



Department
for Education

Areas of research interest

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Research and Analysis within the Department for Education

The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for children's services and education, including higher and further education policy, apprenticeships and wider skills in England. We work to provide children's services and education that ensures equality of opportunity for all, regardless of background or family circumstances.

DfE puts evidence at the centre of policy making and delivery and recognises the crucial role it plays in improving outcomes for children, young people, families and adults. We are a major producer of [statistics](#), [research and analysis](#). The department is also a major funder of external, independent education research. We provided a £125m founding grant to the [Education Endowment Foundation](#), which works to generate and disseminate evidence and to build the experimental evidence base for interventions within schools and classrooms. We are also a major contributor to other What Works Centres, such as the [Early Intervention Foundation](#), and we are establishing a [What Works Centre for Children's Social Care](#).

We also commission research projects and policy evaluations directly, with projects for tender advertised on [contracts finder](#)¹, and operate the analytical Associate Pool - a group of independent academics and researchers that we can commission at pace to provide services such as secondary data analysis and rapid evidence reviews. More information is available [here](#).

DfE publishes the outputs of its research in line with the Government Social Research publication protocol and produces statistics according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. We also have a mechanism to make individualised data we own available for research purposes. These processes are described in Annex A.

We are also users of the economic and social research council's (ESRC) [secondary data analysis initiative](#) and engage with the ESRC as the UK's research council for economic and social policy.

Periodically we run consultations about different aspects of DfE business, including calls for evidence on different policy areas, challenge funds for research ideas, or requests for views on governance issues, including analysis, published [here](#).

¹ You can find our projects by searching for 'DFERPPU'.

Areas of Research Interest

This publication sets out areas where DfE is interested in more research and new evidence². Given the broad policy agenda of the department it is not practical to provide an exhaustive list of research questions of interest. Instead this is a targeted list of areas which are both key departmental priorities and where we feel the research community is currently well placed to add to our evidence base. In terms of approaches to answer the questions, we are interested in both primary qualitative and quantitative research, secondary data analysis, and literature reviews/synthesis of existing evidence. For all questions we are interested in international perspectives and what has worked, or not, in other countries. For all our questions we are interested in how results differ for relevant sub-groups such as Free School Meal pupils, Pupil Premium pupils, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) pupils, Black and Minority Ethnic pupils, and gender.

Early Years

1. What is the prevalence of different pedagogical approaches in different early years settings, including maintained nurseries and nursery provision in primary schools? How does this vary across the workforce? Which of these approaches have the greatest impact on development?
2. How can schools best manage the transition from early years to school and minimise any negative effects on children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Schools

3. What types of approaches lead to better outcomes for condition-specific learning needs in mainstream schooling? What works for SEND outreach work, for example from special schools to support learners in mainstream schools?
4. Which interventions are most effective at recruiting and retaining good teachers within a constrained funding envelope - particularly in shortage subjects such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and Modern Foreign Languages, and in the most challenging schools/areas?
5. What can cognitive science and neuroscientific developments tell us about effective teaching approaches?

² This list is designed to aid external researchers design research which has policy impact. It is not an invitation to tender for DfE funding for specific research projects.

6. Amongst poor performing schools, is it possible accurately to predict which will improve and which will remain poor or deteriorate?
7. What are the underlying drivers of geographical differences in educational attainment?
8. How can schools best identify children's mild to moderate mental health needs, and what role can early intervention play in preventing escalation?
9. What are the factors associated with teacher and pupil wellbeing, and what interventions and approaches are effective in supporting and promoting wellbeing of all in schools and colleges?

Further and Higher Education

10. What impact do further education, technical education and apprenticeships have on improving earnings and career progression for learners? What is the best way to assess the longevity/durability of impact and how does it vary by qualification and learner demography?
11. What are the influences on young people's decision making at key education transition points, including subject and qualification choice at key stage 4 and 5? How do these choices influence their later economic outcomes?
12. How can we understand the differences in participation in further and higher education and training routes - in particular how do issues of access or choice affect disadvantaged pupils?
13. How do skills needs in the national and local economy and qualifications of our labour force match up? Can careers advice policies, the Teaching Excellence Framework and spending decisions improve effectiveness?
14. What role should government play in encouraging upskilling or reskilling for those in the labour market to make skills supply more responsive to local economic needs? What barriers do working individuals face when retraining?
15. How do England's general, technical and academic education systems compare to systems in other developed economies in terms of status, structure, operation and performance? How can the performance of England's systems be monitored relative to systems in these other countries?

Children's Social Care

16. How can we better quantify and measure the benefits of social work assessment, training and development in terms of child outcomes such as wellbeing and educational achievement?

17. What are children's end-to-end routes through the care system, and how does this impact on later life outcomes, such as educational achievement, wellbeing and labour market outcomes?

Cross-cutting

18. What is known about drivers and barriers to parental engagement in their children's education in the home? How can improvements in the home-learning environment mitigate the effect of disadvantage on pupils' attainment?

19. How do schools and colleges become more financially efficient over time? What are the drivers of that behaviour and how can it best be stimulated, supported and replicated?

20. How can emerging technology be deployed to improve school and college financial efficiency and reduce teacher workload whilst maintaining standards?

Key Contacts

Please send correspondence and further questions to ARI.Reply@education.gov.uk

Next Steps

This document is part of a broader engagement between the department and the research community. We will work with academia, research funders and organisations to deliver against these areas of interest. In particular, we will:

- Collaborate with Cabinet Office to second in post-doctoral researchers and research professionals into the department to conduct research on the areas identified.
- Collaborate with the Royal Society and British Academy on their work to improve the coordination of the education research landscape, and the join-up between researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.
- Collaborate with the ESRC to make funding available through their Secondary Data Analysis Initiative for researchers to complete projects which address these areas of interest.

Annex A

Government Social Research Publication Protocol

The Government Social Research publication protocol is designed to ensure government research is released into the public domain in a manner which promotes public confidence and scientific rigour. It sets down five principals. The full protocol is available [here](#).

Principle 1. The products of government social research and analysis will be made publicly available. The primary purpose of social research commissioned and conducted by government is to inform decisions about policy and delivery, but it also plays a role in wider policy debate. The presumption is that products from government social research will be made publicly available.

Principle 2. There will be prompt release of all government social research and analysis. Government social research and analysis should be published promptly, with the normal maximum being 12 weeks from agreeing the final output. Within this period, the timing of the release can coincide with policy announcements/decisions/events. Findings should not be released in such a way as to create a presumed, or actual, advantage to any group or individual.

Principle 3. Government social research and analysis must be released in a way that promotes public trust. Research products should be clearly based on the data collected. They should reflect the policies they have been designed to investigate, but findings should not be influenced by political concerns relating to those policies. Research products should be kept clearly distinct from Ministerial views, although their release can be timed to coincide with Ministerial announcements.

Principle 4. Clear communication plans should be developed for all social research and analysis produced by government Departments and devolved administrations should publicly announce what research projects have been commissioned and publish high-level information regarding those projects. Analysts should be clear with Ministers about the intention to publish in-house analytical outputs as early as possible. Communication plans should be drawn up for all research and analysis produced by government, as part of project management principles.

Principle 5. Responsibility for the release of social research and analysis produced by government must be clear. The Permanent Secretary should appoint a named person who has both the authority and expertise to make judgements about whether an output falls within the scope of the protocol and who is responsible for ensuring the protocol is adhered to.

Publication of Statistics

The Department for Education regularly produces a range of official statistics covering a broad range of business across the Department. DfE and its Arm's-Length Bodies produce statistics according to the Statistics and Registrations Act 1997 and the associated Code of Practice for Official Statistics. These set out the protocols and practices for publishing official statistics in a trustworthy manner. The key points are:

- The timing and content of statistical releases are solely a matter for the Head of Profession for statistics;
- The date of publication is pre-announced at least 4 weeks prior to publication (in practice in DfE we announce around 3-4 months in advance);
- Statistics are released at 9.30am on the date of publication;

Accessing DfE Individualised Data

Currently, the typical way researchers access DfE data is via the [external request process](#). This process has a robust governance process which tests for proportionality, legality, security and ethics/benefits of the research, prior to providing an extract of data. During this process all steps to anonymise/desensitise the data, whilst considering research objectives, are taken. However, that process can be time consuming, and moving towards better ways of providing access to data other than bespoke extracts may deliver significant benefits both for users and for DfE.

That DfE is currently exploring ways to modernise how we provide access to personal level data to external parties, including researchers. It is the intention of the department to increasingly provide ways for researchers to access our data without bespoke extracts being created and moved to the researcher for local storage.

Work will involve extensive research and testing with users to ensure that we not only build any future solutions which meet the strategic objectives of the department, but also support the needs of researchers to access data, as we recognise the significant benefits associated with appropriate, secure access to our data for the purposes of research.



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