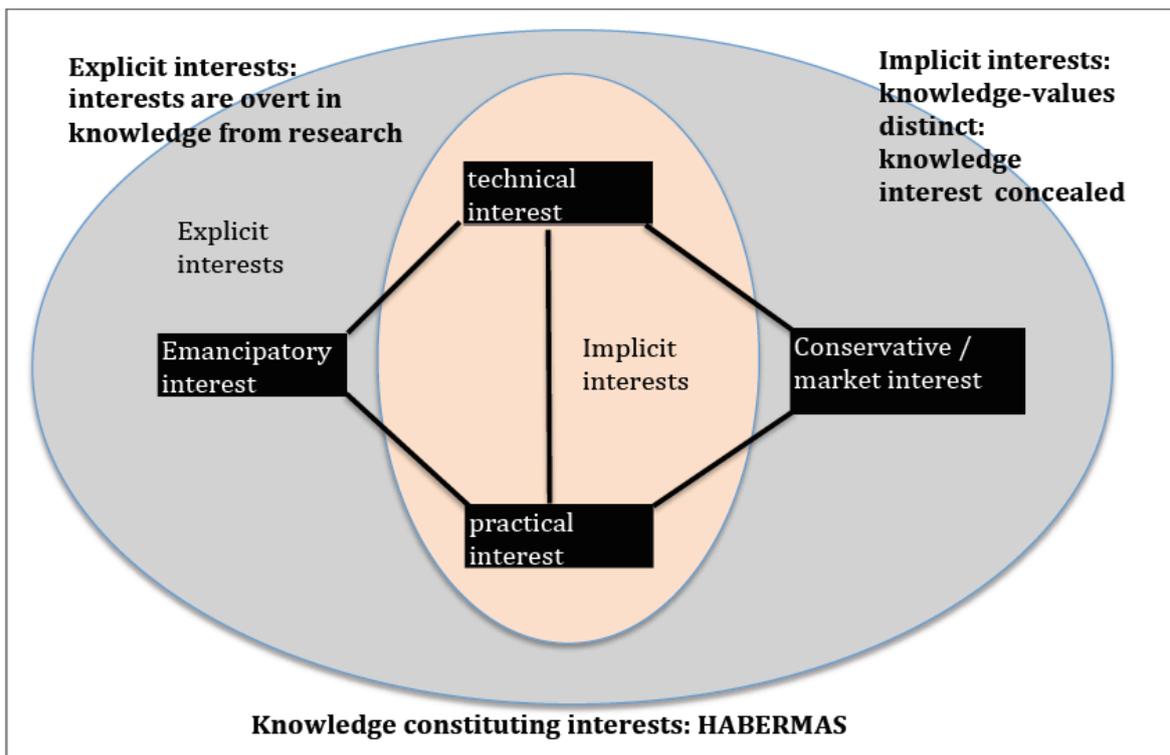
1. doing what a commitment to research requires OR serving policymakers;
2. giving priority to basic inquiry OR promoting applied research;
3. whether the primary concern is about producing knowledge OR an immediate and urgent commitment to practical improvements.

From my perspective, there is no reason therefore to ignore this perspective when considering special needs and inclusive education research. So, I take it that these tensions can be found in the research we are considering and its interface with policy and practice. Furthermore I assume that these tensions reflect differences over methodologies. By methodologies I mean the principles and assumptions that underpin and justify the methods used in research. So, I propose that it is useful to consider some current methodological issues as an introduction to the policy-practice interface in research in the special needs and inclusive education area. In doing so I will draw on the analysis by Habermas (1978) of what he called, 'knowledge constituting interests'. His perspective was that the different kinds of knowledge produced by researchers, sometimes called epistemologies, reflect their social interests. Habermas identified 3 such knowledge constituting interests:

1. technical interest – an interest in prediction and control associated with knowledge of causal relationships – what is often called scientific knowledge. These interests are evident in, for example, research that asks questions about the general consequences of inclusion practices for learning and development.
2. practical interest – an interest in understanding human reasons, motives, perspectives and actions – interpretations of social and personal situations. These interests are evident in, for example, research that examines what inclusion means to children with SEN or disabilities when they attend a special school.

3. emancipatory interest – an interest in removing oppression and promoting justice - insights and awareness raising to promote emancipation. These interests are evident, for example, in research that reveals the pressures which are exerted on some parents to accept placements in separate settings when they would prefer more inclusive settings.

By talking about social interests and the purposes that drive knowledge production, it is clear that these purposes are social and are about the cultures and communities to which researchers belong and with which they identify. I represent a version of this analysis in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1: Different knowledge constituting interest in the special needs and inclusive education field**

Habermas's 3 knowledge interests are shown in this figure in relation to each other. Two of them are seen as implicit interests (technical and practical interests) while the emancipatory interest is seen as an explicit interest. By implicit I mean that the purposes served by knowledge are seen as separate from the knowledge produced. The causal knowledge produced in the technical interest is represented as value and interest free, as this according to Habermas enables the scientists to focus on the quality of the knowledge production. The interpretive insights / knowledge produced through the practical interest is not necessarily seen to serve any particular social interest or value. Both of these interests can be seen as primarily about investigation and understanding by contrast to the emancipatory interest, which is open about its emancipatory aims and values, with the explicit aim to change the social and political

world. However, since the 1970s when progressive-emancipatory aims were prominent in the social sciences, the political climate has changed and it is possible to identify another explicit knowledge interest, which could be called a conservative / market-oriented one. These interests can be associated with the growing prominence of neo-liberal ideology in the social and economic policy. They are conservative in their opposition to progressive political change; they favour individual choice to state provision and market disciplines to state regulation. These interests are evident in the policy analyses expressed by policy organisations, such as the Policy Exchange (Hartley, 2010)

Another feature of this analysis of different interests underpinning research traditions is that often these interests have been seen as incompatible. For example, research with an explicit emancipatory interest has been seen as inconsistent with research that is aiming to investigate and understand, whether through illumination or causal explanations. I will call this kind of perspective a purist one because of its exclusive focus on emancipatory values. For some, these conflicting interests represent paradigmatic conflicts that lead to methodological conflicts. However, it is possible to mix or combine different research aims and methodologies in different parts of a research project or programme. These mixed methodologies and methods represent a hybrid perspective about combining research interests (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2009). This could be a combining, for example, of scientific style experimental methodologies with exploratory case study methodologies. It could also be the mixing of an explicit research interest such as the emancipatory with an implicit practical interest.

### **Evidence-based versus evidence informed practice**

This analysis of differing research interests and methodologies has relevance to one of the central current debates about the relationship between knowledge, professionalism and educational practice. This is the long-standing issue about whether there is a science of education (expressing the technical interest) or whether education is an art that is interpretive and creative (expressing a practical interest). In its current form the debate is expressed in terms of the position that education should be an evidence-based profession. For example, Goodacre (2013) and Styles (2013) argue that teacher reflection and beliefs are open to bias; they tend to be prone to confirming their current perspectives through what is called the confirmation bias. Education should, it is argued, be based on the best knowledge of 'what works' and that the only way to find out is to use a fair test. This means using a control group to control for other factors other than the specific teaching intervention under examination. So, the argument for the use of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Opposed to this 'purist' science of education perspective is a critique from another perspective that also tends to a form of purism. Furedi (2013) and Torrance (2013) have been vocal recently in criticising what they see as the narrow view of science expressed by advocates of evidence-based practice. One of their arguments questions whether RCTs can prove what works in a simple way. Another argument advocates that teachers need space to reflect on their teaching experience.

Here we have clash of purist views, an either - or set of perspectives, when what might be required is more balance in the perspectives taken. This would involve a more hybrid perspective where different research interests might be combined and

balanced with each other. This is where the arguments of Nancy Cartwright, a philosopher of science become useful (Cartwright, 2009). She distinguishes between knowledge of the efficacy of a teaching method – can it have effects in test conditions? – from the effectiveness of a method – can it work for other learners under other conditions? What can be shown to work in some conditions might not work in different less controlled conditions. So, a RCT might show the valid claims that a method has certain learning effects (high internal validity), but this knowledge might not be valid when the method is used in different conditions (low external validity). Cartwright suggests that there is no gold standard, a phrase commonly attributed to RCTs; in her words, ‘RCT’s not only game in town’. She summarises her arguments by contending that:

‘The RCT takes us only a very small part of the way we need to go for practical knowledge. This is what disposes me to warn about the vanity of rigor in RCTs’ (Cartwright, 2007).

So, if RCTs are not the only methodological design, what other designs are available for researching special needs and inclusive education. Catherine Lewis, a well-known US lesson study researcher has argued that there are two broad routes to improving educational practice, the local route and the general route (Lewis et al., 2006).

<b>Pros and Cons of broad routes to improving practice (based on Lewis, 2006)</b>	
<b>LOCAL ROUTE to improving practice</b>	<b>GENERAL ROUTE to improving practice</b>
Practice is developed in local contexts	Establish general causal efficacy claims
Continuous evaluation and adaptation (D and R model)	Then disseminate the general model (R and D model)
Emphasis on flexibility and local ownership	Emphasis on fidelity of implementation
Design Based Research (DBR) Action Research	Randomised Control Trials (RCT) (experimental and control groups)

**Table 1: Two broad routes to improving practice**

The general route is characterised by its aims to establish general causal efficacy claims and a top down research and development model. Much of its focus is on establishing the causal claims by emphasising faithfulness to the experimental implementation of the RCT. By contrast, the local route to improvement is about developing practice in local contexts with continuing evaluation and adaptation of the innovation, what is sometimes called a development and research model. Here the focus is on the flexibility of innovation and its local ownership, what has come to be called Design Based or Action Research. Lewis et al. (2006) suggest that there are strengths and limitations to both routes to improvement and that their adoption depends on the nature of the innovation, the questions asked and the context.

**Concluding comments:**

In making the case for a hybrid approach to researching in this area, we can finally consider Ian Pollard’s conception of *reflective teaching* as an example of what could be a useful way forward (Pollard, 2008). This conception of reflective teaching draws on John Dewey’s thinking in these terms. Teaching is seen as a cyclical process of

planning, doing, monitoring, evaluating and revising practices. It involves competence in evidence based classroom enquiry and knowledge of relevant research evidence that is mediated by creative teacher judgement. Reflective teaching also involves the dispositions of open-mindedness, responsibility and whole heartedness, while being expressed through collaboration and dialogue with colleagues. It also depends on the creative interpretation and translation of external frameworks of teaching and learning. This conception reflects an active teacher who uses and analyses professional experience, but who also uses, reflects and integrates this with research evidence, perhaps including RCT evidence. This is where the research evidence informs but does not fully determine decision-making and practice.

Though the main focus of this seminar is on the research policy and practice interface, these methodological and research interest issues underlie what will be examined in what follows in the policy paper. So, it is important to be open about these issues at the start.

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### **Chapter 3:**

## **Who has the responsibility for teaching pupils with SEN in mainstream primary schools? Implications for policy arising from The 'Making a Statement' study**

**Rob Webster and Peter Blatchford**

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The long-awaited Children and Families Bill will very soon complete its passage to Royal Assent. The Bill sets out widespread changes to services relating to adoption, looked-after children and those with special education needs (SEN). Brian Lamb's inquiry into parental confidence in the statutory assessment process, together with other reviews into provision for types of SEN (e.g. The Salt Review on severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and John Bercow's review on speech, language and communication needs), provided the catalyst for the reform of the SEN system heralded by the Bill.

These reforms have been heavily trailed as 'the biggest changes in SEN in 30 years', providing us with a new SEN Code of Practice and replacing SEN Statements with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). EHCPs will – as Statements currently do – set out the educational needs of pupils with high-level needs, together with the provision required to meet those needs. EHCPs will also encompass any needs and provisions that fall with the remit of health services and social care services, bundling services in one legally-binding document.

The changes to the SEN system are now visible on the horizon. The reforms present some serious challenges to local authorities, which many are beginning to grapple with; in particular, reducing the assessment and planning process from 26 weeks to 20 weeks, and transferring all children and young people with existing Statements to EHCPs within three years (DFE, 2013).

Yet, at a more fundamental level, it is only recently that we have begun to find out more about the day-to-day teaching and support that pupils experience once a Statement is put in place. Such information would, therefore, seem essential if schools and local authorities are to successfully implement the new Code of Practice.

In 2011/21, we conducted the Making a Statement (MAST) project to find out more about the teaching, support and interactions experienced by pupils with Statements attending mainstream primary schools. We shadowed 48 pupils in Year 5 who had Statements for moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, making minute-by-minute observations. We followed each pupil for a full school week. Observations of 151 average attaining 'control' pupils were also collected to provide a reference point for comparison. We also produced detailed case studies on each of the Statemented pupils, based largely on interviews with 195 teachers, teaching assistants (TAs), SENCOs and parents and carers. Spending a week at a time observing at close quarters, and discussion with practitioners and parents, brought home how schools are making every effort to attend to the needs of pupils with Statements amid a period of intense flux and

financial uncertainty for schools and local authorities. However, quantitative and qualitative analyses of these data identified several key concerns. For more on the MAST study, see Webster and Blatchford (2013a; 2013b; in press).

Firstly, we found that a high degree of separation and TA support are strong and consistent characteristics of the educational experiences of pupils with Statements. The pupils spent over a quarter of their time away from the mainstream class, the teacher and their peers. A clear point to emerge was the almost constant accompanying presence of a TA in relation to all the locations in which pupils worked. There is, in other words, an intimate connection between TAs and the locations, both in and away from the classroom, in which pupils with Statements are taught. Compared to average attaining pupils, we found that those with Statements spent less time in lessons with teachers and other children, and were more than three times more likely to interact with TAs than teachers. The higher degree of one-to-one interaction with TAs was often at the expense of interactions with not only teachers, but peers too. Pupils with Statements had almost half as many interactions with their classmates compared to other pupils. This, we argue, is likely to adversely affect their social development and involvement in school life.

The second main finding was that TAs were found to have more responsibility for the planning and teaching of Statemented pupils than teachers. Many TAs devised alternative curricula and prepared intervention programmes, and almost all TAs had a high level of responsibility for moment-by-moment pedagogical decision-making; explaining and modifying tasks set for the class by the teacher. Teachers rarely had as high a level of involvement in planning and teaching pupils with Statements, and there were little or no opportunities for planning with TAs before lessons.

Given what was found in relation to who has responsibility for Statemented pupils, it is perhaps not surprising that our third main conclusion was that the appropriateness and quality of pedagogy for Statemented pupils seemed to us very unlikely to address the gap in attainment between these pupils and their peers. Compared to the average attaining pupils, those with Statements received a less appropriate and lower quality pedagogical experience. The support provided for these pupils – particularly by TAs – was clearly well intentioned, but seemed unlikely to be sufficient to close the attainment gap.

The fourth finding concerned the gaps in teachers' and TAs' knowledge for meeting the needs of pupils with Statements. Teachers and TAs felt under-prepared for dealing with the challenges and complex difficulties posed by such pupils. Most teachers reported having had no training on meeting the needs of pupils with high levels of SEN, indicating failings in initial teaching training. As TAs held valuable knowledge about the pupils they supported, teachers often positioned them as the 'expert', despite TAs having similar weaknesses in their knowledge and training. Finally, there were also concerns about the ways in which schools prioritise meeting the needs of pupils with Statements. There was little evidence of an effective and theoretically-grounded pedagogy for Statemented pupils. Often, the specification on the Statement of a number of hours of TA support seemed to get in the way of schools thinking through appropriate approaches for pupils with pronounced learning difficulties in mainstream primary schools.

It is worth restating how the experience of spending weeks in schools gathering data brought into sharp relief the myriad pressures on schools and teachers. The proposals outlined in the new Bill and the draft Code of Practice are significant, not only in terms of the changes to SEN structures and processes as we know them, but also insofar as they apply to a group of pupils in mainstream schools with a much wider range of needs than was the case 30 years ago. That budgets to meet the needs of these pupils grow ever tighter compounds the challenges facing schools and local authorities (LAs).

We argue, therefore, that the concerns we raise above should not be taken to as a criticism of LAs, schools or teachers. Schools, for instance, had not 'given up' on pupils with Statements. Nonetheless, the findings from the MAST project and our previous research – the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford, Russell and Webster, 2023) – do raise questions about the appropriateness of current arrangements. There are two key implications. Firstly, with EHCPs set to replace Statements, a key message to policymakers is that the currency of Statements should change from 'hours' to 'pedagogy', and avoid where possible over-simplistic quantifications of support.

We recognise, there is likely to be resistance to this suggestion. Understandably, during the lengthy, and at times stressful, statutory assessment process, the parents of children with Statements and schools are often preoccupied by how many hours of support will be detailed on the Statement, if a place in a mainstream school is sought or offered by the local authority. But the assumption that more TA support for pupils who struggle would raise standards has been exposed as an unfortunate mirage by results from the DISS project. Parents, therefore, need to be included in discussions about this and the rationale for alternative ways of supporting their children. We found in the earlier DISS study that pupils receiving most TA support made less progress than similar pupils who received little or no TA support, even after controlling for factors likely to be related to more TA support (e.g., prior attainment and SEN status). Moreover, we found evidence that the effect of TA support on pupils' academic progress was more marked for pupils with highest levels of SEN. For example, for pupils in Year 6 on School Action Plus or with a Statement who received the highest amount of TA support made less progress in English, mathematics and science, than pupils with lower-level needs or no SEN at all who received similar amounts of TA support (Webster et al., 2010).

There is, in other words, a double-whammy effect for the pupils with high-level SEN and for whom TA support is a near-permanent fixture in their educational experience, due largely to having a Statement. Regardless of their level of SEN, pupils who receive a high amount of TA support perform less well than those with little or no TA support; but when those pupils also have high-level SEN, the effect of TA support exacerbates the negative effect.

We should make it clear, however, that despite these troubling findings, our solution is not to do away with TAs. This, then, is the second key implication raised by our research. Despite periodic backlashes from thinktanks and the media, which use the DISS project findings to justify the mass scaling back of TA numbers, our deeper understanding of what the research truly reveals suggests schools and pupils have

far more to gain from fundamentally rethinking the common approaches to the ways TAs are deployed and prepared.

Crucially, this reform challenges schools to conceptualise the role and function of TAs in a much broader context, so as not to reinforce the historic link between them and pupils with SEN. School leaders and teachers need to think more inclusively about pupils with SEN, and ensure their learning needs are not met principally by TAs, and to address the separation that characterises their day-to-day experiences. Returning to the draft Code of Practice, the 174-page draft contains only around a dozen references to TAs, classroom assistants and learning support staff. This playing down of the TA role seems intentional, as the draft Code makes it clear throughout that 'special education provision is underpinned by high quality teaching and is compromised by anything less'. The first sentence of Section 6.5 reinforces teachers' responsibility and accountability for 'the development and progress of pupils in their class, *even* where pupils access support from TAs or specialist staff' (p71, emphasis added). Our research suggests that this ought to be the case *especially* where pupils receive TA support.

The draft Code also restates what we have always assumed was the case, but so often gets lost in translation: core and additional funding included in schools' budgets can be spent 'as they think best' (p45). Leaving aside how parent-controlled personal budgets might affect these arrangements, the message is clear that resources need not automatically be spent on TAs to work directly with pupils with Statements. Schools, the draft Code continues, 'should make sure funding is allocated to provide high quality provision for those with SEN' (p45). In this sense, TAs could be deployed in classrooms for periods during a lesson to allow teachers to provide quality input.

We have produced guidance on what schools can do to make more effective use of TAs (Russell, Webster and Blatchford, 2013). Furthermore, we are using it to work with an increasing number of schools in a collaborative way, exploring with SENCos and teachers how TAs can be deployed in classrooms to provide more inclusive teaching and learning experiences for pupils with SEN.

Another group of practitioners within the system that must also be on song are the pool of over 1,800 'independent supporters' from voluntary, community and private organisations who will, from September, assist parents through the SEN process (1). The training for these 'champions', as the Dept. for Education calls them, must reflect the research evidence that provides a clear warning of what happens if we continue with the 'business as usual' model of SEN provision, which positions TAs at its heart.

Putting TAs front and centre with regard to school improvement processes is long overdue, and many schools are beginning to do just this and are set to reap the benefits. But as the draft Code of Practice makes clear, the emphasis on what SEN provision must look like places the emphasis where it should be: on high quality teaching for all.

## **Impact of the research**

We are gratified that the TA projects have had a lot of influence on policy and practice, as shown in the case study on the DISS work for the IOE Research Assessment Exercise submission (2). We will not reiterate the points covered here, but just mention that the DISS project findings caused government policymakers, education bodies, inspectors, local authorities and schools to reconsider not only the deployment of TAs, but provision for lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN. *Many local authorities and schools have issued staff guidance that refers to our findings.*

In order to extend the reach of the work, we have now set up a programme of knowledge transfer and consultancy that is working towards a sustainable model, which not directly involve the involvement of the research team. To this end, we have developed a consultancy package that involves: training facilitators; asking schools to complete an 'audit' of TAs in the school; and facilitating work in schools on aspects of TA deployment identified in the 'audit' of TA deployment. The consultancy ends with a debriefing session, feedback and evaluation. This work is underway and we have been very impressed with the take up by schools.

### **Reflections on dissemination, knowledge transfer and consultancy relating to the research**

There are many important influences on the impact a project has on school practice and policy. Most important we believe is the quality, clarity and meaningfulness of the research itself. In this respect we believed that it was important to get the 'science' right first; that is, to ensure that the design, methods of data collection, analyses and interpretations were sound. Having a large grant and a longer than usual timeframe was of enormous help. But there was also an element of serendipity in that the clear and unexpected negative results on the impact of TAs, though very troubling at first, gave the impetus to the quest for an explanation of the findings in the form of our 'Wider Pedagogical Role' model, which was also the basis for advice to schools on change for the better. The opportunity to test the model in the course of many presentations, workshops and other events helped established the viability and validity of the model. The DISS projects and our following work have been a successful example of how research can lead to meaningful knowledge transfer and consultancy.

A lot of our effort has gone into how – with clear research findings that have clear implications for school policy – one can influence schools and encourage them to change the ways they use TAs. It is helpful to view influence on policy at three levels: top down, middle tier and bottom up. There are clear signs that the balance between the three levels has changed in recent years. The present Government, in contrast to the last Labour Government, seems to have little interest in influencing policy on TAs (though it has taken on unprecedented control of schools structures, in the form of the push toward academies and free schools). A big change in recent years, which began long before the present Government, but which has increased under it, is the weakening of the middle tier: LAs. With this development the valuable support previously offered by LAs (e.g. through school subject advisors, and support for LA wide initiatives) has declined, and the middle tier influences are seriously reduced. There are the beginnings of an alternative middle tier developing, including academy chains and private consultancy companies, but this is at present

fragmented, often expensive and sometimes confusing for individual schools. This then has put a lot of stress on bottom up change. This is the level at we have been operating, and though productive, the ensuing dissemination and constancy work has been inevitably relatively local.

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Professor Peter Blatchford is Professor of Psychology and Education at the IOE, London, and co-directed the Making a Statement project. Prior to this, Peter directed the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project and a pioneering large-scale study on the effects of class size differences in primary schools. He has an international reputation for work on school breaktimes and peer relations in school.

### **Notes:**

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/30-million-for-new-special-educational-needs-champions>

2. [http://www.teachingassistantresearch.co.uk/download/i/mark\\_dl/u/4012366993/4604586874/IOE](http://www.teachingassistantresearch.co.uk/download/i/mark_dl/u/4012366993/4604586874/IOE)

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## Chapter 4:

### A Future Made Together: New directions in the ethics of autism research

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Autism directly or indirectly affects millions of UK citizens. Recent figures estimate that 1 in every 100 UK children and adults have an autism spectrum condition (Baird et al., 2006; Brugha et al., 2011), a 20-fold increase from the results of the first epidemiological study (Lotter, 1966). While this increased prevalence is most likely attributable to greater public awareness, widening of the diagnostic criteria and diagnostic substitution (Fombonne, 2009; Gernsbacher et al., 2005), the growth in autism diagnoses have incited concerns of an “autism epidemic” in public arenas (Lilienfeld & Arkowitz, 2007; Roithmayr, 2012) and of a growing “public health problem” in clinical and academic communities (Newschaffer & Curran, 2003).

Despite greater awareness of the condition, the opportunities and life-chances for autistic (1) people remain often severely limited in comparison with the non-autistic population. Autistic people are far less likely to have a well-paying job than non-autistic people (or a job at all, in fact), many have problems in their social lives, with limited social contacts outside their immediate family, and many also struggle with their health and their material well-being (Howlin et al., 2004, 2013).

Recent public policy (e.g., Autism Act 2009, Scottish Strategy for Autism) and service development (e.g., NICE guidelines; NICE, 2013) initiatives in the UK have responded directly to the recognition that autism is both common and has a substantial impact on individuals and society (Knapp, Romeo, & Beecham, 2009). The introduction of the first ever disability-specific law in England, the Autism Act 2009, placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Health to introduce a strategy for improving outcomes for autistic adults, and similar initiatives have been forged in the devolved authorities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Department of Health’s Adult Autism Strategy was announced in 2010 and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) commissioned a suite of guidelines on the identification, diagnosis and management of autism in children, young people and adults (NICE, 2011, 2012, 2013).

There has also been a dramatic expansion of autism research in the past decade (Dawson, 2013). A recent analysis of publications on autism from 1980 to 2010 by the US’s Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC, 2012a) showed that research activity on autism had demonstrated remarkable growth, far outpacing such growth in comparable fields, such as child psychiatry, pediatrics and developmental psychology. In 1980, there were approximately 200 journal articles on autism. In 2010, this number had grown to 2,400 publications per year – a 12-fold increase over the 30-year period.

Funding for autism research has also grown considerably. In the US, the Combating Autism Act authorized an unprecedented amount of money (US\$950 million over 5 years) dedicated for research on autism screening, early diagnosis, and intervention programs for children (Insel & Daniels, 2011; Singh, Iles, Lazzeroni, & Hallmayer, 2009). In 2010 alone, government and non-government funding for autism research in the US exceeded \$400 million (IACC, 2012b).

In the most comprehensive review of UK autism research ever undertaken, we found that almost £21 million was invested in autism research between 2007 and 2011 by UK government and non-government organisations, spread across 106 different projects (Pellicano, Dinsmore, & Charman, 2013). These projects were mostly directly towards children with autism. Only 11 projects exclusively targeted autistic adults. The Economic and Social Research Council made more funding awards than any other organization, while the Medical Research Council awarded more money for autism research than any other funder.

These developments are to be hugely welcomed. With 1% of the UK population lying on the autism spectrum, it is vital that we develop our understanding of autism. Greater knowledge of the nature of the condition and its potential impact is clearly of significant social import. The same comprehensive review also analysed the nature of the projects funded. This analysis of 106 funding awards made between 2007 and 2011 showed that projects in the areas of biology, brain and cognition far outstripped all other areas of autism research – both in terms of number of awards made and money spent (Pellicano et al., 2013). More than half (56%) of the UK grant expenditure went towards such grants, totaling £11.6 million spread across 60 research projects (see Figure 1). Comparatively little research in the UK during this period was targeted towards identifying effective services for autistic people and their families (5% of funding), on diagnosis (5%) and interventions (18%) or on societal issues (1%). This pattern is unusual internationally. In the US, for example, research is more evenly balanced between basic science and translational and applied research (Insel & Daniels, 2011; IACC, 2012a).

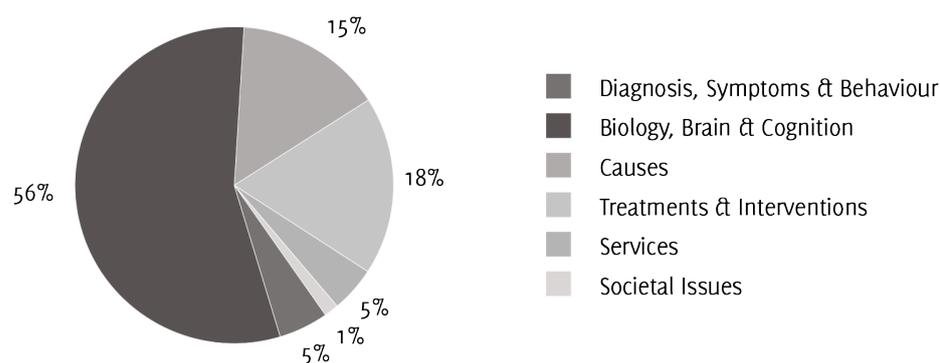


Figure 1. UK autism research funding by research category (2007 – 2011).

This imbalance in UK autism research – the heavy bias towards basic science – raises an important question: is the research profile commensurate with the needs and priorities of the autism communities? Very little is known, however, about what type of research autistic people, their parents and carers and practitioners actually

want and value, and whether the current funding landscape in the UK matches up to their stated priorities.

To address this question directly, we consulted with over 1,700 autistic people, their families, practitioners and researchers to understand what they thought of current autism research in the UK and where the funds towards autism research should be prioritized (Pellicano et al., 2013). The majority of our respondents – autistic adults, parents of children with autism, practitioners and autism researchers – were generally dissatisfied with the pattern of current funding. It is not that people did not value investment in basic science. They just also wished to see a more balanced profile of research, including greater investment in research that assists with the day-to-day living with autism – for those who are autistic themselves, their family members and those who work with them.

Indeed, some emphasised that the research failed to speak to the reality of their lives in the here-and-now (*parent*: “You know that’s all researchers are interested in, what causes it, what causes it? Doesn’t say much for the kids that have already got it, does it?”) Autistic adults also noted that the priorities represented “neurotypical priorities regarding us – not autistic people’s priorities”. Overall, respondents prioritised research that would (1) identify effective public services, (2) establish evidence-based interventions, treatments and education approaches, and (3) understand the place of autistic people in society. Participants also called for more research on under-served populations, including autistic adults and girls and women (Pellicano, Dinsmore, & Charman, 2014a).

These findings confirm that there is a huge gap between the type of knowledge being produced by current UK autism research and the stated priorities of the autism community, which means that, for the most part, the advances in research fail to impact upon those who need them most: autistic people, their parents and carers and those who help support them. One key question is *how* can autism researchers reduce this so-called translational gap? Or, putting that another way, what needs to be done to make the most of the advances in autism research?

The mismatch between what is being researched and the research that is preferred and prioritised by the UK’s broader autism community is attributable to (at least) two underlying causes. The first relates to the relative expertise of autism researchers in the UK. Analysis of the UK’s research activity in 2011 showed that cognition research had the greatest number and proportion of publications, reflecting the UK’s strength and leadership in this area (Pellicano et al., 2013). It is therefore possible that the established expertise in this particular area of autism research has been to the detriment of investment and training of researchers in newer, more applied areas, especially public health and social care, education and sociology. There is thus a need to build capacity in currently under-researched areas, especially in work that builds on existing strengths. While there are good reasons not to undermine areas of comparative advantage (like in the area of autistic cognition, for example), we need to promote work in under-researched areas both by working more collaboratively and broadening researchers’, especially early career researchers’, skills in more applied areas.

The second explanation relates to the nature of decision-making in research. Autistic people, their family members, and even practitioners, however, are rarely involved in the decision-making processes that shape research and its application (Pellicano et al., 2014b; Pellicano, Ne’eman, & Stears, 2011; Wallace et al., 2013). Research priorities are thus set almost exclusively by funders and academics in specialist fields. This is problematic not only because of the feeling of exclusion that it engenders but also because it generates concrete problems for those responsible for commissioning local autism services, people working in such services, and for autistic individuals and their families, when attempting to make evidence-based decisions on education, health and social care.

This situation is unlike research in other health-related areas (e.g., Chalmers, 2004; Partridge & Scadding, 2004), where there has been some steps towards reforming clinical research decision-making so that “patients and the public” are more actively involved in the research process (INVOLVE, 2012; see [www.invo.org.uk](http://www.invo.org.uk)). Indeed, it is plausibly argued that such involvement is essential to ensuring that scientific discoveries are more thoroughly *relevant* to patients and communities, are sufficiently *tailored* to the realities of their everyday lives, and are consistent with their values (van der Laan & Boenink, 2011).

Contemporary models of patient involvement have built upon Arnstein’s “ladder of citizen participation” (1969) in which the rungs of the ladder reflect increasing levels of participation and degree of citizen control in decision making ranging from *non-participation* or manipulation and therapy through to *tokenism*, including informing, consulting and placating, and to the higher rungs of *citizen power* via partnership, delegated power and citizen control. The aim in these models is to move “patient”/citizen/community involvement up the ladder of participation (see INVOLVE, 2012).

Very little, however, is known about the extent to which the autism community is engaged in research, beyond being involved as ‘subjects’ – which would equate to “non-participation” in Arnstein’s (1969) model. We therefore also asked researchers and members of the autism community about their experiences of engagement in research (Pellicano et al., 2014b). Specifically, we asked participants to think about whether they had been involved in *public dissemination* (receiving information about research through newsletters, blogs, events etc.), *dialogue* (direct communication or consultation between researchers and participants) or *partnership* (joint collaborative working between researchers and non-researchers).

While the majority of researchers said that they ‘frequently’ or ‘very frequently’ engaged in public dissemination and dialogue, only a minority of autistic people, family members and practitioners shared this view. All groups of respondents agreed, however, that active research partnership was a rare occurrence. In terms of satisfaction with the engagement they had experienced, the responses varied greatly across all four stakeholder groups, with researchers most commonly reporting ‘dissatisfaction’ with the level of engagement, and non-researchers most commonly endorsing ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’.

We also analysed the open-ended responses were analysed from the survey, focus groups and interviews. Several themes emerged from the researchers' responses. There were a variety of *attitudes towards community involvement*. While some researchers felt that there was a need for real community participation in research, others felt that people making judgments about research and research funding "have to be other scientists". *Barriers to involvement* were also frequently mentioned. Researchers were concerned about the diversity of views within the autism community, the unlikelihood of any disputes being resolved and some of the difficulties inherent in working with autistic people (*researcher*: "it can often be difficult to work with people with autism as their viewpoints may be held very firmly and a 'black and white' thinking style can be a challenge"). Notably, all of our researcher respondents implicitly viewed the autism community as relatively passive in the research process, rather than actively involved in knowledge production. Indeed, *no* researcher suggested that community members should be co-producers of research, that is, that the balance of power with regards to key scientific decision-making processes (priority-setting, funding decisions, design, implementation, interpretation or dissemination) should be equal between researchers and members of the autism community, as it is in community-based participatory models of research (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010), and none mentioned the possibility of user-controlled research (INVOLVE, 2012).

There were also common themes to the responses of non-researchers (autistic people, family members and practitioners) (Pellicano et al., 2014b). The *nature of participants' experience of involvement* in research varied widely. Some people, particularly parents, had never been involved in research. For others who had been involved, some people described positive experiences (*parent*: "those [researchers] I have come into contact with have had a genuine interest and concern for people with autism."). On the whole, however, the descriptions of autistic adults' and family members' interactions with researchers were largely negative. Family members felt disappointed and frustrated at being "mined" for information and having little or no opportunity to learn about the resulting discoveries and what they might mean for them (*parent*: "researchers are more keen on collecting data, not providing results"). Autistic adults reported feeling objectified ("we are a bit like monkeys in a zoo") and their experiential expertise disregarded by researchers. This *lack of reciprocity* resulted in feelings of distrust and being less motivated to participate in future research (*autistic adult*: "Whatever we say, is that really going to influence anyone?") (see also Milton & Bracher, 2013).

The majority of autistic adults, parents of children with autism and professionals wanted to be more involved in the research process. But there was resistance – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit – to engaging the autism community from researchers themselves. Scientific research prizes itself for being impartial, falsifiable and rigorous. For some, the very involvement of those with a vested interest (e.g., "patients", community members) was a potential source of bias. But scientists themselves are not free of bias. And there are ways of including community members in the research process, while maintaining scientific rigour (see Nicolaidis et al., 2011). In any case, without such involvement, the research findings are at risk of being 'lost in translation'.

## **The path forward**

There is, unfortunately, a disconnect at present between the UK's investment in autism research and the life-chances for autistic people and their families. Our findings have highlighted a need to invest in currently under-served areas, especially in work that translates basic scientific knowledge into practice for those with autism. There is also an urgent need for greater involvement of the UK's autism community both in priority-setting exercises in specific areas and in research more broadly to ensure that resources are targeting the critical needs of autistic people and their families – however difficult that may seem. Autistic people, family members, practitioners need to be involved in various stages of the research process – from establishing the research priorities and conducting the research, to disseminating and implementing the final products/intervention.

How should we instill an ethic of engagement? And how do we go about creating a participatory framework for UK autism research? Building and maintaining mutually supportive partnerships is the first place to start (Israel et al., 2005). Researchers must listen to the views and perspectives of the autism community to appreciate what it is like to be autistic, to care for someone who is autistic, or to work with someone who is autistic. And the autism community must work towards gaining a better understanding of research and the challenges involved. We – researchers and funders, the autism community and the public – need to work together towards advancing autism research in the UK. We need to invest more in those areas that are under-resourced and in populations that are under-served, we need to join together in innovative new partnerships and we must seek to ensure that everyone with a stake in the research process is given an opportunity to make their voice heard.

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## **Notes:**

1. The term “autistic person” is the preferred language of many people on the spectrum (e.g., Sinclair, 1999). In this paper, we use this term as well as person-first language to respect the wishes of all individuals on the spectrum.

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## **Chapter 5: Special Educational Needs and Inclusion: Reflection, Renewal and Reality**

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### **Introduction**

In 2006, the NASUWT commissioned us to conduct research on SEN and inclusion in order to explore the impact of policy on teachers' experience in their schools. Stage 1 of the research was a literature review (Ellis et al., 2008) published in 2008. This explored policy and guidance documents as well as a broad range of other relevant literature in order to develop a deeper understanding of the influences shaping the dominant discourses on SEN and inclusion. It also served to highlight some of the potential sources of tension for teachers and their schools in implementing the policy of educational inclusion pursued by the Labour government. The review informed the lines of enquiry for the second stage of the research (Ellis et al 2012). This stage drew on over 1,500 responses to an online survey from a range of teachers in primary, secondary and special schools and case study data gathered from over 100 teachers in a range of schools from four local authorities (LAs).

The research project as a whole spanned an interesting period in the development of national policy for special educational needs. At the point the research was initially commissioned the operation of the policy of inclusion pursued by the Labour government since *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE, 1997) had recently received some high profile criticism (eg Ofsted 2004, Warnock 2005, Macbeath et al 2006, Education and Skills Committee 2006). Data collection for stage two of the research began in the early part of 2010 with the online survey. This captured teachers' opinions in the final months of the Labour government. By the time case study visits commenced the Coalition government had been elected. The final case studies took place after Ofsted (2010) had voiced their concerns regarding over identification and inconsistency in the application of the term 'SEN'. Though this article primarily focuses on the second stage of the research (Ellis et al 2012), we view this as part of a whole project and so also make reference to the original literature review (Ellis et al 2008). The policy analysis conducted at that stage and extended to encompass more recent literature in the second report (Ellis et al 2012) was central in researching teachers' experience and interpretation of policy and guidance.

### **The target issues and intended outcomes**

The initial literature review (Ellis et al 2008) generated numerous key findings and key themes. A salient point in light of later national developments was the recognition through this review that much of the terminology within the Code of Practice (DfES 2001), as the principle guide on the identification of SEN, was open to interpretation. Crucially the formal definition of SEN itself contained interpretable phrases such as 'a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age' and 'educational provision which is additional to, or otherwise different from, the educational provision made generally for children of their age in schools maintained by the LEA, other than special schools, in the area' (DfES 2001: 6). Such a definition may have been workable if viewed from a perspective of a difficulty in learning residing entirely within the individual, entirely unaffected by situational and

locational factors and a standard, unchanging offer of educational provision. However, in an era of inclusion where it is accepted that 'the child's difficulty in learning 'may be caused or exacerbated by the school's learning environment or adult/child relationships' (DfES 2001: 6) and there is a need for 'the progressive extension of the capacity of mainstream schools to provide for children with a wide range of needs' (DfEE 1997: 43), such a definition becomes problematic in ensuring consistency in identification between schools. It is interesting to note that in the Labour government's *Excellence for All Children* (DfEE 1997) this potential for variation in identification between schools caused by the formal definition of SEN was explicitly recognised:

'Whether or not a child has SEN will therefore depend both on the individual and on local circumstances. It may be entirely consistent with the law for a child to be said to have special educational needs in one school, but not in another.' (DfEE 1997: 12)

We developed a view through our examination of policy and guidance that as the policy of inclusion developed this created a potential difficulty for schools in interpreting a Code of Practice (DfES 2001) that in its processes, if not its spirit, still reflected a medical model of disability and difference.

Highlighting a potential tension between strands of policy for SEN and inclusion may seem surprising given the close association between the two terms. In contrast, a potential tension between a policy for inclusion and a policy for standards raising agenda has been well documented (e.g. Booth *et al.*, 1997, 1998, Rouse & Florian, 1997, Bines, 1999, Thomas & Loxley, 2001, Audit Commission, 2002). In addition to this more usually identified issue we perceived a more specific tension. There seemed to be an incongruity between the 2005 White Paper's concerned observation rooted in a standards raising perspective that:

'Some children who have fallen behind have SEN: 65% of pupils at age 11 who do not attain the expected level in English, and 55% of those not attaining the expected level in maths, are identified as having SEN. By no means all children with special educational needs are falling behind – many are meeting and exceeding expectations' (DfES 2005a: 54).

and the guidance provided through the Code of Practice (DfES 2001) on the identification of SEN. Based on this guidance, one could argue that it would be surprising if this was *not* the profile of attainment nationally.

The definition of SEN requires the child to have a learning difficulty defined in terms of 'a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age, (DfES 2001: 6) and the key test of the need for the additional or different action that forms part of the definition of SEN is that 'progress is not adequate' (DfES 2001: 52). We are certainly not suggesting that underachievement of pupils with SEN is acceptable and should go unchallenged or that some pupils with particular forms of SEN can exceed national age related expectations. Rather our concern relates specifically to the impact on schools in terms of the identification of SEN. There seems to be an inherent problem if pupils are identified in one way and then when their attainment presents as entirely compatible with this, it is remarked upon in national policy documents with a degree of concern.

From the literature review (Ellis et al 2008) we approached the collection of data through the survey and case study visit with a view that schools and teachers were operating in a policy context where policy and guidance for SEN was interpretable and the three standards of policy – inclusion, SEN and standards raising – potentially created tensions that needed to be resolved by individual establishments at the level of day-to-day practice. The predominant focus for this second phase of the research was the variability inherent within identification, provision and outcomes in relation to SEN. In order to explore political, professional and personal differences in attribution of causes and solutions to this variability, the following research questions were explored:

1. How are teachers interpreting and implementing policy for SEN and inclusion?
2. How are teachers experiencing teaching pupils with SEN in a policy context of inclusion?
3. What are the training and support needs identified by teachers in relation to SEN?

In order to address these questions the methodology employed sought to investigate the following areas pertinent to the education of pupils with SEN:

1. The relationship between the definition of SEN in the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and the identification of SEN;
2. Training, support and development needs;
3. Policy and guidance for SEN and inclusion;
4. The deployment of support staff;
5. Behaviour and SEN;
6. LA support

The intended outcome was to provide a second report (Ellis et al., 2012) to follow on from the original literature review (Ellis et al., 2008) that provided a comprehensive insight into how teachers experienced, interpreted and implemented policy and guidance for SEN and inclusion. This reflected the priorities of NASUWT as the funders of this research. As a professional association key purposes for them were to achieve a research informed understanding of the impact of policy and guidance on members and to possess information that could be used to inform both their own policy stance on SEN and inclusion and future contributions to central government in response to consultations and calls for views.

### **What we found**

In the context of this article it is only possible to provide a broad overview of the findings. We would encourage readers to go to the original report (Ellis et al., 2012) to explore findings of interest in the broader context of surrounding discussion.

From the survey data four main findings emerged in relation to teachers' interpretation and implementation of policy for SEN and inclusion. These were:

- An agreement from 41% that national guidance for SEN and inclusion influences practice *BUT* only 13.7% considering that any *specific* national policy or guidance documents on SEN and inclusion had been particularly influential on their school's practice.
- Only 17% of teachers reported that policy and guidance for SEN was clear to implement
- Relatively large proportions had not heard of *quality first inclusive teaching*, *waves of intervention* or *provision mapping*.
- Ofsted was a trigger for engagement or action

These views were largely confirmed by the case study visits. The majority of teachers we spoke to did not directly engage with policy and guidance. Instead they relied on what they needed to know being disseminated if it was important. Some of the head teachers and SENCOs we spoke to took a similar view, relying on local authority bulletins, briefing events or advisory/support service staff for knowledge of key developments at national level that might have direct implications for school practice. There was a general view that policy and guidance was likely to be of limited practical value and also that it changed frequently anyway. Interviewees typically viewed Ofsted as a trigger for engagement or action in relation to national policy and guidance. The message seemed to be that anything about which a school might be inspected tended to be addressed. Identification of SEN was not seen as a major issue. Teachers, SENCOs and Heads generally felt secure in their own approach, but recognised that some schools might adopt a different one. This is not to suggest there were not dilemmas in identification and some teachers articulated these. For example one teacher told us about identification:

*'It's not easy as a subject teacher. I have children with very low literacy and low attention – they are very difficult to teach, but are they SEN? I don't know. Do they need extra support? Yes. Have we got that? No. Do they disrupt others? Yes.'* (Secondary teacher)

Another told us:

*'I have students who don't have SEN but who cannot access the curriculum because they have difficulty with attention and engagement, so I have to ask, 'Is there a specific reason for this? Or are they just low achieving?'* (Secondary teacher).

Despite these dilemmas, it appeared that schools and individual teachers were making sense of identification in what they considered to be in the best interests of their pupils and were not unduly concerned with whether this was consistent with other schools locally or nationally. There was a feeling from many colleagues that we spoke to during the visits that identification as SEN was easier when the pupil had a clear medical diagnosis or label.

Six main findings emerged from the survey data in relation to teachers' experience of teaching pupils with SEN in a policy context of inclusion. These were:

- Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) was the most difficult form of SEN to include in lessons (59.9%), the next most difficult were those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (12.7%).
- Just under 80% of mainstream teachers indicated they that experienced a tension between policies for inclusion and policies for raising academic standards
- 83.2% of mainstream respondents agreed that the availability of more additional adult support staff would be useful (in relation to special educational needs of pupils they currently work with).
- 78% agreed they could identify the learning needs of pupils with SEN in their current classes.
- 59% agreed they could effectively assess the progress of pupils with range of SEN in their current classes.

- 49% agreed they were able to effectively teach pupils with a range of SEN in their current classes.

BESD is likely to be viewed as the most difficult form of SEN to include due to the impact on teaching and learning within the group setting of the classroom when problematic behaviour occurs. This is consistent with older research (eg Avramidis et al., 2000a, 2000b) regarding the views of teachers and others on the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties. Regardless of whether or not they fit within the new category of social, mental and emotional health that replaces BESD in the draft Code (DFE 2013), it seems likely that the group of pupils respondents had in mind when answering this question in our survey will continue to be a source of concern for teachers.

The strong belief in the usefulness of more adult support is interesting in the light of critical perspectives (e.g. Ofsted 2004, 2006; Blatchford et al 2009) regarding methods of deployment and effectiveness of this form of support in terms of the contribution to pupil progress. The reasons that interviewees gave for needing support staff were usually related to the fact that teachers are required to teach a wide range of pupils in a group setting. One problem a number of interviewees articulated during the case study visits was that even where they had differentiated the task, they were still reliant on the pupil engaging with it. This required constant chivvyng and coaxing that prescribed the need for additional adult support. If pupils were not enabled to get on with the task, then not only did they not make the required progress but behavioural problems also ensued. This often had a negative impact on the learning of the whole class. An issue that emerges from views expressed by interviewees is whether the impact of TAs should be considered not only in relation to the pupils to whom their support is directed, but also in relation to making the class teaching of a diverse range of pupils manageable.

The last three bullet points shown above present a picture of the realities of practice. For the vast majority *identifying the learning needs of pupils with SEN* is not such an issue as *effectively teaching* or *assessing progress*. A salient point is that a considerable amount of attention has been focused on the identification of learning needs (eg Ofsted 2010, DFE 2011) but the survey data would suggest it is the area of least concern for teachers. In the case of both *effectively teaching* or *assessing progress* approximately 20% of respondents recorded a 'don't know' response. This may indicate some uncertainty and possibly a lack of confidence in their own practice rather than necessarily a weakness. It was also clear from the teachers we spoke to during the case study visits that their concerns were more to do with how to teach pupils with SEN effectively within a class of 25 -30 rather than the identification of SEN or a lack of knowledge in relation to specific types of SEN. Secondary colleagues and teachers of older primary pupils made the point that they were often not involved in the initial identification of pupils as having SEN as this had usually taken place earlier.

From the case study interviews it was clear that teachers do not think of pupils with SEN in isolation. Although SEN is a strand of policy that is currently receiving major attention (eg DFE 2011, 2013), it seems that within the classroom teachers are focused on trying to effectively teach a range of vulnerable groups of which SEN is

one - albeit it, unlike the others, subject to a set of procedures set out in the Code of Practice (DfES 2001). In many of the schools we visited it was evident that data on pupil progress was scrutinised regularly. A lot of those we spoke to used a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating system to identify pupils who were not making sufficient progress. This tended to encompass all pupils, including those with SEN. Most teachers we spoke to saw the value of this focus on the use of data to monitor progress in terms of the degree of movement from an individual pupil's own starting point. It was viewed less positively where teachers felt that data was used to set unrealistic expectations with regard to closing the gap between current attainment and national age related expectations.

Five main findings emerged from the survey data in relation to the training and support needs identified by teachers in relation to SEN. These were:

- Over 70% indicated that their Initial Teacher Training represented inadequate preparation to teach pupils with a range of SEN.
- Approximately 60% of teachers indicated that they needed more training on SEN.
- 'More knowledge about SEN' was seen as less useful than 'more time', greater access to specialist teachers who work directly with pupils' and 'more additional adult support'.
- Teachers typically look for support within their own school - over three quarters of mainstream survey respondents said they would ask the SENCO.
- One-off after schools sessions and all or part of staff development days were the main forms of training in SEN.

It appeared from the survey that there was not much training in relation to SEN being undertaken and most was in the form of one-off after schools sessions and all or part of staff development days. There was little indication of accredited training being undertaken and very few mainstream staff who responded to the survey had any specialist qualifications in relation to SEN. The most common source of information for teachers appeared to be the SENCO or colleagues. These points, along with the findings regarding a perceived need for more training and the view that initial teacher training provided inadequate preparation, could be interpreted as evidence that initial teacher training for SEN needs to be strengthened and also that those in post are in need of more training in this area. The obvious counter argument to the views expressed regarding initial teacher training is that the annual NQT survey has consistently reported (eg TDA 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, TA 2012) that around 90% of respondents rated their training as satisfactory or better in:

'helping them to teach pupils with special educational needs in their classes, with appropriate support' (TA 2012: 58).

An inevitable weakness of a questionnaire-based survey is that it is very difficult to know what is in the respondent's mind when they select a response option. When we conducted the interviews we were presented with a very different view on the issue of training. Interviewees generally did not seem to be suggesting that they were in need of training in order to effectively teach the pupils they currently encountered in their classes. The younger teachers we spoke to did not present a view that they had started their careers insufficiently equipped to teach pupils with SEN, even though

there was variation in the level and type of input they received during initial teacher training related to SEN. Caution needs to be exercised in assuming the case study participants reflected the views and experiences of the wide range of survey respondents, but the interviews caused us to question the meaning behind the tick the individual respondent places on a questionnaire when asked about the need for more training. When surveys like ours appear to provide evidence of a need for more training in SEN it is perhaps necessary to consider whether this is indicative of teachers feeling ill equipped to carry out their role effectively or simply reflects an understandable and commendable professional belief that extending one's knowledge, skills and understanding is always desirable rather than? As one secondary SENCO told us,

“I would tick ‘yes’ to more training but do not know what that would be”

From those who spoke about the type of training that would be useful, there was a clear sense that training in relation to individuals with SEN does not necessarily help in teaching individuals with SEN in groups. Any training needs to take account of this difference. In light of this finding it is a shame that the impetus that seemed to develop in the mid noughties, encouraged by National Strategy materials (eg DfES 2002, 2005b), regarding the features of quality first inclusive teaching for pupils with a range of needs seems to have waned somewhat.

### **The impact on policy and practice**

The impact on policy and practice is difficult to gauge. We disseminated the findings through:

- An NASUWT launch conference for the first report (Ellis et al 2008).
- A summary of the second report (Ellis et al 2012) produced and distributed ahead of its publication at the NASUWT's annual Easter conference in 2011.
- An NASUWT launch conference for the second report (Ellis et al 2012).
- An article entitled 'Identification of SEN: is consistency a realistic or worthy aim?' (Ellis and Tod, 2012) in *Support for Learning*.
- A Keynote presentation entitled 'Enduring and Emerging Issues within the Green Paper' at the 2012 SENCO Update Conference.
- Copies of both reports being distributed to approximately 750 SENCOs who have followed the National Award for SEN Coordination at Canterbury Christ Church University. The research also informs teaching on this course.

In addition, the literature review (Ellis et al 2008) informed the thinking behind the chapter 'Reframing special educational needs' in our publication *Behaviour for Learning: Proactive Approaches to Behaviour Management* (Ellis and Tod 2009). Though we know what we have done with the published reports (Ellis et al 2008, 2012), we have little knowledge of the use to which others have put them. It is difficult to gauge any impact at the level of changes in practice though the NASUWT has used the research in their responses to government. Both reports were included in NASUWT evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee in December 2012 and to the Children and Families Bill in March 2013. The literature review (Ellis et al., 2008) was included as evidence within the Department of Education Northern Ireland review of SEN (1). In addition, for both reports it is possible to identify numerous citations. This, however, only gives an indication of awareness of their existence rather than impact.

### **Implications for the interface between policy, practice and research**

As a result of the SEN Green Paper (DFE 2011) and subsequently the draft Code of Practice (DFE 2013) a lot of attention is being focused on Education, Health and Care Plans and other processes and procedures such as the Local Offer. Through such changes it could be argued that policy makers are manipulating the variables over which they have the most direct control in the hope that this will reduce variability in identification, assessment and provisions and lead to better outcomes. Processes and procedures for Education, Health and Care plans seek to address some recognised issues with the system (eg Lamb, 2009), but from our research we would suggest that the level of attention currently focused on processes and procedures affecting a relatively small proportion of pupils mainstream teachers encounter is unhelpful. Most teachers most of the time encounter those pupils who will either be categorised as ‘Children and young people with special educational needs but no EHC plan’ under the Children and Families Bill or have greater difficulties in learning than their same age peers that are not considered sufficiently significant to warrant identification as SEN at all. We would also note that for all the faults of the current Code (DfES, 2001) related to the interpretable nature of its guidance, the draft Code appears in comparison to be considerably weaker in providing useable, practical guidance on the graduated response schools are encouraged to adopt. It would seem to offer more scope for variability in identification rather than less.

The draft Code (DFE 2013: 86 - 87) notes that:

‘With the right staff training, strategies and support in place the majority of children and young people with SEN are already successfully included in mainstream education’

Identifying what ‘the right staff training, strategies and support’ is could provide a useful shared focus for practitioners, researchers and policy makers. From our research we would suggest there are at least five points that need to be considered:

- What methodological approaches do we use to identify ‘the right staff training, strategies and support?’
- The notion of a single ‘right’ way needs to be questioned. There needs to be recognition that whether we are talking about staff training, strategies or support, we need to seek to build an evidence base of what works for whom under what conditions. This would allow informed decisions to be made about the most appropriate form of training for teacher, the teaching strategies to be employed and the support to be provided.
- What do we count as improved ‘outcomes’ and what are the elements of teaching most likely to secure these?
- Teachers need training and strategies that reflect the fact that they are teaching children with SEN *in groups* - because that’s what they have to do!
- The feasibility of implementation in a classroom context will always be Important – ‘specialist’ approaches are typically characterised by the frequency and intensity of the intervention and the increased monitoring of, and responsiveness to, the individual’s response

#### Notes:

1. [http://www.deni.gov.uk/appendix\\_6\\_-\\_responses\\_from\\_organisations\\_representing\\_the\\_education\\_sector.pdf](http://www.deni.gov.uk/appendix_6_-_responses_from_organisations_representing_the_education_sector.pdf) , accessed 31/1/14

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## **Chapter 6: Evidence based policy and practice: The Better Communication Research Programme**

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Evidence based and evidence informed policies are of increasing interest at government level in many countries. Implementing this approach is not always easy, even if the will is there, and it must be recognised that research evidence is only one of the factors that politicians consider they need to take into account. In this paper we first review briefly the issue of policy and practice related research and then examine the Better Communication Research Programme (BCRP) as a successful example of research that has had direct impact on both policy and practice.

### **Developing evidence based policy and practice**

Policy development, both national and local, is ultimately a political activity. Research evidence is one of a number of competing factors that must be considered, including values, ideologies, political necessity and expediency, and finance. Furthermore, research evidence may not be given sufficient weight or may be ignored when a new government comes to power and has different policies. For example, our research on parenting programmes commissioned by the Labour government as part of the Respect Agenda (the Parenting Early Intervention Programme) provided strong evidence for a study of over 2000 parents in 18 local authorities (LAs) that the three evidence based programmes targeted at parents of children 8-13 years with behavioural difficulties were also effective when rolled out on the larger scale (Lindsay, Strand & Davis, 2011). As a result, that government funded all LAs to implement evidence based targeted parenting programmes; our research showed this national roll out was also effective (Lindsay & Strand, 2013). However, the new Coalition government decided to switch resources to universal parenting programmes for younger children (0-5 years).

A government will have general policy predispositions relating to its basic values and ideology; a similar situation occurs at local government level. Education has often had substantial direction emanating from broad social policy including comprehensivisation of secondary schools, positive action (and financial allocation) to address socioeconomic disadvantage, and more recently marketization of educational services. Some issues, even some mantras, reappear albeit in different forms, for example “choice” and “diversity”. In addition there are imperatives that are more firmly educational, for example, approaches to improve literacy; and other imperatives with characteristics of both general social policy and more specific educational policy, for example inclusion (social inclusion, inclusive education). Evidence based policy and practice is long established in health but has more recently become more of a driver within broad social policy. The Labour government funded a large number of initiatives aimed at improving educational provision, informed by research into their effectiveness and usefulness, as well as acceptability. There are at least six requirements for the development of evidence

based policy and practice (Lindsay & Strand, 2013). First, there must be evidence that the intervention is effective. Second, a policy must be agreed and approved for implementation. Third, systems are required for ensuring that the implementation will be effective; in particular, training will often be necessary. Fourth, there must be a supportive (or at least non-antagonistic) context to host the intervention. Fifth, national and/or local leaders must appreciate the benefits of the intervention, including both effectiveness and cost-effectiveness. Sixth, there must be a political will.

These requirements span political and scientific domains. With respect to the latter, the production of evidence, there are also a number of elements. First, there must be a sound theoretical basis. Second, a specific intervention must be developed, designed from the principles derived from the science. Third, initial studies are required to test out the ideas and provide a basis for the fourth stage, an efficacy trial. Normally, a randomised controlled trial (RCT) is regarded as necessary to demonstrate efficacy. However, a positive RCT is not sufficient. More trials, especially trials by independent researchers are needed, as initial trials are often conducted by the original developer of the intervention and independent trials may have less positive results (Eisner, 2009). Finally, it is necessary to ensure that the intervention remains effective when rolled out in community settings, and especially on a large scale. For an example see the evaluation of the Parenting Early Intervention Programme described above (Lindsay et al., 2011; Lindsay & Strand, 2013).

### **The Better Communication Research Programme**

In 2008, a review led by John Bercow, MP, subsequently the Speaker of the House of Commons, reported (Bercow, 2008). Together with colleagues, we had provided empirical research evidence and a review of the research literature, to the Bercow review of provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN; Lindsay et al, 2010). The Secretary of State, Ed Balls, accepted all of the Bercow recommendations, including the funding of a research programme as part of the Better Communication Action Plan (Ref). The aims of the BCRP (2009-12) were to improve the evidence base available to commissioners, policy makers, practitioners, and parents in developing services for children and young people with SLCN.

The research team designed ten main projects with the active involvement of a steering committee comprising representatives of the DfE, the voluntary and community sector (including Afasic representing parents), practitioners and researchers. These drew on the Bercow Review, our associated research (Lindsay et al., 2010), and previous studies concerning educational provision and practice (Dockrell et al., 2007) and informed by wider research. For an overview of the BCRP as a whole see Dockrell et al. (in press); in addition, all 19 reports for the BCRP are available on the DfE website, comprising one overview, two interim, 10 technical, and four thematic reports <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/>. An indication of the range of research is given below according to major themes.

## **Understanding speech, language and communication needs: Profiles of need and provision**

Four studies provided evidence on this topic. We designed and validated a research based observation tool to enable teachers in reception and Key Stage 1 to profile the language learning environment, opportunities and interactions in their classrooms to examine the extent to which this was effective in supporting the development of language and communication (Dockrell et al., 2012). The national data sets (National Pupil Database and School Census) comprising the 6.4 million children in the state education system were analysed in order to examine the prevalence rates and trajectories over time of children with SLCN and ASD (Meschi et al., 2012); and the factors that affected identification of SLCN or ASD, including social disadvantage, age and ethnicity (Strand & Lindsay, 2012). In our prospective study we examined the abilities, needs and provision made to meet the needs of children with language impairment (LI) or ASD (Dockrell et al., 2012). The perspectives of parents of children with SLCN, and of the children themselves were explored (Roulstone et al., 2012).

Our studies indicated both the lack of clarity of the SLCN category and the importance of focusing on children's needs rather than primarily focusing on a diagnostic category. For example, we demonstrated the substantial overlap of (as well as differences between) children with a language impairment (LI) and those with ASD. For example, on average children with LI had lower levels of language ability than those with ASD but there were high levels of overlap on measures of language, attainment and social relationships. We also showed how the prevalence SLCN at school action plus (SAP) level of need reduces steadily over key stages 1 and 2; and the higher prevalence of children with statements for ASD compared with those as SAP – the contrary pattern to that for SLCN, and indeed children with other types of SLCN. We also identified the substantial numbers of children whose primary need is recategorised, either in terms of level, with large numbers reducing from SAP to school action or even no SEN over key stage 3; or changing category of SEN from SLCN or ASD over this period – the 'switchers'.

In terms of provision, we demonstrated the high reliance on teaching assistants, as might be expected, but also that children with ASD were likely to receive higher levels of 1-1 support than children with LI from both TAs and also from speech and language therapists, despite having less impaired language ability.

## **The relationship between speech, language and communication needs and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties**

Drawing again on the prospective study, we carried out a detailed analysis of the nature and levels of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties among children with LI or ASD. This indicated a substantial overlap as well as differences in degree. For example, levels of peer problems were significantly above the norm for both groups but more so for children with ASD; by contrast, conduct problems, although more prevalent than the norm, were less of a concern (Charman et al., under review; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012). To complement others' views on the difficulties that the children experience we asked the children about their own quality of life. Many of the children and young people were positive about aspects of their lives but they also identified area of concern such as reduced autonomy.

## **Effectiveness and cost effectiveness of interventions for children with SLCN**

We carried out interviews with speech and language therapy and educational psychology managers to identify the main interventions used by practitioners working with the range of children with SLCN (Roulstone et al., 2013 – CLTT); on the basis of this we conducted a national survey to identify the use of different forms of interventions, with children presenting with different needs (Roulstone et al, 2012). We then conducted a detailed review of the research evidence of the efficacy of these interventions. This resulted in an analysis of 57 interventions currently in use (Law, Lee, Roulstone, Wren, Zeng, & Lindsay, 2012). In addition, we examined the evidence for ‘dosage’ of interventions (Zeng, Law & Lindsay, 2012), of cost-effectiveness of interventions (Beecham, Law, Zeng, & Lindsay, 2012); and created a tool for practitioners or commissioners to use to estimate cost effectiveness for their own services (Law, Beecham & Lindsay, 2012).

## **Impact of the BCRP**

The purpose of the BCRP was to inform policy and practice. To assist this, the DfE funded the Communication Trust to disseminate and help to embed the BCRP evidence. To date this has taken several forms. The Communication Trust has created a highly successful web version of *What Works for SLCN?* [<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/schools/what-works/>]. This allows searches of the evidence according to parameters such as type of SLCN, or age of child. A group convened by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, including Dockrell, Law & Roulstone, is updating this resource over time. The Communication Trust has also produced a version of the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool (<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/communication-supporting-classroom-observation-tool/>). Both of these have been highly popular.

The RCSLT has been directly involved in disseminating results from the BCRP through Webinars for speech and language therapists and targeted dissemination activities for commissioners

At the political level, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties (2013) drew heavily on the BCRP evidence in producing its report on the relationship between SLCN and social disadvantage: their report makes 52 separate references. Its Chair, Lord Ramsbotham, gave the “*strongest possible support for the excellent reports, which we hope will be adopted and exploited by successive governments for years to come. They are a priceless treasure trove of information, evaluation and advice and a credit to the work of all those who contributed to their research and production*” Similarly, the development of the Children and Families Bill also drew on the BCRP, as acknowledged by the Minister, Edward Timpson; furthermore, major contributions to the consultation on the Bill and the new draft SEN Code of Practice (2013) drew on the BCRP evidence.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper we have explored briefly some pertinent issues when considering the development of evidence based policy and practice. We presented a general model that is appropriate when the focus is a specific intervention, such as a ‘programme’.

However, policy and practice are often much more complex. Our example of the BCRP is provided as a wide-ranging research programme with a much broader brief: to improve policy and practice for children and young people with SLCN. Evidence of individual interventions in this case is insufficient. Rather, what was needed was a multi-faceted research programme. This addressed fundamental questions of the nature of different types of SLCN, leading to our argument that the evidence demanded interventions (including provision) based not only on diagnosis (e.g. ASD or LI?) but rather on individual and group needs (because of the high level of overlap in characteristics and needs). The BCRP also produced evidence of current practice and tools to assist commissioners, policy makers and practitioners. Furthermore, we researched the perspectives of parents and the children and young people themselves.

This very multi-faceted evidence base is a very rich resource that has been valued. But note the added dimension of the DfE funding the Communication Trust to take the research findings and not only disseminate but also work with commissioners, policy makers and practitioners in order to have direct effects and improve the provision made for children with SLCN.

In summary, we suggest that this example of the BCRP provides an important example of a research programme comprising a sequence of initial research (fundamental, policy- and practice-related) being used politically to inform a government review (Bercow Review); that review leading to political decisions based on the research, and also commissioning new research; a substantial research programme co-produced with civil servants, practitioners, the VCS and parent representatives; the production of a range of research which includes fundamental as well as policy or practice related foci; and then the take up of this research both politically (e.g. the All Party Group and the Children and Families Bill) and by practitioners and commissioners (e.g. use of tools); supported and mediated by the VCS organisations, primarily the Communication Trust, Royal College of Speech, Language Therapists and Afasic. We would argue that there are important lessons to be learned from this example in terms of maximising impact including not only the quality of the research itself but also its nature (both fundamental research and policy- and practice-related); the active engagement with government departments, in this case primarily the DfE, and with practitioners and the voluntary and community sector. As a result, as researchers we can provide research findings that can be influential on both policy and practice, but mediated by and in conjunction with, organisations that are skilled in dissemination influencing others.

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## **Chapter 7: Developing agenda for research-policy/practice interaction: small group discussion**

What follows is a summary of the discussions in each of the groups, which met twice during the day's seminar. Groups addressed some of these questions:

1. How could the kind of research they had just heard about be made more usable in future?
2. What might be the broader implications for the research-policy-practice interface? e.g. how to enhance user influence on research priorities, questions and methodologies;
3. What conditions are needed to make this happen? e.g. professional learning, organizational and funding issues.
4. How easy will it be for the 'research community' to have a collective view on research priorities when there is competition between institutions for funding/status?

As some reporters mentioned what they covered may not fully summarise all that was discussed. These summaries were spoken and recorded, with others in the groups having a chance to comment on their accuracy.

### **Group 1:**

This group noted that there had been a change in the research landscape especially in terms of research having an impact. Some projects talk about a top down approach; trying to get to the top-level people. It was noted that aiming to have an impact on those in local and central government is much harder because these people are hard to find and organizations disaggregated. There was discussion about the DFE as a funder of research and a disconnection or distance, like the separation raised in the Blatchford/ Webster paper (Chapter 3); that those who commission research are not always those people who follow up with projects at the end when they are completed. It was also suggested that this might explain why it is very difficult to get that continuation and follow through of the research.

This group also had a vision of an a-political or non-political arms length kind of body that was empowered to take a long-term vision of the best way forward for research. The underpinning assumption was that governments and politicians take a short-term view. Linked to this was the idea that with some body like this there might be more sequential research. What members of this group found impressive about the projects discussed at the seminar was the building of one project onto another, one leading to another. There was also the idea that, in terms of sequential research, starting with efficacy should lead onto effectiveness research. The short termism of much funding means that that it is much harder to do that.

### **Group 2:**

This group had four points. The first one was the implications of research studies for enhancing policy and practice. The NASUWT research (chapter 5) was discussed in this respect. Because it was drawn from teachers in schools it was immediately applicable. One member of the team talked about using it with a team of specialist teachers as a general way of highlighting issues. One can ask, 'this is what the

study's sample of teachers think, here's a national study'. It can help SENCOs to understand the world beyond being a SENCO. From the 'Better Communication' research (chapter 6) they discussed how it enables schools to look more carefully at what children's primary needs were. This is in the context of the way in which there have been changes in how children's needs are recorded by schools. This helps one to see more what the children's needs were and what that means at transition to secondary schools.

They next asked how can the use of research be improved? This led to a consideration of how the Better Communication research can enable 'communicating supporting classrooms' forward. Some members said that they missed some of the good practice guidance that was on Government websites before the new Government policy change, e.g. the Inclusion Development Plan materials which has been archived so not easily found.

The third question that the group examined was 'what current and future issues and questions can research projects be asked to address?' and that is where for the first time the issue of parents focusing on quantity rather than quality came up. This was a direct response to the Blatchford / Webster teaching assistant research. The group did not feel that the issue was resolved, but thought that it was there and needed to be recognized. Discussion also moved onto the question of 'if teachers and teaching assistants are not working well enough together to ensure that the teaching assistant adds value' what is to be done to explore how they could work together and use research to inform that. Also discussed was an issue from the NASUWT research about teachers finding it most difficult to teach children with behaviour difficulties or with autism spectrum difficulties effectively in their classes. Since that research was done, some thought that there has been a notable political impact on that area because all the 'Back on Track' developments under the previous Government had been shelved; that is, the guidance and the duty on schools to collaborate together. The emphasis had been on developing more PRU's, key stage 4 pupils being allowed to go to FE colleges, flexibilities and increased potential for elective home education. There are real research opportunities, it was felt, to look again at the rights and entitlements of young people who are not particularly attractive to anybody apart from perhaps diagnostic psychiatrists.

Finally this group asked how can the research policy and practice interface be improved in the SEN disability field? In this context Ofsted thematic inspections were discussed and how research informed these thematic inspections. There was also discussion about the partnership with the third sector as there might be some real opportunities there.

Group 3:

This group did not want to repeat what had already been said in the reporting back by the first two groups. However, one topic they considered was how practitioners and policy makers can be given time to engage with research findings. Another issue that arose from Brahm Norwich's introduction was the concerns about the external validity of many claims about evidence; how something that is supposed to be evidence can be made relevant to a local situation. One response may be to organise or commission research at a local level or establish local fora, at local

authority and maybe school cluster level for considering research matters. However, it was stressed that this was not urging as did David Hargreaves had said recently, to get rid of all Research Council funding and allocate it to that school level in the system. Instead, this is the position that recognizes, what Geoff Lindsay said, about the need for different kinds of research, including these kinds of local systems.

There were also a number of suggestions about improving communication about research between producers and users of research. Examples were given from magistrate training where they have a news headline type of system, or the medline system in medicine that gives one or two lines on what is been going on and a link to where it can be followed up. In addition, sometimes there is a need for somebody to stand in the role of translator; bringing ideas and practices from one sector to another. This was then related to how there is a real problem with the different motives that are in play in different sectors which people inhabit. For instance, within a university where somebody wants to get promoted, someone will ask, 'where's your single authored paper?' But, somebody else might say to them 'why don't you do more collaborative research?'. There is here a conflict motive.

There are also other kinds of motive, for instance, the transformation of the voluntary sector at the moment, which is making more and more provision. The way in which the funding and the control of that funding is altering their orientation to what kind of knowledge they require. It was felt that contradictions can arise between the different partnerships that could inhibit any kind of satisfactory implementation. There was also some discussion about a term that Caroline Gibbs talked about at the end of the TLRP exercise. She talked about surfing the policy wave and the idea that in England it is very difficult for a researcher, as it were, to start their own wave. It is very difficult for a researcher to go along and knock on the doors of national policy makers and say 'Excuse me, I found out this, you ought to be thinking about it'. However, what you might be able to do is when somebody at the national policy making level is interested in something, you may be able to influence the direction of that wave. And then the question is 'how do you get in there and influence that?'. It was thought that Geoff Lindsay and Julie Dockrell's research on speech and language difficulties, with 20 years engagement is a very good example of that approach. But that had a direct connection with what sounded like aligned motives, you know, the fact that they got everyone to buy into it.

#### Group 4

This group discussed issues about communication and research, how it is done, who should do it and who should communicate with whom. The importance in particular of sharing knowledge with parents was emphasized; who should do that, whether that was the researchers' role, the government's role or some other intermediaries.

There was also discussion around the difficulties in designing impact studies for interventions in this field; that it is a very complex area and people want to know what works. Though it seems to be an easy question, to actually answer it when you there are many contextual issues and so many variables, is far more complex than that simple question.

This group also addressed the question of whether or not there does exist a shared

vision about what SEN research is going to achieve anyway. The funding of research was also given an airing, with discussion of how it is driven by the funding source and the wider variety of sources now. In the presentation were examples of studies funded by government and unions, and how that may or may not distort or shape the kind of research that can take place. Linked to that is the role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS), both to identify research priorities, but also being a conduit for funding from the charitable trusts and foundation sector. It was suggested that perhaps the usual and easiest way of doing something in partnership with a VCS was to seek funds from a charitable foundation. But that funding can come from a wide variety of sources. What is needed are the skills of a fund-raiser first and a researcher second. Also if it is coming from charitable trusts and foundations, their priorities can be quite idiosyncratic, depending on if it is a family trust with a particular interest. This is evident in the autism field where there are a number of very wealthy trusts that only fund certain types of autism research because of their own experiences.

Much of the discussion was also about the problem with the fragmentation of the schools sector. This connected to communication issues as the local authority was previously an effective conduit. The question was how do you get the message across and down and through to people when it is so fragmented? The group also considered the problem of if the government/ DFE chooses to ignore you, do you then turn your back on them as well? It was felt that it was certainly important to be aware of all the other drivers or influences in the political arena, such as the Education Select Committee or the different all party parliamentary groups. But there are many of them and there is a need to liaise with them if we cannot get through to the government and DFE. And, then one of the members of group floated the idea about a 'what works' centre for SEN where things can be brought together. One of the issues is where does a teacher go to find out where things are now? And whether such a sort of web-based centre would be of help?

#### Group 5:

This group was very struck by the way in which the local authority networks had been weakened, but at the same time the Educational Psychology networks had become strengthened. One member of the group was anxious about whether research would inform the design of the SEN Local Offer. There was also some discussion of the role of governors in research dissemination as they are now inspected by Ofsted. The group was very concerned about the role of the relationship of education and health; that relationships were developing as effectively as they could be. One person referred to a very interesting study of professional development in some Scandinavian countries, which looked at whether peer-relating professional development worked or not. The key conclusion was that where in one country, Finland, they had adopted school links to universities, this was seen as a more successful model. By contrast, in Denmark, where they had not done quite as well, this was attributed to them using more peer to peer professional development.

The group also discussed the idea of a college of teachers, as an educational version of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE); there is growing interest in it at the moment. The group's view was that provided that this kind of organization was very firmly linked into university and other research models,

then it could be successful. It was also seen as important to ask the question about NIHCE; if we were to go down this road, do doctors actually use NIHCE as much as people seem to think they do? In particular the group had a few suggestions for policy makers about their need to take more time to look at what was going on. One member felt very strongly that civil servants should be linked to appropriate conceptual frameworks when they were trying to do things. Another member pointed out that there is a considerable amount of research that was done in the last ten years, some really useful, which is not necessarily getting to where we would hope. Also noted was a diminishing impact of print journalism and possibly the weakening of educational journalism generally within the national press. The importance of think tanks and of course electronic media was also emphasized. Teacher support teams (and also Lesson Study team) were seen as very interesting ways of looking at teacher conversations. Also, there was discussion about the role of Ofsted in spreading research. The group asked the question, 'actually why do Ofsted subject reviews and other reviews not actually quote research and give the actual evidence base on which they are working, when they make judgements about what they are saying?'

This group also liked the idea of big studies, at the right time, with the right resources and the right people involved. Some believed that in the established literature there was an important issue about the question of SEN/disability categories. Though this is not a new issue, it kept on coming back. Somebody talked about the 'route to the loot' (funds for research) that was felt to be a strong preserver of categories.

Finally, the discussion turned to things that should be researched. The group felt that there should be coordination of networks of action research that engaged more with professionals; groups of teachers. This would include senior leading teachers in partnership with the universities who could be developing practice through classroom observations and so on. Establishing long-term relationships with senior managers and head teachers as well as looking at systems and natural histories, such as, diagnostic changes, was also seen as important.

#### Group 6:

The first issue that this group raised was about acknowledging the risk of interpreting research headlines and a concern that learning progress outcomes were not the only valid research outcomes. The second presentation raised questions about how do we define community and measure it? The afternoon sessions showed that issues of description and identification are still central and largely unresolved. The first presentation focused on the world of the class teacher, a close-in generic activity, and the second presentation was more focused on research that was categorical. This led to a discussion about the debate about separate special educational needs pedagogies, which has renewed relevance as there are more categories of need driven by politics and financial issues.

There was a discussion about availability of specialist resources. It seemed that teachers either lack awareness or knowledge about accessing resources: how to find the right information in the current environment feels very difficult to navigate. So, there was a view that open access journals could make a difference, enable people to access good research and enable practitioners to access a critical dialogue. It was

felt that more sharing of ideas, more time and space to reflect on practice and research was needed. The idea of mediators and conduits was also discussed, especially educational psychologists and academics helping to translate research between producers and users too. The final points were about the bigger community, how can we help teachers engage with the complexity of research? And how do we define community and then work collaboratively with different groups to identify the issues that need researching?

#### Group 7:

This group related their discussions to points raised by other groups. Following the first presentation there was a focus on 'well what if national policy does not respond to research and it's implications?'. This led to discussion of the importance of the voluntary sector and communicating with parents. The group heard about a very interesting example of a leading edge group in Barnet focusing on different areas of special needs where research infuses and influences deliberation, something that has been going for several years. This was seen as an interesting example of a middle level institutional arrangement that can link through to the universities. This had links with other groups discussed.

The group also considered issues that arose about collaborative research and the value of collaborative research where the funder is not a single funder. If different groups funded research this might have some influence on the research and lead to a more varied take up of the research. This group also covered various pieces about a general teaching council or a teaching college; an institution that is not directly under the control of Government, but set up by government to have a longer term remit. This linked to the idea of a national research and development agency, which links to ideas raised by previous groups.

When this group discussed the autism research presentation several members thought that there needed to be more of a balance towards applied research and this need could be addressed by some a teaching council kind of organization. The group was impressed by the BCRP programme with its long term period of research and the reciprocal trust built between the researchers and the voluntary sectors. Some wondered whether this was reproducible in other areas of research. As regards the NASUWT research, the group asked about the role of professional associations. It was thought that they tend not to campaign on professional issues and focused more on salary and immediate issues. This being so gives even more thrust to the argument for some sort of national institutional system.

#### **Concluding recommendations:**

The following recommendations come from a thematic analysis of the above summaries as the conclusions to the questions that were asked at this seminar.

##### i. National agency with research strategy and functions

- A few groups recommended an a-political or non-political organization which could be an at-arms-length from Government, that was empowered to take a long term vision view of the best way forward for research and development in the field.

- This agency might commission or organize a 'what works' centre for SEN where research-informed practices can be brought together.
- Some groups considered that this research function may be allocated to a College of Teachers. Another view was that there is a need for an educational version of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NIHCE). It was also suggested that such activity be firmly linked into university and research models.

#### ii. Local Authority and school level schemes

- One model was for a cluster of schools or a local authority to organize a leading edge group that focused on a specific area of SEN that draws on and informs research. There is an example of this operating over several years with links to university researchers and research. This is an interesting example of a middle level institutional arrangement that can link with universities.
- Another model was for schools to establish teacher groups (professional learning communities), whether in the form of Teacher Support Teams (problem solving groups) or Lesson Study team (for the review and development of lessons) as a forum where research interfaces with teacher deliberation and practice. These can be seen to address one of the conditions identified below – finding time/space for teachers to reflect on research and its use.

#### iii. Kinds of research:

- It was recommended that different styles of research were required including research that is cumulative, where one project builds onto and leads to another. This meant that designs other than controlled ones that focused on learning progress outcomes were also required. Participants liked the idea of big studies at the right time, with the right resources and the right people involved. But, as part of this plural approach there was also place for the coordination of networks of action research where groups of teachers, including senior leading teachers, could be engaged in partnership with the university. This could examine investigations at a classroom level.
- Research needed to be about efficacy (what works in tight limited conditions) and effectiveness (what can work in a range of service conditions). There were concerns about the external validity of many claims about evidence-based research.
- The call for a more balanced mix of research styles including applied research, it was suggested, might be met by the work of a national agency (see above recommendation). One group saw that this could take the form of commissioning research at a local level or of establishing local fora at local authority or school cluster level.
- There were few specific suggestion about the content of research, but one group saw a research opportunity to examine the rights and entitlements of young people who through their emotional and behavior responses are not particularly attractive in the school system.

#### iv. Conditions needed to use and stimulate research:

- Several participants across discussion groups highlighted the key condition required for the use of research and the identification of research agendas. This

was the need for practitioners and policy makers to have protected time to engage with research findings.

#### v. Communicating research and enabling its use

- There were also a number of suggestions about improving communication about research between producers and users of research. Examples from the justice and medical systems were used, for example, headlines to capture the practitioner and policy-makers' attention with web links to further details. In addition open access journals could make a difference, enabling access to good quality research and enable practitioners to access a critical dialogue.
- There was also seen a role for translators or mediators; bringing ideas and practices from one sector to another. Here the role of educational psychologists and academics was seen as relevant to translating research between producers and users.
- Finding novel ways to share knowledge with parents was emphasized too.
- One way of communicating research to policy makers was to wait till somebody at the national policy making level was interested in some topic. Researchers with research-based knowledge relevant to this topic may be able to pick the right time to interest policy-makers in their research.
- The value of collaborative research was highlighted, especially when there are several funders. If different groups fund research this might have some influence on the research and lead to a more varied take up of the research.

#### vi. Role of VCS

- The role of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) was also recognized; to identify research priorities, but also being a conduit for funding from the charitable trusts and foundation sector.

#### vii. Ofsted's potential role

- A few participants discussed the potential role of Ofsted in spreading research. One group asked the question, 'why do Ofsted subject reviews and other reviews not actually quote research and give the actual evidence foundation on which they work?' Ofsted's thematic inspections were also discussed and whether research informed these thematic inspections.

#### viii. Developing a research agenda

- The central need was to identify the issues to be researched. Working collaboratively with different groups was seen as the central principle here.