

# Expression of interest

# Research on the evolving role of local authorities in school systems that are increasingly academised.

**Project reference: DFERPPU 20-21/035**

**Deadline for expressions of interest:** **5pm on 22nd February 2021**

## Summary

Expressions of interest are sought to undertake a research project to understand the role of local authorities in providing sufficient school places to meet the diverse needs of all pupils in an increasingly academised system. This research will update research published by the department in 2014 called “The evolving education system in England: a temperature check” that examined the role of local authorities in the system[[1]](#footnote-2).

The two overarching questions the research will answer are:

1. How do local authorities ensure sufficient supply of high-quality school places?
2. How are local authorities supporting vulnerable children and fulfilling their duties with regards to those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), expelled children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds?

## Background

The education system continues to evolve with more schools converting to become academies. The department is considering the consequences for our statutory and regulatory framework and existing legal duties (e.g. for schools, trusts, LAs) as schools become academies. Local authorities hold several statutory duties and play a major role in managing the system - as a commissioner, coordinator, or neutral arbiter. The department would like to explore a number of LA roles in more detail, as schools become academies. These areas are admissions, exclusions, Alternative Provision (AP), SEND, high needs funding and school organisation (covering sufficiency of places).

In 2014 the department published a research report entitled “The evolving education system in England: a temperature check” which examined the role of local authorities in the system. This report found that the system was evolving positively and many of the worries raised by LAs in earlier research[[2]](#footnote-3) had not been realised. For example, concerns that academies might refuse to comply with the school admissions code or requests to expand were not borne out. The headline findings from the research for the two strands on which we want this new research to focus were:

* 1. Place planning – is evolving well, with local areas finding ways to ensure that there are enough primary places. There are examples of local systems working pro-actively with free school proposers to enhance local provision. LAs still had some concerns about how secondary schools will handle the current increase in primary numbers as it works through the system, but they are relatively confident that they will cope.
  2. Vulnerable pupils – progress was slower, but there was evidence of local systems beginning to develop school-led approaches in areas where national policy has been agreed.

## Research aims

The main aims of this research are covered under two overarching questions which are both set in the context of a more or fully academised schools’ sector:

1) **How do local authorities ensure sufficient supply of high-quality school places?**

* This will involve exploring issues including data availability, system incentives, barriers, operational processes and good practice.

2) **How are local authorities supporting vulnerable children and fulfilling their statutory duties with regards to those with SEN and disabilities, expelled children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.**

* This will involve exploring issues including meeting the needs of Educational Health and Care plans, barriers to commissioning AP, levers available to LAs in relation to vulnerable children, and how LAs are exercising safeguarding duties.

## Methodology

The proposal is to undertake two different strands of this project which use different methodologies.

**Strand 1 – Qualitative interviews** in 10 local authority areas. These will include a range of leaders from each local system through one-to-one interviews and small-group workshops. The interviews will provide a rounded view on the role of each local authority because the sample won’t solely include LA staff (elected members, senior local authority officers and heads of service) but also school leaders (including MATs), governors, and diocese education officers.

**Strand 2 – Survey of local authorities**

A survey of local authorities (completed by the head of education or someone similar) to “test” or further validate the key findings from the qualitative work. This will allow us to understand how strongly the findings from the 10 LA areas studied in depth resonate with the rest of the country.

## Timing

* Deadline for EOIs – 5pm 22nd Feb 2021
* Deadline for tenders – 5pm 18th March 2021
* Anticipated start of project w/c 22nd March 2021
* Fieldwork to take place during the summer term
* Draft final report by early September 2021

## Assessment criteria

Your expression of interest should be **no more than 1,000 words** and there is no need to provide references at this stage.

EOIs will be assessed by the following criteria:

* Evidence of understanding the education system, especially the role of local authorities and their statutory duties.
* Evidence of relevant methodological experience (online focus groups, depth interviews, survey)
* Capacity to complete the interviews and reporting by the deadlines given above.

Each of these are equally weighted

| **Closing date for EOIs:** Monday 22nd February 2021 at 17.00  **Send your EOI form to:** [**robert.cirin@education.gov.uk**](mailto:robert.cirin@education.gov.uk) |
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## How to submit an expressions of interest

You must submit an expression of interest (EOI) in order to be considered to be invited to tender. To do so, please complete the NEW EOI Form which can be found under attachments. A submission of an EOI does not guarantee an invitation to tender and the Department does not routinely advise organisations that they have not been successful in being invited to tender. Feedback is however available on request.

All contracts are let on the basis of the Department’s Terms & Conditions, a copy is available attached to the Contracts Finder listing. You are encouraged to check these before submitting your expression of interest, as these form part of your contractual obligations.

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