



Department
for Education

Evaluation of the Green Paper Support Contracts

Research brief

October 2013

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SQW

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Background

In October 2012, the Department appointed SQW to undertake a high level evaluation of the Green Paper Support Contracts¹ (see Table 1). The purpose of the evaluation was two-fold:

1. To understand the appetite for, use and effectiveness of the current support offer to inform decisions on the funding and delivery of potential future support
2. To provide evidence of the range of starting points for local areas in relation to their preparedness to meet the forthcoming special educational needs (SEN) reforms.

Table 1 The Delivery Partner contracts

Support contract	Name of delivery Organisation(s)
Support for the delivery of short breaks	Impact
National support for Parent Partnership Services	National Network of Parent Partnership Services (NPPN)
Building the capacity of the voluntary and community sector in providing early intervention mental health support for children and young people (BOND)	Consortium led by Youngminds
Early support and key working training	Consortium led by the Early Support Trust and National Children's Bureau
Preparing for Adulthood	NDTi, Helen Sanderson Associates and the Council for Disabled Children
Parent participation through support for Parent Carer Forums	Contact A Family

Source: Department for Education

Key findings

Take up of the support offered as part of all six contracts was high across the relevant target audiences. Furthermore, those that had accessed the support offers generally reported high levels of satisfaction in relation to the relevance, quality and usefulness of the activities that had been delivered.

¹ The commission formed part of an extension to an existing contract to evaluate the SEND Pathfinder Programme

The support offered by all of the six Delivery Partners was perceived to have had some form of impact on their target audiences. This varied by Delivery Partner but could be divided into two types of impact: the first related to an improvement in general awareness of the relevant agenda and as a result had acted as a catalyst to further the thinking of areas; and the second related to more tangible results, such as improvements in the quality and capacity of a service. Although both types of impact were felt to have been valuable, future support should probably lean more towards achievement of the latter, more tangible results, as areas need to move from considering how to develop the new agendas to actually delivering them.

Despite the positive feedback received in relation to each of the contracts, there appeared to have been limited central coordination across the activities of the individual Delivery Partners. This included an absence of a single point of access for local areas to build their understanding of the range of support that was on offer and the absence of a formal interface for the Delivery Partners to provide better aligned support across the contracts. This therefore presented a potential missed opportunity to deliver better marketed and more joined-up provision across the Delivery Partners.

Awareness of the SEND reforms was high across the board; i.e. the Heads of SEN, Parent Carer Forums (PCFs), Parent Partnership Services (PPSs), and the short breaks and transition leads. The high levels of awareness translated into most areas (as reported by the Heads of SEN) reporting that they had either begun or were actively considering measures aimed at improving the readiness of their area to meet the reforms.

Method

This report is based on evidence gathered through:

Five tailored e-surveys disseminated to the main target beneficiaries of five of the six contracts (all six contracts (all undertaken in February 2013), i.e. all but the BOND contract (see

- Table 2)
- 29 qualitative follow-up consultations with a small number of each set of survey respondents (undertaken in March 2013)
- A small-scale qualitative case study of the BOND contract (undertaken in March 2013).

Table 2 Description of the five online surveys

Target audience	Coverage	Response rate²
Early Support and Key Working (and general awareness of the support contracts)		
Heads of SEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness and take-up of Delivery Partner contracts ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with, support delivered through the Early Support and Key Working contract ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	63% (95 Heads of SEN)
Parent Partnership		
Heads of Parent Partnership Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with, support delivered through Parent Partnership contact ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	73% (111 Parent Partnership Services)
Parent Carer Forums		
Chairs of Parent Carer Forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with support delivered through the Parent Carer Forum contract ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	73% (111 Parent Carer Forums)
Preparing for Adulthood		
PfA leads in local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with support delivered through the PfA contract ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	51% (78 PfA leads)
Short Breaks		
Short Breaks Leads in local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with support delivered through the Short Breaks contract ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	62% (94 Short Breaks leads)
BOND		

² Base = 152 local authorities

Target audience	Coverage	Response rate ²
One of the five pilot areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Take-up of, and satisfaction with support delivered through the Short Breaks contract ▪ Awareness of SEN reforms, and readiness for reform ▪ On-going support needs in preparing for reform 	N/A

Source: SQW

Awareness of the Delivery Partner contracts

The Heads of SEN reported high levels of awareness across all the support contracts, with the exception of the BOND contract, whose activities had focussed on delivering in-depth support to a small number of local authorities. Take-up of the relevant activities on offer proved more variable (ranging between 38 and 53% across the contracts) and was likely to have been under-reported by the Heads of SEN as much of the activity being evaluated fell outside of their service area. However, those that were aware that their local area had accessed the relevant support, most commonly reported being either fairly or very satisfied with the delivery across all the contracts.

Early support and key working contract

Feedback provided in relation to the Early Support and Key Working contract was largely positive. This included at least 72% of the responding Heads of SEN reporting that they were either fairly or very satisfied with the relevance, quality and usefulness of the support they had accessed. Those that had accessed the key working training reported the highest levels of satisfaction; a large number also stated that this had helped them to further develop key working in their area.

It was therefore evident that the support offered through the Early Support and Key Working contract had been well received and had contributed to the development of key working across the majority of areas that had accessed the support.

Support for Parent Carer Forums

Feedback on the support provided to the Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) through the Contact a Family contract illustrated that reach and take-up had been very high, with all but two PCFs from across England having accessed at least one of the activities offered. Furthermore, high levels of satisfaction were reported in relation to the relevance, quality and usefulness of the support that had been accessed (80% reported being satisfied with the delivery across nearly all the services offered). This was reported in turn to have translated into impacts in relation to ensuring the sustainability and building the capacity of the majority of PCFs. It is therefore clear that the activities had been well received in the main and were felt to have been effectively delivered by nearly all PCFs.

Support for Parent Partnership Services

Take-up of the support services provided by the National Parent Partnership Network (NPPN) was very high, with at least 80% of the responding Parent Partnership Services (PPSs) reporting they had accessed at least six of the ten offered services. This indicated there had been a clear demand for much of what had been offered.

Satisfaction with the relevance, quality and usefulness of the support that had been accessed was reported to be high, with no service receiving less than a 77% satisfaction rate relative to all three of the indicators. The evidence also illustrated that the support had been perceived by nearly all (94%) of the responding PPSs to have been helpful in improving the quality of their service. The majority also felt that it had helped to extend the reach of their service to more parent carers.

It is therefore clear that the NPPN had delivered an effective support offer that had been well received by nearly all the responding PPSs.

Preparing for Adulthood contract

Nearly all (84%) respondents reported having accessed at least one of the services offered as part of the Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) support contract, thereby implying that take-up of the offer had been high. Satisfaction in relation to the relevance, quality and usefulness of the services that had been accessed was reported to be largely positive, with at least 62% of respondents reporting that they were satisfied with each of the relevant services across the three indicators.

Looking across the findings, it was clear that the PfA team had made effective progress, especially in their targeted work with a small number of the pathfinder areas. Similarly, the activities delivered by the team were perceived to have had a positive impact on raising awareness of the PfA agenda, which now needed to be backed up with practical resources and a move towards putting the theory into practice.

Support for Short Breaks

Take-up of support for Short Break services was very high, with 99% of respondents having accessed at least one of the services offered. This was further evidenced by the finding that over three-quarters (78%) of respondents had accessed four or more of the six services formally offered through the Impact support contract.

Satisfaction with the services received was high in relation to their relevance, quality and usefulness, with over 82% of all respondents reporting that they were satisfied with all the services they had accessed across all three indicators. Similarly, a large number of respondents reported that the support provided had been helpful in supporting the development and delivery of their statutory short breaks duty statement.

These findings suggest that Impact had correctly and appropriately identified the needs of their target audience and had subsequently delivered an effective suite of services to meet the required need.

The BOND contract

This small-scale contract had been effective in building a sense of shared purpose between commissioners and providers, despite its delivery coinciding with a period of substantial changes to the commissioning landscape. The support had been most effective in those areas with a history of commissioning Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services from voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSOs). In those areas where these relationships had not been as strong, interviewees felt that the pilot had helped to cultivate stronger links. Where partners had not been able to engage more school leaders/health commissioners, significant effort had been spent in trying to do so.

Those that received support over the course of the pilot were very satisfied with its quality, usefulness and relevance. The pilot was felt to have had a positive impact on the capacity of VCSOs in the three local authority areas to successfully bid for public sector contracts. The thematic workshops in particular were identified as a good networking opportunity and were felt to have been very useful in helping VCSOs navigate their way through the new commissioning landscape.

Awareness of the SEN reforms and potential areas for future support

Awareness of the SEND reforms was high across the Heads of SEN, Parent Carer Forums, Parent Partnership Services, and the short breaks and transition leads in February 2013³, with between 78 and 98% of each type of respondent reporting they were either fairly or very aware of the reforms. Similarly, the majority of the Heads of SEN reported that they had either begun or were actively considering measures aimed at improving the readiness of their area to meet the reforms.

Most of the progress reported by the Heads of SEN had been achieved in relation to the development of a new integrated or single assessment process and similarly the subsequent education, health and care planning process. Conversely, the least progress was reported in relation to the development of the local offer, personal budgets and workforce development, mirroring the findings from the evaluation of the first 18 months of the pathfinder programme.

Pathfinder areas were more advanced in their developments relative to non-pathfinder areas. Nonetheless, progress reported by the non-pathfinder areas was generally encouraging, with only a small number of areas reporting not having any firm plans in place to progress the various elements required to deliver the reforms.

³ All surveys were undertaken in February 2013 and therefore the responses provided are relevant as of that point in time.

The Heads of SEN suggested several areas where it was felt they may benefit from additional support to better meet the requirements of the SEND reforms. This most commonly included support to further develop:

- Joint commissioning arrangements between the local authority and partner Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Personal budgets
- Governance structures to deliver the new assessment and planning process
- Workforce development
- Development of a new integrated assessment and planning process.

This mirrored the findings from the evaluation of the pathfinder programme, with the exception of the final bullet, which was suggested by non-pathfinder areas in the main.

Supplementary feedback gathered from the other surveys also identified potential areas of support, which differed in accordance with the needs of the relevant group. However, all four groups – the parent carer forums, parent partnership services, and the short break and transition leads – felt they would benefit from further clarification on the implications of the SEND reforms, signalling a potential need for continuing communication in this area.

Local areas will be asked to provide an update on their perceived readiness to meet the SEND reforms in both October/November 2013 and April/May 2014, as part of the extended evaluation of the SEND pathfinder programme. This will enable the tracking of readiness over time, where it is expected that subsequent surveys will show improvements as areas increase their efforts to prepare for the reforms.

Conclusions and recommendations

The support provided by the six support contracts was well received by the relevant target audiences and perceived to have had some form of positive impact. Awareness of the SEND reforms was high across the target audiences, with most local areas reporting that they had either begun or were actively considering measures aimed at improving the readiness of their area to meet the reforms.

Looking forward, a range of potential future support needs were identified by the different respondents. The majority of these related to either specific infrastructure or change management requirements associated with the SEND reforms, and were therefore not mutually exclusive in their nature.

We therefore recommend that any future support is:

- Focused on provision that leads to tangible results
- Commissioned as part of an integrated package of services/activities that draws together the relevant expertise and experience

- Coordinated and subject to strategic oversight by a central resource
- Underpinned by a common set of principles (e.g. to work across the 0-25 years age range, engender multi-agency working etc.)
- Complementary to support that has already been commissioned by the DfE (e.g. the pathfinder champions and recently commissioned 2013-15 VCS contracts).



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE- RB309

ISBN: 978-1-78105-273-0

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