

Overview of the National Evaluation of the Independent Support Programme

Background to the Independent Support Programme

The Independent Support (IS) Programme signals a major investment in and commitment to supporting children, young people, families and others with special educational needs and disabilities to take full advantage of the SEN reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. Running from September 2014 to March 2016, this is a major transformation programme with new monies available to enable voluntary, community sector and private organisations to recruit, train and deploy a pool of “independent supporters” to provide additional support to help the families of children and young people through the newly reformed processes in education, health and care services. The focus is on testing new approaches, building evidence and sharing learning in order to inform the spread and replication of what works.

Evaluating impacts and learning from what works

DfE and CDC have commissioned NDTi to design and deliver an independent evaluation to run alongside and inform the development and delivery of the IS Programme. This 5 phase evaluation focuses on the question of “what works (in independent support), for whom, in which circumstances, how and why?” investigating:

- how different models of independent support are implemented locally;
- if and how different groups of children, young people and families benefit (including whether the programme is successful in engaging hard to reach families and vulnerable children);
- the roles that partnership working and other delivery arrangements play in achieving outcomes for children and families;
- the immediate and longer term impacts of the programme for service provision and local authorities;
- the cost and value implications of these factors for different stakeholders, including local and central government.
- emerging examples of good practice, highlighting how these have achieved outcomes and the transferable lessons that can be adopted for children, young people and families in very different circumstances and localities.



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Evaluation Aims and Objectives

The evaluation findings and evidence of outcomes and impacts will be used to inform future decisions and investments around independent support, in the context of wider SEND reforms, so that policy and service developments are designed and implemented in the most effective way. In other words, the evaluation will generate usable learning around outcomes and impacts, including:

1. Evaluating the training and support package offered to independent supporters, and others associated with independent support;
2. Evaluating the deployment and delivery of the independent support workforce;
3. Evaluating the quality of independent support being provided across England;
4. Evaluating the impact of independent support on children, young people and parents;
5. Creating a map of different IS models including arrangements for ensuring the voices of children, young people and families influence local delivery and commissioning arrangements.
6. Developing a core data set for Independent Support
7. Undertaking a Value for Money study of independent support.
8. Developing a shared understanding about which models of Independent Support are most likely to deliver better outcomes for children and young people and their families across a range of situations (demographic, geographic, economic, familial), support needs and disabilities/impairments.

The five phases of work

Phase 1: Scoping and Design. June -September 2014

Detailed design and delivery arrangements agreed with DfE/CDC including:

- A Programme Logic Model setting out the rationale and different contexts in which IS will operate, the various delivery models and mechanisms adopted, resources available and how they have been used, and the desired outcomes that the Programme is seeking to achieve. This “Programme logic” will be tested as the evaluation progresses so that conclusions can be drawn about why things have or haven’t worked.
- A comprehensive data and evidence framework including key outcome areas and associated indicators/measures; data that will generate information to assess progress towards these; resources involved; and how they have been deployed via different delivery models and mechanisms. This framework will act as the core data set for local IS delivery partners, who will be supported to complete this at three time points.
- Working with networks/fora of children and young people with SEN and disabilities to identify and support a small group of children and young people to work with our evaluation team on activities in Phases 3 and 4 (see below).



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Phase 2: Mapping the Contexts, Delivery Mechanisms and Desired Outcomes (CMO)¹ of the Programme. September 2014 - January 2015

Undertaking initial 'CMO mapping' through 3 main activities:-

- Mapping the range of delivery models adopted across England including: who is providing them, for whom, how they have been resourced and their desired outcomes. This will inform the selection of 12 fieldwork sites with whom we will develop detailed CMO maps in Phase 3; and 6 case study sites where we will assess the experiences and journeys of children, young people and families with SEN/disabilities in Phase 4.
- Mapping and extracting key learning from previous relevant studies, highlighting evidence about the right conditions for effective delivery and change in order to achieve the outcomes and objectives of the Programme.
- Disseminating a postal/online survey to local delivery partners and provider networks, covering the following key issues:
 - How local arrangements for delivering IS are designed to address local needs, gaps and enhance the local offer
 - The nature and design of the delivery model for IS that has been adopted and/or considered, and why
 - Where IS fits into the overall picture of local support including thoughts for ongoing funding and sustainability after this funding period ends
 - Eligibility criteria/frameworks in use for IS and rationale for these
 - Local outcome measures adopted/considered including studies of outcomes, experience, cost effectiveness/value for money undertaken
 - Arrangements for involving children, young people and families
 - Wider partnership arrangements.

Results from these 2 phases will enable a good understanding of the current situation (before Independent Support is implemented), how different approaches are being developed, and where these fit into local offers. The first round of data collection from all local authority areas will also happen during this phase.

¹ These CMO maps will describe local approaches and outcomes being achieved. They provide the framework against which organisational, service and change activities can be identified as having contributed to or hindered the delivery of desired outcomes, from which transferable learning to other locations can be developed.



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Phase 3: What's Working, For Whom, Where and How? February-September 2015

During this phase we will work with 12 fieldwork sites to capture and analyse evidence relating to agreed outcomes and impacts; and identify a smaller sample of 6 areas where there is evidence of progress towards these outcomes. We will work directly with children and families in these 6 areas, as well as independent supporters and IS providers, to track personal journeys and experiences of independent support, capturing their stories and outcomes using adapted person centred tools. The second round of data collection from all areas will also take place.

Phase 4: Learning from Experience. October - December 2015

This phase consists of ongoing fieldwork activities and data collection; and the third and final round of data collection from local authorities and sample of 12 fieldwork sites in particular. At this point, at the end of the first year of active data collection and fieldwork activities, we will also take stock and identify key findings, messages and lessons to share with a wide range of people both directly and indirectly involved with the Programme.

Phase 5: Analysis & reporting on findings and outcomes. January - March 2016.

This final phase will focus on analysis and synthesis of different data from the previous 4 phases to address the evaluation objectives and broader aims.

A final report to DfE/CDC will be produced, including summaries that can be widely circulated to all those who have participated and contributed to the evaluation. Easy read, plain English and accessible summaries will be produced for children, young people and families; and targeted, topic based briefings for independent supporters, delivery partners, local authorities, education and health care organisations.

Throughout the evaluation we will share regular Evaluation Briefings with everyone involved in the Independent Support Programme and the wider world to encourage ongoing learning and sharing of what works in Independent Support.