



Department
for Education

Grants to fund innovation in alternative provision

Specification of requirements

March 2018

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Overview of the fund

Background

1. Alternative provision (AP) is education for children and young people whose educational needs cannot be met in a mainstream or special school. Local authorities are required, by law, to make provision for all children of compulsory school age who would not otherwise receive suitable education, for any reason, such as those who have been permanently excluded from school or who are otherwise without a school place. Schools have a duty to commission AP, during fixed period exclusions, from the sixth day of an exclusion; and can also choose to direct children to AP to improve their behaviour, without excluding them, in some circumstances. Further information can be found in our statutory guidance¹.

2. The AP sector is very diverse, reflecting the wide range of needs of the children who are educated within it. There is some very effective provision, which is succeeding in supporting some of the most vulnerable children to make strong academic progress in, and achieve meaningful outcomes when they leave, AP. Despite this, overall, children in AP are more likely not to achieve the educational outcomes they need to prepare themselves for, and succeed in, adult life. Children who have finished Key Stage 4 in AP often have not achieved the knowledge and skills they need in key subjects, such as English and mathematics, and have a much higher chance of disengaging from education, employment or training when they leave school.

3. The Government strongly believes that every child deserves an education that enables them to fulfil their potential, whatever their background, needs or location in the country. AP plays a critical role in making this happen. It provides support to children at challenging moments in their lives and each placement has the potential to transform a child's life chances. In delivering reforms to AP, the Government wants to ensure: the right children are placed in AP; children have good experiences of, and receive high quality education in, AP; children make good academic progress in AP, including in key subjects, such as English and mathematics; children achieve meaningful outcomes after leaving AP; and AP is recognised as an integral part of the education system and that it is designed to achieve high quality outcomes for children and value for money for the taxpayer.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/268940/alternative_provision_statutory_guidance_pdf_version.pdf

The Alternative Provision Innovation Fund

4. Our reform of AP seeks to build an evidence base on how to improve outcomes for children in AP and to spread good practice consistently across the school system. There is, currently, limited evidence on the most effective methods to improve the outcomes for these children, and on why some commissioners and providers achieve better outcomes than others. Effective practice is not systematically captured and shared in order to improve performance across the education system.

5. To address these issues, we are launching this Innovation Fund to develop projects that will deliver better outcomes for children in AP and to extend evidence-based projects to new settings. The fund will also enable us to share effective practice across the sector.

6. We will evaluate funded projects to strengthen the evidence base on effective practice and build knowledge and insights that can be shared with the sector. We expect all successful projects to participate fully in knowledge-sharing and networking events which will be organised through the fund; and to share their experiences with the wider AP sector and beyond.

7. We would welcome bids within the following three themes:

- supporting children to make good academic progress in AP and **successful transitions from AP to education, training and employment at age 16** and beyond;
- supporting children to **reintegrate into suitable mainstream or special school placements**, where this is in their best interests and compatible with the interests of other children at that school; and
- enabling better educational outcomes for children in AP by **increasing parental or carer engagement**.

8. All bids should demonstrate clearly that they will target at least one of the three policy themes; and bidders are encouraged to provide succinct and relevant evidence that they meet the priorities outlined in this guidance.

9. We are particularly interested in projects that would reach two or more AP settings; are commissioned by school partnerships; or will be delivered across a local area. However, recognising the diversity of the AP sector, we will consider bids that are of smaller scale if they are able to demonstrate clearly that they meet the assessment criteria set out below and could be meaningfully evaluated.

10. We intend the Innovation Fund to run for two academic years from September 2018 to July 2020.

Policy themes

11. We have focused the Innovation Fund on three policy themes that are key to improving the outcomes of children in AP. A brief summary of the Department for Education's (Department) ambitions within each theme is outlined below. We have provided examples of the types of projects and success indicators we would expect to see. Bidders are welcome to submit other proposals as long as they demonstrate that they meet the assessment criteria and overarching aims of the fund, as outlined in this guidance. The final proposals, success measures and indicators will be agreed between the successful bidder, evaluator and the Department.

Good academic progress in, and successful transitions from, AP to education, training and employment at age 16

12. Many children are supported to make rapid social, emotional and educational progress while in AP settings. However, national data on outcomes for children at Key Stage 4 and leaving AP after this stage are very poor. National data shows that 4.5% of children who attended AP achieved 9-4 passes in English and mathematics at GCSE, compared to 65.1% in state-funded mainstream schools and 1.0% in state-funded special schools. While there are many reasons why children who attend AP at Key Stage 4 may face challenges gaining good GCSE grades, national data on outcomes for children leaving AP at 16 are also very poor. In 2015, young people who finished Key Stage 4 in AP made up 2% of all children at this stage but 14% of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) at 16. Comparison with special and mainstream settings shows that young people leaving AP do considerably worse: in 2015/16 more than one in three young people, aged 16, leaving AP did not sustain education, employment or training, compared to approximately one in twenty young people leaving special and mainstream schools.

13. This theme, therefore, seeks projects that support children and young people to achieve good academic progress in AP settings and go on to sustain meaningful education, training or employment, post-16. We are particularly interested in projects that:

- **support children in AP settings, as early as possible, to prepare for their next steps in education and employment.** For example, we are looking for AP providers to raise educational standards to provide children with the knowledge, skills and qualifications they need to move onto meaningful education, training or employment post-16. Projects should seek to improve children's progress in key subjects, like English and mathematics, which provide a strong platform for further study and employment. Projects could also focus on giving children opportunities to develop ambitions for their careers, by working with local post-16 education and training providers and employers, to arrange visits, placements and work experience. They could also enable

children and young people to find out more about the financial and other support available to them, when they leave AP, so they can make successful transitions to education, training or employment.

- **support young people in AP to sustain their post-16 education, training or employment.** For example, we are interested in seeing greater partnership working between AP and post-16 providers to ensure young people leaving AP settings have achieved good progress in key subjects, like English and mathematics, and have developed the behaviours needed to succeed in their further education, training or employment. Projects could also offer support to young people who leave AP settings to help sustain their next placement; or, working with further education colleges and other post-16 providers, could offer early opportunities to young people leaving AP to prepare for their next steps.

14. We are not looking to develop new post-16 provision for this strand. Rather, we are interested in how children and young people can be prepared for their next steps; and how existing providers can adapt to meet the needs of young people leaving AP.

15. Indicators of success for projects that support transition from AP to education, training and employment, at age 16, could include: improved educational attainment, particularly in key subjects, such as English and mathematics; improved access to, and achievement in, appropriate training and/or qualifications; improved child wellbeing and behaviour; improved satisfaction with placements; increased employer engagement; or greater success rates for young people leaving AP going onto sustained education, employment and training for at least 2 academic terms.

Reintegration into a suitable mainstream or special placement

16. We know that children in AP have poorer educational outcomes than their peers in mainstream schools, and that children in AP who maintain a link to mainstream education are more likely to succeed. Some of the most effective AP can re-engage children in their education and support them to return to a suitable mainstream or special setting, when this is in their best interests and compatible with those of other children in these settings. However, often reintegration is not attempted or fails to be sustained. This theme seeks projects that support pupils in making good academic progress while in AP settings and successful transition back to a suitable mainstream or special placement that is sustained and enables them to achieve better long term outcomes.

17. We are particularly interested in projects that:

- **deliver more effective placement arrangements, so that children are prepared to reintegrate into mainstream or special schools after being in an AP setting.** For example, schools and AP providers could work together to ensure children make good academic progress and can continue to engage in

the curriculum provided in mainstream settings. This should enable children to benefit from high quality teaching in key subjects, such as English and mathematics, and could be delivered through part-time or flexible placements across mainstream and special settings. AP providers could also develop targeted programmes to raise academic outcomes for pupils in AP.

Programmes could focus on improving attendance, managing challenging behaviour, providing access to specialist interventions to improve their English and mathematics and greater wellbeing and mental health; or

- **develop stronger transitional arrangements, to ensure that children are supported to successfully reintegrate into mainstream or special schools.** This could be achieved, for example, by developing new procedures or placement arrangements that incentivise investment in ensuring reintegration arrangements work well; allow children to maintain contact with their mainstream or special school while they are in AP settings; or take graduated steps back and maintain important relationships with key adults.

18. Indicators of success for projects that support reintegration into suitable mainstream or special placements could include: improved educational attainment, particularly in key subjects, such as English and mathematics; improved attendance and behaviour; improved wellbeing, engagement and progress in study and school life; increased child/parent satisfaction in the placement; greater support which is suitable for the child and their educational outcomes; or reintegration into special or mainstream schools that is sustained for at least two terms.

Increasing parental or carer engagement

19. Parental and carer involvement is consistently associated with children's academic progress and success at school. It is important that AP providers engage parents and carers in their child's education and their social emotional and behavioural development, while in AP placements. Involving parents and carers, in a positive way, can also help challenge negative perceptions of AP, allowing them to provide more consistent support to their children to succeed.

20. We are particularly interested in projects that:

- **involve parents and carers in engaging children in AP in their education.** For example, we are looking for projects that ensure children make good academic progress, by involving parents from the beginning of a child's placement in AP until they are successfully reintegrated into mainstream or special schools or move on to their next placement. This could be through stronger induction processes; creative ways of engaging parents in supporting their child's progress in English and mathematics; inviting parents to joint

sessions with their children; extracurricular activities; or positive communications about the role of AP.

21. Indicators of success for projects that increase parental engagement could include: improved educational attainment, particularly in key subjects, such as English and mathematics; improved access to, and achievement in, appropriate training and/or qualifications; improved attendance and behaviour; improved wellbeing and engagement in education; improved parental and carer understanding of/engagement with the education provider; sustained reintegration to mainstream or special schools (where appropriate for the pupil); or increased movement into and sustainment of meaningful post-16 placements.

Funding and eligibility

Available funding

22. Up to £4 million is available in the AP Innovation Fund and we expect to fund approximately 10-15 projects. The level of funding that is provided to each project will vary depending on the scale and quality of the proposals received. This means that different sized grants will be provided to different projects, depending on a) the scale of the project proposed; and b) robust evidence of the funding required. While there is no minimum or upper limit for grant awards, we expect to award grants of varying sizes in the range £150,000 - £750,000.

23. Exact funding amounts provided to successful applicants will be dependent on assessment of applications and negotiations on detail of the grants. Payment of grant funding instalments are dependent on projects successfully delivering agreed milestones. Neither the Department nor the grant recipients must pay any grant monies in advance of need. Bidders must expressly state, within their bids, that they accept and will comply with this requirement. Subject always to compliance with this requirement, bidders can state, within their bids, when they might prefer payments to be made. Any such preferences are strictly subject to the Department's approval in its sole and absolute discretion; and, furthermore, such suggestions need to be at intervals that are fair and reasonable to both the bidder and the Department. In specific circumstances, on the basis of need, the Department allows for payments to be made in advance of expenditure, in order to achieve better value for money.

Eligibility to apply

24. To be eligible for grant funding through this fund, bidders must demonstrate that:

- the sole organisation or lead body (if the proposal is a consortium/partnership bid) is a school, college, university, local authority, voluntary, community or social enterprise (VCSE) organisation or other profit or non-profit organisation;
- work will be limited to within England;
- the whole bid is made on a not-for-profit basis;
- the bid must be designed to work within, or in partnership with, school(s), college(s) or other AP provider(s). By 'partnership' we mean that the provider must (as a minimum) engage with the relevant school, college or AP provider attended by the young person, to help assess whether the proposed intervention is successful. We would expect schools, colleges or providers to be named in any bid;
- the bid does not include an application for any funding for activities that are already funded by the Government or other funders;
- the bid does not include an application for any funding for capital expenditure;

- the bid will directly impact children who are currently attending, or have recently attended, AP – this excludes, for example, early intervention in mainstream settings; and
- they will work cooperatively with the evaluator, including by collecting and providing management information and participating in knowledge-sharing events organised through the fund.

25. Grants will not be paid to any organisation that does not pass our reasonable financial due diligence checks. This will include solvency checks and no grant is likely to be paid if it comprises more than 50% of an organisation's annual turnover. Bidders that have demonstrated they satisfactorily meet the assessment criteria will be required to provide additional financial information to support the due diligence checks. The Department will contact relevant organisations, regarding next steps, after an initial evaluation of bids.

Assessment criteria

26. We will evaluate all bids received against the assessment criteria, to ensure a fair process. The Department reserves the right to determine the number of applications that are successful during the process, based on the quality of the bids received, mix of educational phases and geographical spread. We will not fund projects that do not contribute clearly to the overall aims of the AP reform programme, set out in paragraph 3, and the specific outcomes sought under each theme set out in paragraphs 11-21.

27. There are five assessment criteria on which we will assess bids. These are: outcomes; impact; capacity to deliver; sustainability; and value for money. Details of our expectations under these criteria is provided in the table below.

Criteria	The strongest bids will:	Weighting
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be focused on at least one of the policy themes outlined in this specification (set out in paragraph 7); target the specific outcomes sought under each policy theme in this specification (set out in paragraphs 11-21); have plans to measure the outcomes sought in this specification; and provide evidence or a theory of change to demonstrate that the activity proposed will lead to the target outcomes. 	20%
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> be likely to deliver significant improvements to outcomes for children in AP in at least one of the three themes; be delivered across a large enough child cohort; be developing knowledge or codifying practice that will be relevant to other AP or education settings; be likely to be adopted or adapted to other settings in future; and demonstrate a willingness to share knowledge and insights at a national level. 	20%
Capacity to deliver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate that there is robust leadership; and good quality governance and partnership arrangements in place to manage the project; present a clear and well-developed delivery plan – i.e. provide a clear identification of tasks and timescales required to deliver, successfully, the proposal; and clarity on roles and responsibilities; identify risks to delivery and propose mitigation strategies; and present a proposal that is realistic, coherent and achievable within the available time and funding. 	20%

Criteria	The strongest bids will:	Weighting
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate that there is a plan for sustaining activity or impact of the project beyond the Innovation Fund period. 	20%
Value for money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • detail how value for money will be delivered within the proposed costings, including how reasonable costs have been developed and better outcomes will be delivered for the same cost; • provide a clear breakdown of the costs expected to be incurred in meeting the stated objectives; and • provide evidence for how funding requested through the AP Innovation Fund will not duplicate existing funding streams. 	20%

The Application process

How to apply

28. The bidding round will open on Friday 16 March 2018 and will close at 23:59pm on Sunday 22 April, 2018. Key dates and deadlines for the application process are set out in the table below.

Milestones	Dates
Bidding round for the AP Innovation Fund opens	16 March 2018
Pre-application webinars	2pm on 27 March 2018 11 am on 12 April 2018 Midday on 16 April 2018
Bidding round for the AP Innovation Fund closes	22 April 2018
Assessment of applications	April - May 2018
The Department to contact prospective bidders for clarification or additional information, if required	w/c 30 April & 7 May 2018
Requested bidders to submit additional financial information	May 2018
Decisions on applications announced	June 2018
Funding begins to distributed to successful bidders	From September 2018
AP Innovation Fund programme ends	July 2020

29. Successful bidders should expect to begin preparations for their projects during summer 2018, including working with the evaluator to start to collect management information, from the summer term onwards. Projects are expected to be delivered, in settings, from the next academic year, i.e. from September 2018 onwards.

Application form

30. Applications should be succinct and must be within the word limit provided for each section of the form. Applicants will be asked to provide the following information:

- summary of the proposal;
- a project plan;
- the outcomes sought;
- costs and funding information; and
- risks to delivery and suggested mitigations.

Submitting your application

31. Please email a single Word version of your completed application form to APIF.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk by 23:59pm on Sunday 22 April, 2018.

32. The organisation name of the lead bidder and the words 'AP Innovation Fund Application' should be included in the email 'subject' field when submitting your application.

33. Once submitted, applicants will receive an email response confirming the application has been received.

Department for Education engagement with applicants

34. The Department is hosting webinars, including a Q&A session, for interested organisations to learn more about the AP Innovation Fund, including:

- the aims of the fund; and
- the application process/timeline.

35. We would encourage interested organisations to attend a webinar to gain a better understanding of the fund and to use these opportunities to resolve any queries before completing an application. Further details about the dates and registration details of the events can be found on the AP Innovation Fund web page.

36. We would also ask bidders to be available in the weeks commencing 30 April and 7 May 2018 for follow-up discussions with the Department, where we will seek clarifications or ask for additional information on the application, should this be necessary.

Monitoring, outputs and evaluation

37. The Department will be appointing an independent evaluator to evaluate the projects, based on an agreed evaluation framework. Bidders will be expected to cooperate fully with the evaluation process, including any final reporting that may take place after the grant funding has ceased.

38. All projects will need a named project lead who will liaise with the Department and the evaluator. All projects will need to collect and provide the evaluator with agreed management information, which could include data such as unique pupil numbers, attendance and progress records. The management information to be collected will be agreed with individual projects, early in the Innovation Fund programme.

39. The project lead will also be asked to provide termly returns, setting out key activities and milestones that have been achieved; and to send representatives to monitoring meetings with officials from the Department. We envisage at least two monitoring meetings will be held and the lead organisation should consider expenses as part of the application. The Department will also send officials to visit the projects and observe their delivery.

40. The Department will organise knowledge-sharing and networking events during the course of the AP fund, to share effective practice and insights between the funded projects and for the wider sector. Bidders will be expected to participate fully in these activities and to be willing to share their insights with others.

Next steps

Terms and conditions of grant funding

41. Before submitting an application, applicants should ensure they have read and understood the [Department for Education grant funding agreement terms and conditions](#). In applying for the AP Innovation Fund, applicants will be agreeing to the Department for Education grant funding agreement terms and conditions.

42. In the event of an application being successful, the applicant will be required to sign a grant offer letter. This will set out the specific grant conditions, monitoring arrangements and payment details.

Contact details

43. If applicants have any queries, they should contact the Department via the AP Innovation Fund mailbox (APIF.MAILBOX@education.gov.uk), prior to submitting an application form. We endeavour to respond to all queries within 3 working days.

44. We will inform applicants, via email, of the outcome of their bid, after the assessment process is complete. We expect this to be in June 2018.



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