

# BEST IN CLASS 2018

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Evidence, funding and school reform in England  
and the United States

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The Sutton Trust  
- April 2018



## Key Findings

### England

- Use of evidence to inform school decision making has been rising in England since 2012. 68% of school leaders and 45% of teachers cite the use of research evidence. 59% of senior leaders and 23% of teachers use the Sutton Trust/EEF Toolkit to inform evidence-based teaching methods, with awareness among teachers increasing more than fivefold since 2012.
- Early interventions are the highest priority for spending funding targeted at disadvantaged students (the 'pupil premium'), with 31% of teachers in England citing it as the priority.
- 34% of school leaders in England say pupil premium funding is being used to plug gaps in their budget, up from 30% in 2017. Staff cuts are also on the increase because of tightening budgets.
- 30% of academy leaders in England feel that academy autonomy has no effect in the classroom, with 18% saying it has a negative effect. Of the teachers who believed it had a positive influence, the gains cited most were freedom over the curriculum (59%), allocation of resources (57%), along with increased collaboration across schools (45%).

### United States (see note) <sup>1</sup>

- Use of evidence among US teachers polled was high, with 55% of teachers citing research as a factor in school decision making. More than half (57%) said they rely on past experience of what works, followed by learning from what works in other schools (55%).
- Early interventions were the highest priority for funding targeted at low income students (22%), along with one-to-one tuition (12%) and hiring additional teachers or assistants (14%).
- 25% of US teachers polled felt that charter schools have a positive effect on the day to day life of teachers in the classroom. Of those who thought so, most cited freedom to decide programmes and approaches to learning (80%), along with freedom from local bureaucracy (52%).

To provide the background context to many of the issues being discussed at the Best in Class 2018 summit, the Sutton Trust commissioned surveys of teachers and school leaders in England and the United States. Our three areas of focus were: attitudes to evidence and 'what works' in school decision-making, how targeted money for less well-off pupils is spent, and perceptions of charter schools and academy trusts amongst teachers.

The English state school system has 457,300 (full-time equivalent) teachers, serving 7.3 million pupils.<sup>2</sup> These are supplemented by 265,600 teaching assistants, one of the highest proportions internationally.<sup>3</sup> In the US there are currently 3,157,000 teachers estimated to work in the public schools system, serving a total of 50.7m students.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to our annual polling of teachers in England, we commissioned some polling of teachers in the US. A sample of 501 public school teachers was achieved. Demographic quotas were used, but while this limited sample is not wholly nationally representative by school characteristics, the findings offer a useful perspective from US teachers.

<sup>2</sup> As of November 2016, from the School Workforce Survey: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/620825/SFR25\\_2017\\_MainText.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/620825/SFR25_2017_MainText.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.economist.com/news/britain/21699975-english-schools-are-filled-teaching-assistants-but-too-many-are-poorly-used-help-needed>

<sup>4</sup> Digest of Education statistics. [https://nces.ed.gov/programmes/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_208.20.asp?current=yes](https://nces.ed.gov/programmes/digest/d16/tables/dt16_208.20.asp?current=yes)

In England 871 classroom teachers and 372 senior leaders in state schools were polled by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) as part of their regular 'Teacher Voice' omnibus, which runs three times each year. In the United States, YouGov achieved a sample of 501 public school teachers. While not fully representative of the teaching population, this provides indicative findings from the US perspective. However, it wasn't possible to sample US school leaders separately while achieving enough numbers to report on. Accordingly, US figures are compared with the English classroom teacher group, which is closest in composition to the US sample.

## Attitudes to evidence

### *England*

The Sutton Trust has played a strong role advocating the use of evidence in the classroom in the UK. Evidence from good quality research is a crucial tool to assist teachers in choosing the right practices that will bring the most out of their pupils. In May 2011 the Trust published its first 'Toolkit', with Durham University, an accessible summary of the research evidence on a variety of topics, tailored towards teachers. The toolkit summarised the impact on attainment, the strength of evidence, and cost of a range of interventions, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. In 2011 the Sutton Trust was awarded a government grant of £135m to set up (with the Impetus Trust) the Education Endowment Foundation, an organisation dedicated to using innovation and evidence to help children from all backgrounds fulfil their potential. The EEF now manages and maintains the online Toolkit, providing an invaluable resource to teachers and school leaders in the UK, and increasingly, across the world.

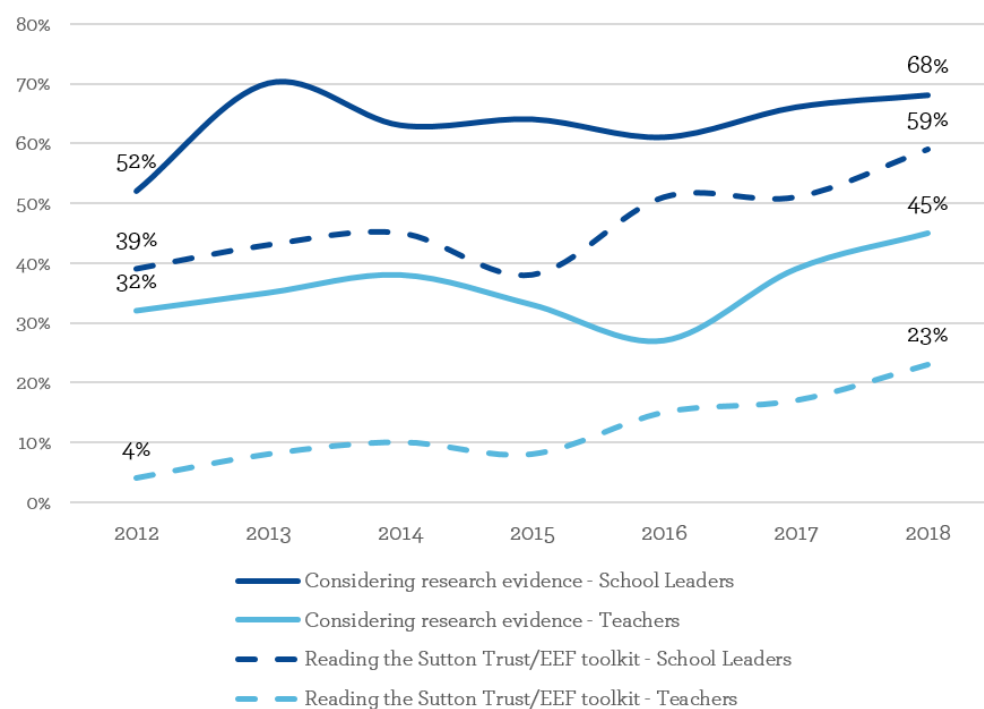
Table 1. Methods used in school decision-making, England (teachers and school leaders)

	Senior leaders (%)	Classroom teachers (%)	All (%)
Using past experience of what works	81	60	66
Considering research evidence on the impact of different approaches and programmes	68	45	52
Evaluating different approaches and programmes then deciding which to adopt	58	38	44
Considering which approaches and programmes are the most cost effective	46	35	39
Reading the Sutton Trust/EEF toolkit	59	23	34
Learning from what works in other schools	66	53	57
Consulting the school's governing body	7	9	8
Consulting the Local Authority	15	10	12
Other	3	3	3

Accordingly, the Trust has been monitoring teachers' attitudes to evidence and how decision-making in schools operates over the past seven years. In 2018, as has been the case throughout the period, school leaders identified 'using past experience of what works' as the most common factor in how decisions are made at school (81%). Similarly, learning from the experience of other schools was identified by 66% of this group. Cost effectiveness was also an important consideration, increasing from 38% to 46% over the past year. However, school leaders reported the use of research evidence as the second most common basis for decision making (68%). Use of the Sutton Trust/EEF toolkit alone was reported by 59% of school leaders, and almost a quarter of teachers (23%), demonstrating the extent of its reach.

In fact, as figure 1 displays, the importance of research in general, and the Toolkit, in particular, has been rising steadily since 2012, amongst both teachers and school leaders. Use of research evidence has risen from 52% among leaders in 2012 to 68% in 2018. Use of the Toolkit has gone from 39% to 59% over that time among school leaders, and amongst teachers has risen more than fivefold, from 4% to 23%. In 2018, use of the Toolkit was reported to be up around seven percentage points since 2017 across the board for primaries, secondaries, classroom teachers and senior leaders.

Figure 1. Use of research evidence and the Sutton Trust/EEF toolkit in school decision-making, England 2012-2018 (teachers and school leaders)



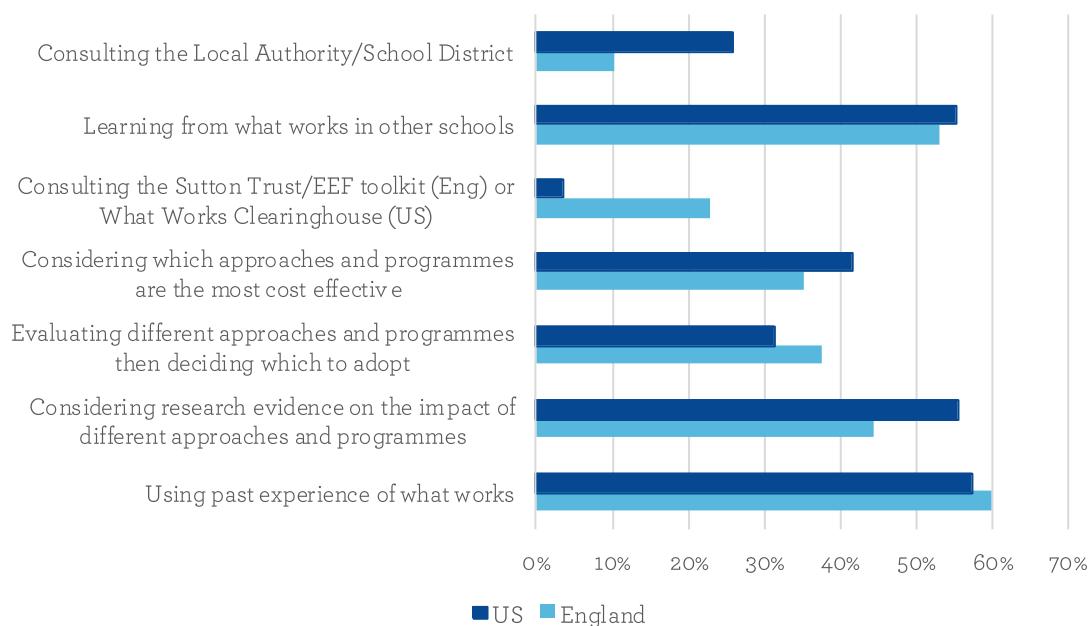
### United States

The importance of evidence has long been recognised in the United States. This was reflected in the establishment by the US Department of Education of the 'What Works Clearinghouse' in 2002. Run by the Institute of Education Sciences, the Clearinghouse has reviewed, evaluated and summarised research evidence on a vast array of education programmes, practices and policies.

Recent research amongst school leaders in the US has shown high levels of research use by principals and school district leaders.<sup>5</sup> Our polling of classroom teachers showed a similarly strong role for research in school decision-making, with 55% of the US public school teachers polled citing the use of evidence, higher than 45% among equivalent teachers in England. It should be borne in mind that the US teacher sample is dominated by classroom teachers, so all comparisons are with English teachers, rather than the school leader sample.

As in England, the top three factors identified were past experience (57%), research evidence (55%) and what works in other schools (55%). Consulting the School Board appeared to have a stronger role in the US at 26%, compared to 9% citing consultation of their local authority in England. However, also notable was use of the What Works Clearinghouse at 3%, compared to 23% for the Toolkit in England. However, awareness in elementary schools was higher (5%), compared to middle and high schools (2%). This may reflect the more decentralised nature of US education policymaking, which has also been an issue with federal programmes like No Child Left Behind. Previous research has indicated that under 20% of school leaders regularly use the What Works Clearinghouse, so it is unsurprising that its use amongst teachers is significantly lower.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2. Methods used in school decision-making, United States and England (teachers)**



<sup>5</sup>"How School and District Leaders Access, Perceive and Use Research" (2017): <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2332858417705370>

<sup>6</sup>"How School and District Leaders Access, Perceive and Use Research" (2017): <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2332858417705370>

## Funding for disadvantage

The pupil premium is the key mechanism by which school funding is targeted at disadvantaged students in England, and is a crucial lever for raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils by allowing schools to target resources directly to them. It was introduced by the coalition government in 2011 and provides a set amount of extra funding to a school for each eligible child registered in the school, in 2015, amounting to £2.5bn (\$3.5bn) per year, and 6% of the total schools budget.<sup>7</sup> A school receives £1,320 (\$1,850) for every primary pupil (aged 5-11) and £935 (\$1,310) for every secondary pupil (aged 11-16),<sup>8</sup> and there is some extra money for nursery providers too. The premium is paid to pupils who have been eligible for free school meals over the previous six years, or who have been in care, and schools are mandated to spend this money directly on raising the attainment of those children. While this is not officially ringfenced, the targeting is monitored by Ofsted, the national schools inspection body. Schools are encouraged to use evidence of what works when it comes to spending their pupil premium funding, and the Teaching and Learning Toolkit was first titled the 'Pupil Premium Toolkit'. Pupil premium funding is not the only source of funding for disadvantaged pupils in England: the wider funding formula for schools includes elements related to disadvantage, but this has traditionally benefited urban schools most.<sup>9</sup> The pupil premium is different in that it is awarded for every pupil meeting the criteria, and targeted at those pupils specifically.

In the United States, the main national source of funding for low income pupils is the 'Title I' programme, federal funding which is targeted to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers/percentages of children from low-income families. These funds are allocated through four formulae that take into account the number of low income children, their proportion in the school population, and existing imbalances in state-level funding of LEAs. Schools must focus their Title I services on children who are failing, or most at risk of failing to meet academic standards, though schools with particularly high concentrations of poorer students can use funds for schoolwide programmes.<sup>10</sup> Unlike England, Title I funds are also allocated to eligible pupils in private schools. In 2009/10, 21m children across 56,000 public schools (roughly 60% of schools) received Title I funds.<sup>11</sup> In 2017 the size of the programme amounted to \$14.9bn.<sup>12</sup> Per student funding differs by area and type of school, but has been found to come to between \$550 and \$750 per pupil, amounting to a 5% top up on per pupil spending overall.<sup>13</sup> While Title I is the main federal source of funds, most states allocate targeted funding for low income pupils, in a variety of ways. State and local government funding makes up 90% of public school funding.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Pupil-Premium-Summit-Report-FINAL-EDIT.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2017-to-2018/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2017-to-2018>. Children in care receive £1,900.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/comm113.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/programmes/titleiparta/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=158>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget18/summary/18summary.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/why-federal-spending-on-disadvantaged-students-title-i-doesnt-work/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/research/how-progressive-is-school-funding-in-the-united-states/>

## England

How is this pupil premium money spent? In the 2017/18 school year in England the highest priority for pupil premium spending reported by school leaders was early intervention schemes (38%), which has been consistently the priority over the past six years of polling. The second most cited measure was the hiring of teaching assistants (16%), though there was a significant disparity between primary (22%) and secondary (3%) leaders. Increased one to one tuition for disadvantaged pupils was highlighted by 10%. The Sutton Trust has consistently highlighted over the years the impact of private tuition on equity and social mobility in schools, so the availability of one to one tuition for the less well-off is important for this group. However, only 4% of all respondents cited improving feedback between teachers and pupils, a relatively inexpensive measure that could add eight months to pupils' learning. Research in the Toolkit shows that improving feedback can be a highly effective way to improve teacher development. Similarly, just 1% mention peer-to-peer tutoring schemes, where older pupils typically help younger pupils to learn, an equally cost-effective measure to deliver substantial learning gains. Overall, 23% of classroom teachers didn't know what their school's priority for pupil premium funding was, though there was a stark difference between secondary schools (27%) and primaries (18%), where school sizes are much smaller.

Table 2. Main priority for disadvantaged pupil spending, England (school leaders)

	Senior leaders (%)
Reducing class sizes	3
Additional teaching assistants	16
Additional teachers	10
More one-to-one tuition	8
Peer-to-peer tutoring schemes for pupils	0
Improving feedback between teachers and pupils / providing more feedback that is effective	6
Early intervention schemes	38
Extending the breadth of the curriculum	4
Improving the classroom or school environment	1
Offsetting budget cuts elsewhere	7
Other	5

Recent years have seen a real terms funding squeeze for schools in England, which has placed increasing pressure on school budgets. It is therefore worrying that 7% of school senior leaders say that offsetting budget cuts elsewhere is the *main priority* for pupil premium spending in their school.

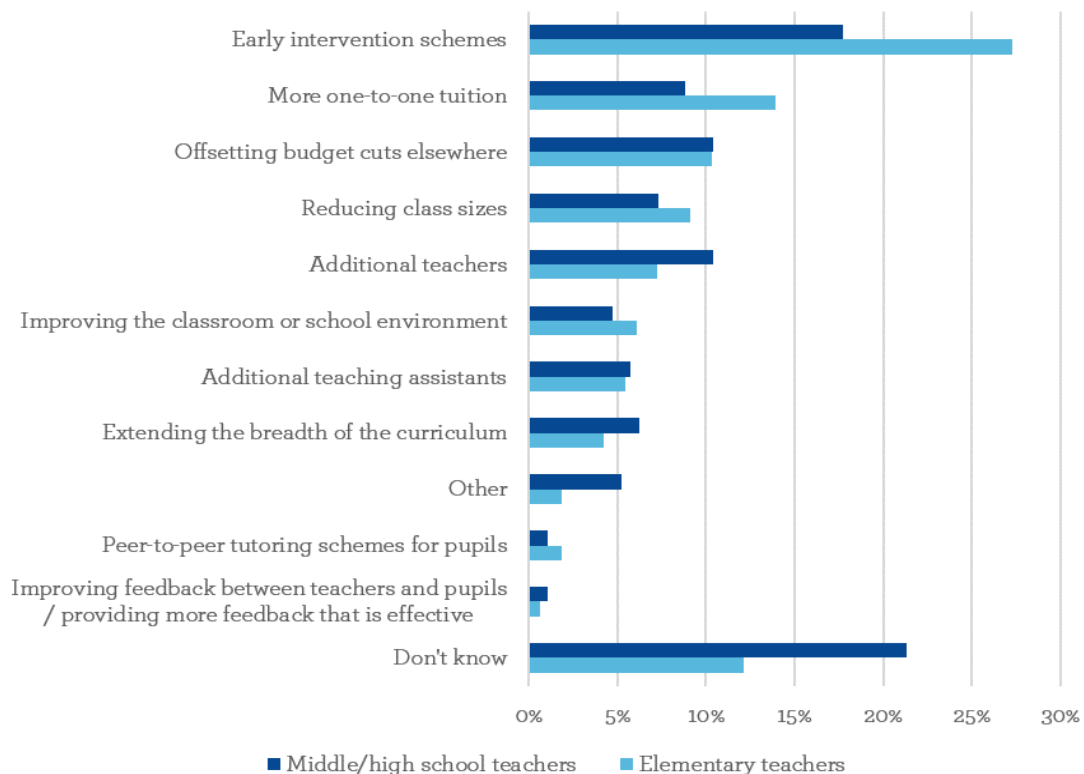
In fact, when followed up on this, more than one in three senior leaders (34%) say the pupil premium is being used to plug gaps in their budget, which is higher than the 30% who said this last year. This increase is mostly driven by secondary schools. Three quarters (74%) of secondary headteachers report having had to cut back on teaching staff to save money over the past year. 74% also say the same for teaching assistants, and 72% for support staff, all increased from levels in 2017. Staff cuts are lower, but also on the rise in primary schools: 24% (up from 21%) for teaching staff, 60% (up from 54%) teaching assistants, and 32% (up from 29%) support staff.

## United States

74% of the teachers we polled in the US reported receiving dedicated funding targeting children from low income households. 67% of teachers reported receipt of Title I funding, with the rest made up of other federal or state sources. Only 7% reported receiving no dedicated funding for such students.

Of those who received such funding, figure 3 shows the priorities for spending this money, in elementary and middle/high schools. Early intervention schemes and one-to-one tuition also came out on top, but were a greater priority in elementary schools than for older students. As in England, a higher proportion of middle/high school teachers reported not knowing their school's priority for spending.

Figure 3. Priorities for spending of dedicated disadvantaged/low income funding, US elementary and middle/high schools (teachers)

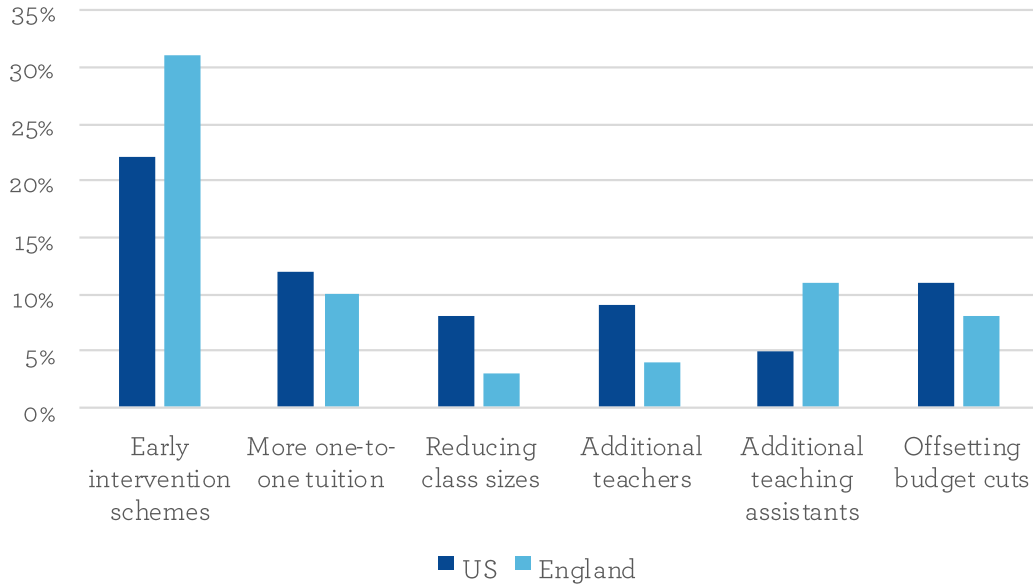


As shown in figure 4, while the highest priority in both countries was for enacting early interventions, this was somewhat lower in the US than England (22% compared to 31%). Hiring staff was of similar importance in both locations (14% and 15% in total), but in the US, there was a greater focus on hiring more teachers, rather than teaching assistants. This is potentially related to the greater focus (8% to 3%) on reducing class sizes in the US.

One-to-one tuition was the second biggest priority at 12%. Funding pressures are clearly an issue in the United States also, with 11% of teachers saying that the biggest priority for funding for low income pupils was to offset budget cuts elsewhere, slightly higher than the 8% of English classroom teachers.

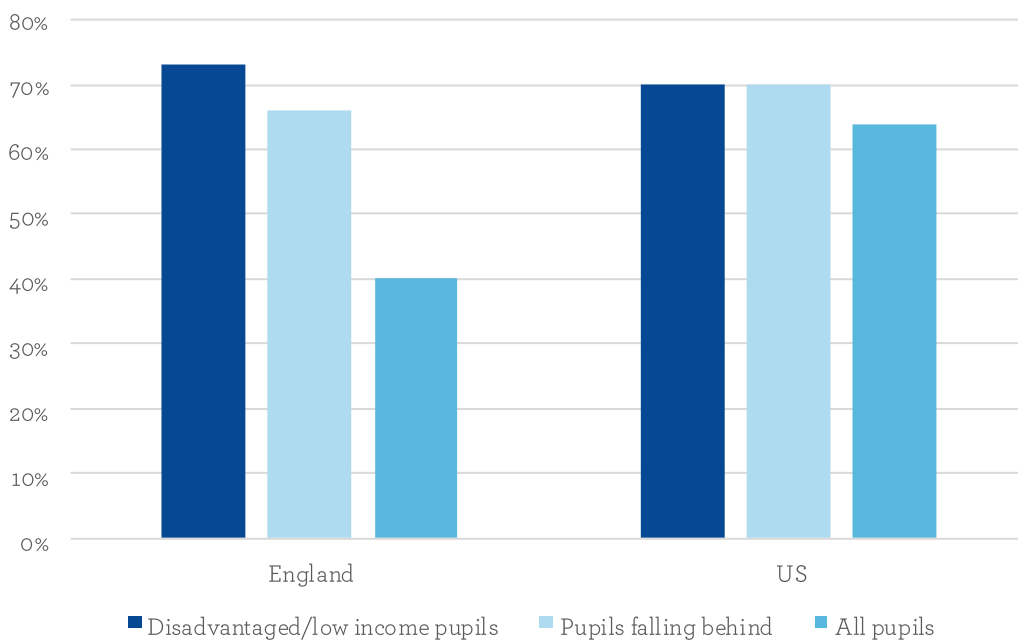


Figure 4. Priorities for spending of dedicated disadvantaged/low income funding, US and England (teachers)



When it comes to the effects of such spending, 70% of US teachers agreed that it helped to target resources to benefit low income students, 70% for underperforming pupils regardless of background, and 64% for all students. In England the equivalent figures were 73%, 66% and 40% respectively. So there are some indications that funding is being used in a less targeted way in the US, albeit not necessarily at the expense of the least well-off. While there is clearly substantial 'leakage' in both countries, this pattern perhaps reflects how such funding is mandated. While Title I funding is allocated by income levels, at most schools, the funding itself is targeted at pupils falling behind, with some schools (those with over 40% eligible students) allowed to use the funding for all pupils in the school. In England, pupil premium funding is allocated by and targeted to the same group of disadvantaged pupils.

Figure 5. To what extent targeted funding in schools raises the attainment of different groups of pupils, England and United States (teachers).



## Charter schools and academy trusts

Academy schools in England are state-funded schools financed directly by an agency of the Department for Education, and independent of the local authority structures that have traditionally been responsible for state schools. They do not have to follow the national curriculum (except in maths, English and science), but are nonetheless subject to inspection by Ofsted. While they control their own admissions, they are required to adhere to a national admissions code. They have also had more flexibility over teachers' pay and conditions.

The academy programme was launched by the Labour government in 2000 to turn around failing schools that served pupils in particularly disadvantaged areas by leveraging the support of philanthropic, educational and business partners. After 2010, the programme expanded substantially and changed its focus by allowing existing schools to independently become academies, many of which were high performing schools seeking greater autonomy.

In 2017, there were 6,087 academies in England, making up 22% of all primary schools and 62% of secondaries.<sup>15</sup> Many academies form part of multi-academy trusts (or chains), which have emerged since 2004, and now include the majority of academies. The Sutton Trust's annual *Chain Effects* report has been assessing the success of academy trusts in promoting school improvement and the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils for the past five years. These reports have found substantial variation, with several trusts making significant turnarounds to school fortunes, but many having little or no effect on the schools they take over.

Charter schools in the US are publicly funded schools, open to all students and similarly operated independently from the traditional school district, offering substantial operational, curriculum and financial autonomy. There are almost 7,000 charter schools in the US, making up around 8% of all public schools.<sup>16</sup> They are mostly independently run, but many are operated by non-profit or for-profit management organisations that run networks of schools.

While the charter school concept was developed in the 1970s and 80s, the first charter laws were passed by states, beginning in 1991. Since the turn of the millennium their number has been growing strongly, with enrolment increasing sixfold between 2000 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> Research on their effectiveness is mixed, with substantial variation amongst schools and areas. Some research has shown that, overall, charter schools have a weak or negative effect on student outcomes.<sup>18</sup> However other research has demonstrated a substantial difference between urban and non-urban charters, with growing evidence that charters located in areas with high levels of poverty and minority populations in particular are highly effective.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Chain-Effects-2017.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-education-charterschools/number-of-charter-schools-students-in-u-s-rises-report-idUSKCN1B22JX>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/New-Closed-2016.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> "Online Charter School Study" (2015): <https://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/Online%20Charter%20Study%20Final.pdf>

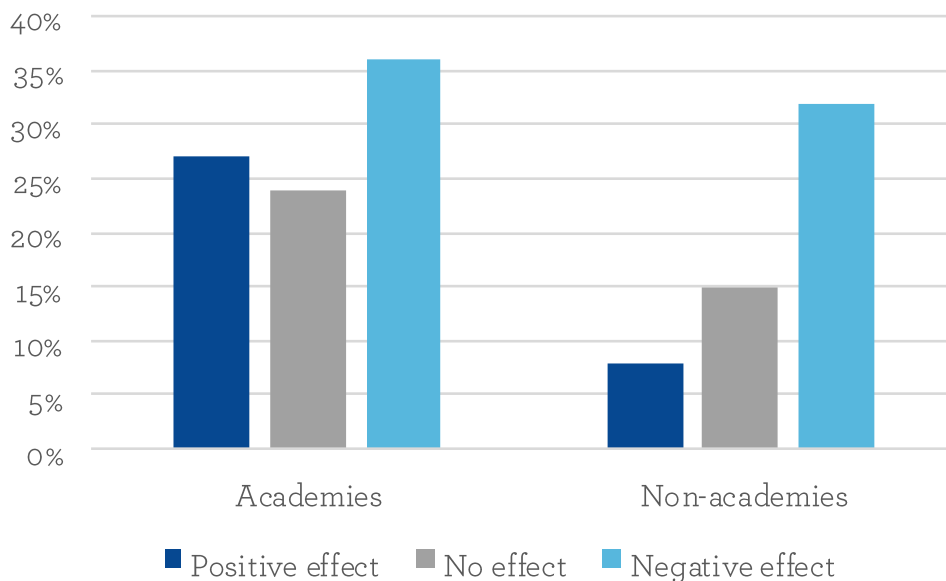
<sup>19</sup> "Explaining Charter School Effectiveness" (2013): <https://seii.mit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Explaining-Charter-School-Effectiveness.pdf>

## England

The English sample of teachers had similar levels of academy and non-academy teachers (524 and 718). While perceptions of academy status differed between those working in one and those not, figure 5 shows that high levels of negativity were consistent across both groups.

Perhaps surprisingly given that autonomy is one of the ‘freedoms’ promised to schools that become academies, 30% of academy leaders feel that this autonomy has no effect, and another 18% a negative one, while 42% felt it had a positive effect. Teachers have often been less enamoured about academy conversions, but it is still remarkable that two thirds (65%) of academy classroom teachers think that academy autonomy has either no effect or in fact a negative effect in the classroom. Just 27% of those who work in academies overall think they have a beneficial effect. This is a concerning finding, and one in contrast with research conducted during the early days of the academies programme in 2003.<sup>20</sup> Including those at other schools, 15% of all respondents saw a beneficial effect and 33% a negative one.

Figure 6. Perceptions of the effect of academy autonomy in the classroom, academies and local authority maintained schools, England (teachers and school leaders)



Of those who did see a positive effect, most cited freedom on the curriculum (63%) and control over resource allocation (60%), with 50% mentioning control over learning programmes. Almost half (47%) of those questioned cited the benefits of more collaboration with schools, perhaps reflecting the influence of the growth in multi-academy trusts. Senior leaders, in particular, cited freedom from local bureaucracy (51%) as a benefit, compared to 26% of classroom teachers.

<sup>20</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080912104014/http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/academies/publications/?version=1>

Table 3. Positive benefits of academy autonomy, of those who saw any benefit, England (teachers and school leaders, all schools)

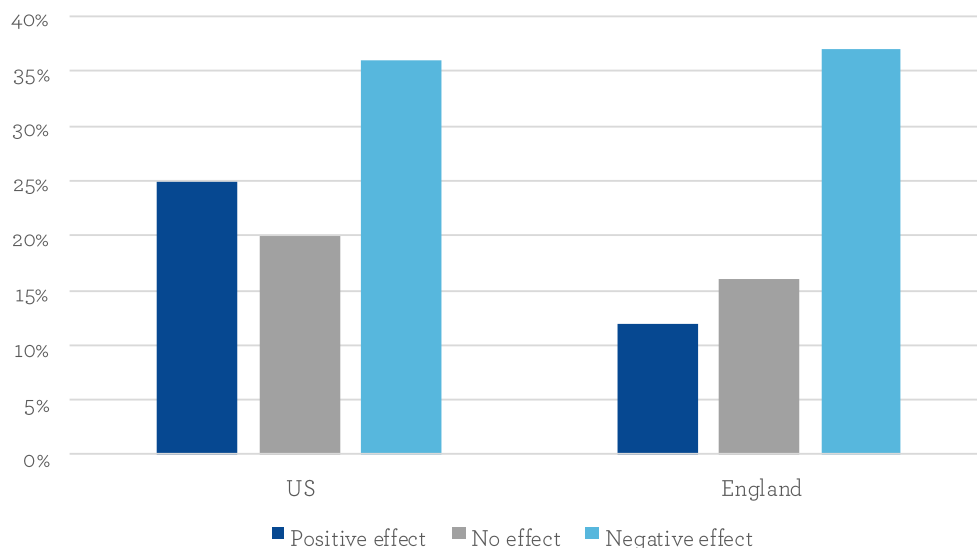
	All teachers
More freedom to decide the curriculum	63%
More control of allocation of resources	60%
More freedom to decide programmes and approaches to learning	50%
More collaboration with other schools/a wider learning network	47%
Freedom from local bureaucracy	37%
More flexibility on teacher pay	10%

### United States

Opinion on charter schools in the United States was similarly mixed. The make-up of the smaller US teacher sample was different to England, with just 4.5% teaching in charter schools, reflecting the fact that charter teachers make up 6% of all public school teachers.<sup>21</sup> However, such low numbers mean that the perceptions of charter teachers themselves cannot be estimated reliably here.

Overall, one in four (25%) of all teachers felt that charter school autonomy had a positive effect on the day to day life of teachers in the classroom, with 36% negative, while 20% felt it had no effect. As figure 7 displays, amongst teachers in England fewer than half (12%) the proportion saw the benefits of becoming an academy, with negative perceptions at a similar level (37%). Substantially more English teachers had no opinion (34% to 19%), potentially reflecting a higher degree of polarisation on the issue in the US. This is despite the fact that many fewer teachers in the US sample had direct experience of working in charters than academy teachers in the English sample.

Figure 7. Perceptions of the effect of charter/academy autonomy in the classroom, United States and England (teachers)

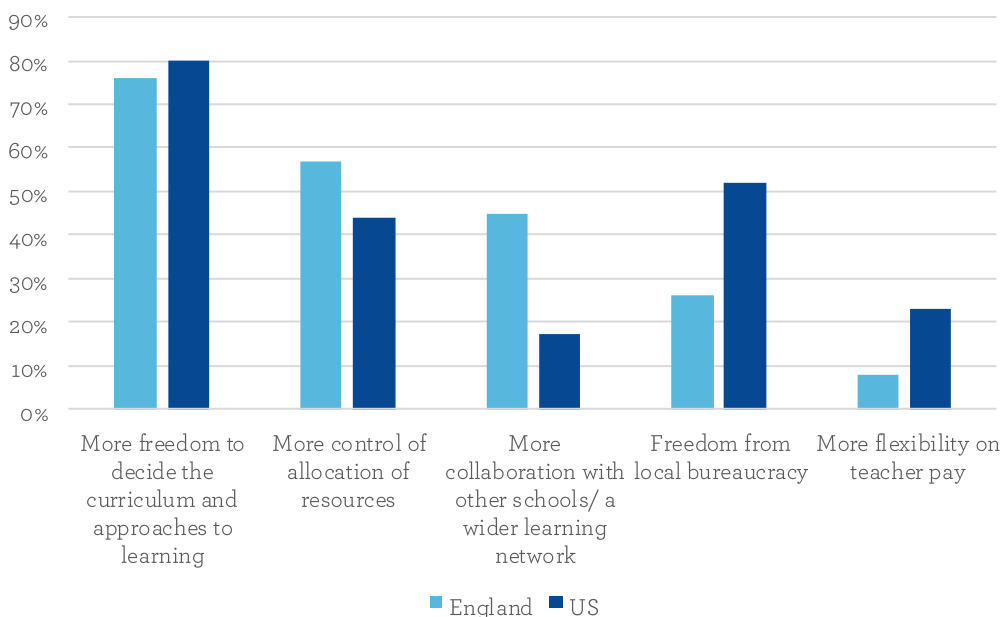


<sup>21</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/08/15/the-nations-teaching-force-is-still-mostly.html>

Of those who saw the positive effects of charter autonomy, the overwhelming focus was on freedom over approaches to learning (80%), with a similar focus in England. Freedom from local bureaucracy was the second highest at 52%. While this was twice as high as among all teachers in England (26%), given that most teachers in the sample don't work in charters, it reflects a trend in England of those not working in academies citing freedom from bureaucracy as a greater benefit than those working in them, potentially indicating a 'grass is greener' effect. The importance of flexibility on teacher pay also differed substantially between the two countries, with almost three times as many teachers citing this in the United States, 23% compared to 8% in England.

Finally, collaboration with other schools was seen as much less of a benefit in the US, 17% compared to 45%, perhaps reflecting the much greater development of multi-academy trusts – which are becoming the main route for academy expansion - compared with charter networks. The majority (59%) of charter schools are independently managed, rather than part of a network.<sup>22</sup> Whereas just a third of academies are independent, with two thirds run as part of multi-academy trusts.<sup>23</sup> While collaboration with other schools was perceived as one of the major benefits of academies in England, this was very much a minor factor in the consideration of US teachers.

**Figure 8. Positive benefits of academy/charter autonomy, of those who saw any benefit, United States and England (teachers)**



<sup>22</sup> <http://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/New-Closed-2016.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Chain-Effects-2017.pdf>

Despite differing school systems, structures, scale and budget, teachers in the United States and England face many of the same challenges, and have significant commonalities in their approaches, perceptions and attitudes. The high level of awareness of the importance of research evidence on both sides of the Atlantic is a positive indication, particularly given its trajectory of improvement in England. However, there remains room to improve *how* research is used and raising awareness of the type of systematic overviews provided by the Education Endowment Foundation and the What Works Clearinghouse, rather than relying on piecemeal or ad hoc recommendations from peers on research sources. Reaching a wider audience within the school leader and teacher communities is crucial to delivering effective programmes for young people from poorer backgrounds and maximising the impact of the dedicated funding provided in each country. While structural school reform can be an important lever for change, ultimately the most significant impact on children's outcomes comes from teachers themselves. So, creating an environment which facilitates high quality teaching is paramount in order to ensure school provides a great start in life for all children.

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