Schedule 2 (Specification)

This Schedule sets out what the Buyer wants.

For all Deliverables, the Supplier must help the Buyer comply with any specific applicable Standards of the Buyer.

Our social value priorities

These are our priorities in this procurement:

Covid-19 Recovery

SPECIFICATION

The Department for Education ("Department") is seeking to approve a provider to deliver targeted, responsive, one-to-one support for persistently and severely absent pupils across a number of Education Investment Areas (EIA). The support will start in Middlesborough, a priority EIA, in the first pilot year before rolling out to an additional four EIAs from the start of year two and continuing in all five areas in year three. The additional EIAs in years two and three will be decided by the Department and could be any of the priority Education Investment Areas nationally. We will work with the successful provider to ensure enough notice is given before this decision is made.

The contract of up to **£2.32 million (total over three years)** will be awarded from October 2022 until 30th September 2025 with break clauses which will be reviewed after the first and second year of delivery. The review will take into consideration the indicative KPI's below and other key deliverables to ensure delivery is on track, and will consider whether the programme continues to represent good value for money. If the findings of these reviews indicate that the contract is not meeting key deliverables, the Department reserves the right to cancel the contractual agreement early.

1   Introduction/Background

Improving school attendance, especially for persistently absent pupils and the most vulnerable is a priority for the Government and the Department.

The reasons pupils become persistently (missing over 10% of possible sessions) and severely (missing over 50% of possible sessions) absent from school are complex and include:

- Barriers from mental & physical health e.g. short term illness

- Academic challenges e.g. low aspirations and confidence

- Social and behavioural challenges e.g. bullying

- Barriers from home environment e.g. housing/financial barriers

- Travel e.g. term time holidays

The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, creating ongoing challenges for schools and local authority services.

Breaking the cycle of poor attendance is critical to the Government's aim of 'levelling up' opportunity across the country. Poor attendance can lead to a range of negative impacts on attainment and wider life chances, as well as involvement in risky behaviours. Regular attendance is vital for maximising the benefits of education, and is also beneficial for a child's well-being, mental health, and long-term development. Furthermore, it provides a protective factor from wider harms, particularly for vulnerable pupils. Regular school attendance is one of the Department's levers to close the disadvantage gap.

We know that poor attendance is associated with:

- Reduced attainment levels at both KS2 and KS4[1]

- Impacts on pupils' wider life chances – including a higher likelihood of becoming NEET post-16[2], lifetime reduction in earnings and poor health outcomes[3]

- Risky behaviours that impact on the wider community – including gang membership, offending and serious violence[4]

Responding to problems with school attendance requires a whole system response, and this pilot is one part of a multi-faceted attendance delivery plan, aiming to sustainably improve attendance across the country. The Schools White Paper – Oppor-

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[1] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/the-link-between-absence-and-attainment-at-ks2-and-ks4

[2] Characteristics of young people who are long-term NEET (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[3] What works re-engaging young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[4] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/716039/examining-the-educational-background-of-young-knife-possession-offenders.pdf

[tunity for all: Strong schools with great teachers for your child](#), sets out the Departments long-term vision for a school system that helps every child to fulfil their potential by ensuring that they receive the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

To do this we need to build capacity in the parts of the country that need this most. This is why in the Levelling Up White Paper we announced 55 Education Investment Areas (EIAs), and a subset of 24 Priority Education Investment Areas which will receive more intensive investment so that we can address entrenched educational issues. For the purpose of this pilot, we will be focussing support on a select group of Priority Education Investment Areas.

In their recent Rapid Evidence Assessment on interventions to improve attendance ([Attendance interventions rapid evidence assessment | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)](#)), the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) found that more research is required to identify specific interventions/programmes that can improve individual pupil attendance. Through this pilot we hope to improve the evidence base and understand how to improve attendance for individual pupils who are either persistently absent or at risk of persistent absence. The findings from this pilot may inform further government programmes and enable schools, trusts, and local authorities to address persistent and severe absence more effectively.

2   Required service

The Department is aiming to pilot an intervention based on the two approaches which EEF judged to have the most evidence of promise, which they called 'interventions that target the individual causes of low attendance' and 'targeted parental approaches'.

Through the initial pilot year, the successful delivery partner, along with an external evaluator contracted by the Department, will be required to combine these approaches into a 'mentoring' model. Mentors will work closely with individual pupils and their families supporting them and working to address any individual barriers to attendance they might face in conjunction with their school, local authority, and other relevant services.

The frequency and duration of the support provided will differ between each pupil depending on their specific circumstances. The successful delivery partner will need to test and refine the approach during this period before expanding to the full trial in years two and three with a more defined intervention. After the first year, we will look to build evidence about the efficacy of the approach in different circumstances.

By the end of the three-year programme, we would expect to have achieved the following outcomes:

- Have improved overall attendance levels and engagement with education for all pupils who are participating.

- Developed our understanding of effective practice and different delivery models when delivering 1-1 support to pupils who are persistent or severely absent.

- Improved the evidence base about how best to support individual pupils to regularly attend school through a rigorous evaluation of this intervention, that helps us understand the value for money, and helps schools, trusts and LAs make evidence informed decisions.

- Tested this intervention on a cohort of pupils with severe and persistent absence to understand what works for the children with the greatest level of need.

To achieve this, we would expect the successful provider to:

- **Manage and recruit a team of attendance mentors.** The provider will need to recruit an appropriate number of mentors across a range of geographical areas. The number of mentors should be able to work with and support at least 335 pupils in year one, and at least 1,665 pupils across all three years. We would expect the mentors to be recruited as near to the start of the contract as possible in the first year (end-October at the latest), and then be in place by September in years two and three. The support will start in Middlesborough, a priority EIA, in the first pilot year before rolling out to an additional four EIAs from the start of year two and continuing in all five areas in year three. The successful bidder would also be expected to ensure that the mentors who are appointed have the appropriate skills and experience in order to deliver this work.

- **Develop the mentoring approach and provide training to mentors to ensure this is effectively delivered.** The provider will need to develop and articulate their proposed mentoring approach. They will need to develop and train the mentors in this approach to ensure consistency. The approach will involve mentors providing tailored one-to-one support to an identified group of persistently and severely absent pupils in year 6 to year 11. The mentor should work with the pupils to understand their individual causes of absence, and then put in place responsive and targeted support to help the pupils overcome those barriers. Where these barriers relate to family life, or the identified support requires co-operation or action from the family, the mentor will also need to engage with the family. Given the level of disengagement from some pupils in this cohort, mentors may be required to provide support in different

locations (e.g. in the family home). However, the end goal will always be to increase engagement and attendance in school. The number of mentors appointed will need to be able to support 335 pupils in year one, and a further 1330 pupils in years two and three.

In addition to this, we would look to work with the provider to develop and disseminate best practice materials through GOV.UK based on the learning from effective interventions used throughout the pilot.

- **Manage the onboarding of pupils who will be supported.** Support will be targeted towards persistent and severely absent pupils in mainstream and alternative provision settings. The successful provider will be expected to identify pupils for mentoring with reference to their attendance data. The provider will be expected to work with the school, LA and other relevant services to negotiate the support with the family. Some causes of absence may be for reasons which can't be resolved through mentoring (for example long term sickness) therefore the provider will work with the department and evaluator to develop criteria setting out which pupils will be eligible for support.

  To test the efficacy of the support for pupils who are both persistent and severely absent we will require sufficient representation on the pilot from both cohorts. This split will need to be agreed with the evaluator to ensure we have an adequate sample size for each for high quality evidence. We recognise the challenges this may bring working with pupils with the highest level of disengagement and will require a provider that is able to evidence their ability to improve attendance outcomes for this group.

- **Build relationships and work with local partners.** As well as working with the pupil, mentors will be required to work with the school and family to tailor the support to the pupils' needs. In some instances, mentors may also be required to work or link into other local authority services. As above, in years 2 and 3 this will require working across 5 LAs/EIAs in total.

  The provider will also be required to work with the department, local partners, and schools to publicise and promote the programme to ensure a high level of engagement.

- **Establish effective governance, oversight, and reporting.** The provider will be expected to provide the overall project management function for the pilot. This will involve developing a project plan for delivering and implementing this work through to the end of the pilot. This includes a record of key risks and actions taken to mitigate these. We would expect effective local governance

arrangements across the geographical areas that can manage and report outputs on a regular basis. Governance and reporting arrangements for the pilot as a whole will be agreed as part of the contracting process with the successful provider (we have given some indications about management information requirements below). Management systems should be in place to ensure mentors are supported and challenged where appropriate, although we would expect the majority of funding to be dedicated to frontline delivery. The provider should put in place safeguarding checks to ensure all employees hold the relevant level of DBS clearance to fulfil their role.

It is essential that we gather intelligence and data from mentors throughout the pilot which will be shared with the external evaluator. The provider will need to develop systems to capture changes in data. The successful provider will need to work with the department and the evaluation team to ensure that the appropriate information is collected (more information about MI requirements is set out below).

- **Manage finances.** As the employer of the attendance mentors, the successful provider will be expected to carry out all employer responsibilities for mentors and any other staff including managing contracts and budget. The provider will be responsible for meeting all costs.

- **Working with the external evaluator.** An important outcome of this pilot is developing a stronger evidence base about which attendance interventions have the greatest impact on persistent absentees. Because of this, the Department will contract an external evaluator to lead the evaluation of the pilot. The provider will need to agree a reporting process with the Department and evaluator on exactly what information is required and at what frequency (an indication required MI is provided below). In addition to accessing quantitative data, the provider should also facilitate the evaluation team to gather qualitative impact data from pupils, families and services impacted by the support.

The provider should be willing to be flexible, within reason, to any adjustments suggested by the department and evaluator to ensure effective outputs. Adjustments could include adjusting the criteria for selecting eligible pupils for support and the duration of mentor support as the evaluator gathers more evidence. The provider is expected to need to work with the evaluator for approximately one to two days a month. This time will likely be split across multiple meetings throughout the month.

3   Management Information

The provider must ensure that mechanisms for the collection of GDPR-compliant management information and data sharing exist, that the provider liaises with any external evaluator appointed by the Department from the start of the contract, and that they fully engage in analysis and formative evaluation to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into delivery in an ongoing quality improvement cycle. The provider should also assist any appointed independent evaluator to help facilitate direct contact with schools and other stakeholders to support the evaluation where necessary.

As part of the collection of management information, activity and output measures during the contract could include but are not limited to:

- The number of mentors recruited and trained for the pilot

- Depending on the specific pupil recruitment approach adopted, the number of schools referring pupils on to the pilot

- The number of persistent or severely absent pupils who are receiving support, and the number who are allocated per mentor

- Data on the changing attendance rates of pupils who engage with a mentor, and information about how the mentor is supporting each pupil

- The mentoring approach used in response to particular pupil barriers to attendance and the duration of the support.

- User feedback on the service and support provided by the successful contractor and/or mentors from pupils and their families, school staff and other relevant stakeholders.

The pilot and implementation phase will also be used to refine the evaluation methods and choice of evaluative tools used in subsequent phases of the evaluation.

We would anticipate to also see some outcomes from the pilot. We would expect the successful provider to work with an independent evaluator to facilitate collection of the measures and/or outcomes data. These outcomes may include:

- Improving pupil attendance rates, improving attainment, reducing engagement in risky or offending behaviours, and reducing 'not in education, employment, or training'.

- Measurements of the school approach to the management of attendance and related school practices, and pupil and family perceptions of school and education. Including measurements of relationships between pupils and families

and the school, parent/carer attitude to school and education, pupil's school engagement and connectedness and school belonging.

- Short-term outcomes that may be the process of change through which the intervention improves the pupil's school attendance include measures of pupil socio-emotional wellbeing, resilience and mental health, pupil connectedness to school and engagement in education.

4 Targets

During the contract the provider will be regularly assessed against the following Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These KPI's will form the basis of the annual review in the contract. The final KPIs will be agreed with successful bidder during the contract finalisation stage.

Indicative KPIs include:

1. Support to be provided to at least 1,665 pupils over 3 years. This is broken down as follows:
    a. At least 335 pupils in year one, 665 additional pupils year two, and 665 additional pupils in year three.
    b. An agreed proportion of supported pupils will be from the persistent or severe absence cohorts
    c. In years 2 and 3, that there are agreed number of pupils across each geographical area.
    d. That mentor support delivered to participating pupils in timely fashion
2. Evidence that pupil engagement and attendance is improving or that barriers to pupil attendance are being addressed.
3. Management information and other agreed data is provided to the Department and external evaluators in a timely manner (to be agreed during the contract finalisation stage).
4. X Number of full time equivalent (FTE) employment opportunities created under the contract, by UK region, for those who were made redundant due to COVID-19. (The value for this KPI will be determined based on the information provided in the suppliers tender).

5 Security of Data

5.1 For contracts which require the holding or processing of either personal data and/or OFFICIAL data the successful contractor will need to assure the Department that they can comply with the Department's security standards. Under these contracts successful bidders will be processing any personal data on behalf of the Department and the Department will therefore be a data controller. The controllership of any personal data processed for delivery of these qualifications will be determined by the successful bidder and therefore it will be their legal responsibility to comply with Data Protection requirements, including Data Security.

6   Costs

6.1   As part of the application process, a pricing template has been provided (attachment 4), tenderers are required to use this document to provide a detailed breakdown of costs for each financial year. Bidders are required to outline their costs by Financial Year however please note that the requirements of the contract will be for academic years. For example, Academic Year One will run from October to September, however, the academic year runs over two Financial Years. **Bidders must ensure that costs are broken down by Financial Year and not Academic Year**. As part of this breakdown, we would expect to see rationale on the assumptions you have made for the costings included within the table.

6.2   Payments will be made by BACS transfer following receipt of a valid invoice.

6.3   The successful tenderer should provide details of discounts for prompt payment.

7   VAT

7.1   Please state clearly when submitting prices whether or not VAT will be charged.

7.2   Where the contract price agreed between the Department and contractor is inclusive of any VAT, further amounts will not be paid by the Department should a vatable supply claim be made at any later stage.

7.3   Where the overall contract price is exclusive of VAT, the Department will pay any VAT incurred at the prevailing rate (currently 20%). If the VAT rate changes the Department will pay any VAT incurred at the new rate.

7.4   It is the responsibility of tenderers to check the VAT position with HMRC before submitting a bid.

8 Contract Management

The provider will be required to submit information to the Department and the evaluation team throughout the project's lifetime. These governance arrangements will be discussed and agreed with the successful provider as part of the contract negotiations.