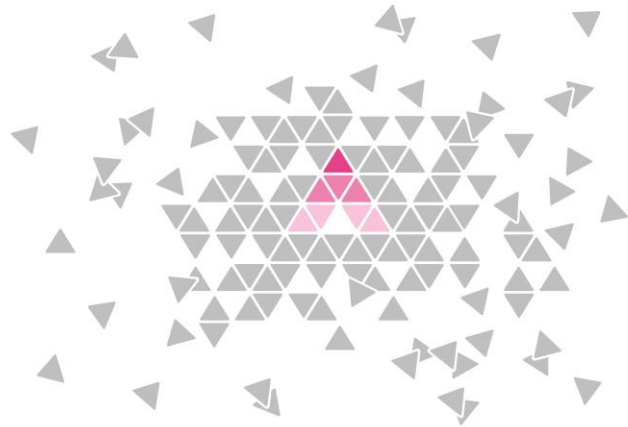


**A deep dive into social and emotional learning.  
What do the views of those involved tell us  
about the challenges for policy-makers?**

Alice Yeo and Jenny Graham

March 2015



**Social and emotional learning: Skills for life and work report 3**



Cabinet Office



Social Mobility &  
Child Poverty  
Commission



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## ResearchAbility

ResearchAbility is a qualitative social research and skills building consultancy run by Jenny Graham and Alice Yeo.

ResearchAbility improves qualitative research by carrying out robust, rigorous **research** as well as through **skills building** and **supervision** services. Our professional approach is underpinned by quality and integrity whilst being responsive and flexible to meet client need.

We have over 25 years combined experience of carrying out high quality research, evaluations and reviews in the not-for-profit and public sectors and have taught extensively on qualitative research methodology.

The 45 plus projects we have managed and delivered include small, fast, low budget studies to big budget, mixed method evaluations or longitudinal studies running for several years.

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## Executive summary

This research is part of the review on ‘Social and emotional learning: skills for life and work’ commissioned by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), the Cabinet Office (CO) and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC). ResearchAbility, a qualitative social research consultancy, carried out a deep dive into how children and young people learn social and emotional skills (SES) in the education and youth sectors. Through interviewing a range of policy makers, practitioners and children and young people, this research set out to identify:

- What are the key issues affecting how SES are developed in school and out-of-school settings?
- What are the challenges policy makers need to consider in order to strengthen SES provision?

The research sought to understand the issues underpinning the delivery of SES. For example, understanding what helps and hinders schools in developing children and young people’s SES in the context of schools’ other demands and priorities. It did not seek to define SES or measure the effectiveness of provision, but to inform any policy development by providing an understanding of the issues driving delivery both in and out of school.

In total, there were 38 research encounters with a total of 119 participants. The study took place between November 2014 and March 2015. In March, ResearchAbility presented headline findings to two policy workshops. The discussion following these presentations was used to help refine the findings presented in this report.

## What are SES and why do they matter?

While participants used differing terms and labels, there was broad agreement about the set of skills and characteristics referred to by the term SES. These skills were seen as interlinked and interdependent, suggesting that it is important for children and young people to have the opportunity to develop the full range of skills. Across the different participant groups, developing social and emotional skills when young was seen to be a crucial foundation to living a happy and fulfilling life.

Participants acknowledged that SES can help people cope and deal with the many difficulties that can be experienced in life and as such provision should be available to all. Children and young people experiencing disadvantage or living in vulnerable circumstances were reported to have more to gain from SES provision, and seen as less likely to be developing SES at home. Evidence of the positive link between SES and academic attainment was also reported to be growing.

## Education sector

**Current picture:** for a child or young person attending school there was a wide range of ways that they *could* learn about SES:

- **Curriculum:** specific delivery of SES through the curriculum was described as being in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons. However, it was also emphasised that learning about SES could be woven through other parts of the curriculum, for example, learning about resilience by looking at Winston Churchill in history or empathy by looking at the Holocaust.
- **Targeted** group interventions or programmes that could be delivered by staff in-house, such as Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) or by external providers. Peer interventions, such as playground monitors, were also mentioned.
- **Pastoral care staff:** non-teaching staff with a remit to deal with any social or emotional issues arising for students and their families.
- **Counselling services**
- **Extra-curricular activities:** for example, drama, music, debating, chess, sports.
- **Community engagement:** an outward looking school that involves parents and carers in activities, works with the Local Authority and takes part in social action in was also seen to support SES development in children and young people through engaging with the wider community.

**Key features:** To be most effective there was a firm belief that there should be a ‘whole school approach’ to SES: as well as having specific provision through lessons like PSHE, it should be embedded, modelled and reinforced throughout the structures and systems and behaviours of the staff, led by the Head teacher. Staff skills and wellbeing were also seen as being important, with a number of aspects highlighted:

- New teachers learning how to deliver SES, e.g. through continuing professional development;
- Teachers of PSHE being trained and qualified to do so, as happens in other curriculum subjects;
- For teachers to be able to model and reinforce positive social and emotional skills with their students, their own wellbeing needed to be sound. Examples of supporting staff wellbeing were self-reflective practices.

**Challenges:** participants described Ofsted and attainment targets as being the two key operational priorities for schools. **Ofsted** requires schools to consider the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of their students. The way this happens can result in students knowing facts (for example, knowing about different types of illegal drugs), but not necessarily being equipped with the social and emotional skills to safeguard themselves in challenging situations (such as how to respond if drugs are offered to them). **Attainment targets** were reported to be demanding, leading to a risk that non-statutory requirements, such as SES provision, may be overlooked. **Measuring impact** was widely reported to be important. How to do it effectively was seen as a challenge, particularly where it is embedded. Little appetite was expressed for another layer of assessments relating to SES.



## Youth sector

**Current picture:** the youth sector was described as undergoing significant change. Three factors driving current provision were highlighted.

- A reduction in **the Local Authority offer** due to budget cuts was reported to have resulted in less open access youth provision, and an increasing focus on targeted work with vulnerable groups of children and young people. This has effectively reduced provision of SES to those children and young people described as *'just under the threshold'* for targeted intervention.
- An increase in the role played by **the third sector**, with some innovative practice and approaches emerging and filling the gaps left by the reduction in LA provision.
- A rise in **social action** youth work and the uniformed organisations championed by central government policy.

**Key features:** the development of children and young people's social and emotional skills were seen to be the core function of youth work. In contrast to the compulsory nature of education, the voluntary nature of (most) youth provision was seen as facilitating a different kind of relationship between staff and the young people. The features underpinning effective SES delivery were described as:

- Developing a **'trusting relationship'** between staff and young people was described as being the foundation on which SES can be built.
- **Promoting agency and control** by empowering children and young people to make decisions about their activities and goals within a setting was also seen as being important.
- **Facilitating reflection and promoting self-awareness** were also reported as key features of effective youth provision and were seen to support a positive approach by emphasising successes and seeing mistakes as learning opportunities.
- **Modelling SES:** as in the education sector, it was important for staff working in the youth sector to demonstrate strong social and emotional skills in all of their interactions.
- **Staff skills:** one of the strengths of youth workers was reported to be their skills and expertise underpinned by their qualifications.
- **Community engagement:** young people talked about the benefits of working in their communities and experiencing first-hand some of the issues being faced.

**Challenges:** participants talked about the challenge of **securing funding** for youth provision in the current financial climate where resources are limited. As with the education sector, **measuring impact** was seen to be important but difficult and limited by a culture that previously had not included evaluation as part of its core practice. However, progress was described as being made.

## Conclusions

Three overarching challenges for policy makers were identified. There is currently huge **variability** in SES provision across the education and youth sectors meaning that some children and young people receive it and some do not. Navigating SES provision through a **complex delivery landscape** was seen to be a challenge. Provision needs to be **high quality**, requiring those delivering SES to have the right training and skills.

Underpinning these challenges, a number of specific areas were also identified: the need for improving the evidence about what works in SES provision was seen to be important in order for children and young people to have access to the best provision. Including the voice of children and young people in this discussion was seen as being important. The need for a clear framework of accountability in relation to SES provision in schools was highlighted. Without this, participants felt that provision would remain variable and may focus on facts rather than equipping students with the skills that will help them navigate challenging situations.

By engaging with the challenges currently facing the education and youth sectors in relation to SES development, provision could be made more effective and equitable for children and young people.

## 1. Introduction

This report details research carried out as part of a review of social and emotional skills (SES) commissioned by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), the Cabinet Office (CO) and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC).

Through collecting in-depth data from a range of policy makers, practitioners and children and young people, this research explores what is happening in terms of social and emotional learning in schools and out of school settings. In particular, this research set out to identify:

- What are the key issues affecting how SES are developed?
- What are the challenges policy makers need to consider in order to strengthen SES provision?

### 1.1 Aims and research approach

The research employed a qualitative approach. Interviews, observations and focus groups were conducted with participants in different roles across the system of SES delivery both in the education and youth sectors. The research included national strategic stakeholders, Local Authority level stakeholders, staff delivering SES in settings and children and young people. Research focused on what was being provided, how, when and to whom, the features of effective SES provision and the facilitators and challenges to good provision.

The achieved sample was:

Participant group	# research encounters	# participants
National strategic interviews	15	17
Local strategic interviews	4	6
Staff at settings	9	19
Children and young people	10	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>119</b>

The national strategic interview participants were selected based on discussion with the study's commissioners and steering group. The organisations represented in these interviews were:

Education	Youth
<p><b>Department for Education</b></p> <p><b>Ofsted</b></p> <p><b>EIF Trustee &amp; SEAL expert</b></p> <p><b>Teach First</b></p> <p><b>National Union of Teachers</b></p> <p><b>Independent Schools Association</b></p> <p><b>PSHE Association</b></p> <p><b>Place2Be</b></p>	<p>Cabinet Office</p> <p>National Youth Agency (NYA)</p> <p>National Youth Council for Voluntary Services (NYCVS)</p> <p>Prince’s Trust</p> <p>Youth United</p> <p>Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC)</p> <p>National Citizens Service (NCS)</p>

Following the main stage of the research, findings were presented at two policy workshops hosted by EIF and attended by stakeholders and practitioners from the education and youth sectors. The workshop discussions were used along with the key findings of the research to identify the challenges for any future policy that might seek to strengthen the provision of SES. A detailed description of the study’s methods can be found in appendix A.

## 1.2 Strengths and limitations to the research

The following chapters present the views of research participants, organised thematically. We are confident that the key themes were identified through this work. The same issues were coming up repeatedly; they resonated across participant groups and at the policy workshops.

While the sample of national strategic participants was diverse, it was only possible within the time available to include a small number of places and settings for the deep dive visits, so they were not intended to represent the full range and diversity of SES provision. Rather, their purpose was to illuminate the key issues raised in national strategic interviews. Settings were selected on the basis of being examples of good SES practice. A limitation of this research is the lack of examples from settings with weaker SES provision, although some of this was captured from talking to the young people.

Participants took part on the understanding that their contributions would not be individually identifiable in the report. To ensure this anonymity, findings are not identified by organisation or individual but are attributed to the participant group where relevant. The case serial number has been included in the description at the end of each quote (e.g. N9) for transparency – allowing the reader to see how often individual participants have been quoted throughout the report whilst maintaining their anonymity.

## 2 What are social and emotional skills and why do they matter?

Participants were asked about their views of social and emotional skills and whether they saw SES provision in the education and youth sector as being important for children and young people. This chapter explores participants' responses to these questions in detail.

### 2.1 What are social and emotional skills?

When talking to participants, it was clear that there was no single agreed definition of what social and emotional skills are. Some participants used the term '*life skills*', '*non-cognitive skills*', '*personal and social development*', '*social and emotional learning*' or the '*social and emotional aspects of learning*' (SEAL). Others talked about '*character*' and '*grit*' and '*resilience*'.

What was clear was that all research participants understood the kinds of characteristics being referred to. The characteristics most readily referred to were: confidence and self-esteem, resilience – being able to bounce back; empathy; good communication skills; the ability to work in a team, to make decisions and for young people to have a sense of control over their lives.

Three key frameworks were cited by some national stakeholders as useful in defining the umbrella term 'social and emotional skills'. The characteristics set out in the Education Endowment Framework review<sup>1</sup>, the five dimensions of the SEAL approach<sup>2</sup>, and the framework for character education from the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue<sup>3</sup>. The characteristics highlighted in each of the frameworks are set out in this table:

EEF review of non-cognitive skills	SEAL	Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue
Self-Perceptions	Self-awareness	Civic virtues
Motivation	Motivation	Performance virtues
Perseverance	Self-regulation	Moral virtues
Self-Control	Social skills	Good sense
Metacognitive Strategies	Empathy	
Social Competencies		
Resilience and Coping		
Creativity		

Perhaps not surprisingly, which skills were highlighted and what they looked like in practice varied across the sample, depending on which groups of children and young people the provision was intended for and the organisational culture and ethos.

<sup>1</sup> Gutman, L & Schoon, I (2013) *Non-cognitive skills: evidence and intervention*. Education Endowment Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey, N; Lendrum, A & Wigelsworth, M (2010) *Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme in secondary schools: national evaluation*, Research Report DFE-RR049

<sup>3</sup> <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/other-centre-papers/Framework..pdf>

Different terms could have different meanings in some cases. For example, representatives from the youth sector generally used the term ‘life skills’, but for some this term meant only the practical skills people need to be able to live as a functioning adult, like budgeting and cooking. Social and emotional skills were sometimes defined as ‘personal and social development’. In the policy workshops that followed the research it was felt that establishing a common language would be an important step towards promoting inter agency working for the benefit of the children and young people.

An important point made by national stakeholders in relation to the nature of social and emotional skills was the fact that they are interdependent and interlinked. Participants pointed out that in order to become a ‘well-rounded’ individual (a term used across participant groups) children and young people needed to develop the full range of SES, and not just one or two dimensions.

Throughout this report, we use the term ‘social and emotional skills’ (SES) for consistency, but readers should note that the exact range of skills participants referred to could vary.

## 2.2 Do social and emotional skills benefit some children and young people more than others?

Participants were asked whether they saw social and emotional skills as important for children and young people to acquire. The answer was overwhelming: it was seen as crucial. However, the issue of whether particular groups of children and young people could benefit more from the provision of these skills in the education and youth sectors was viewed as being complex and multi-faceted. Part of this was about the difference between responding to meet a specific social or emotional need, compared with universal provision of social and emotional skills that could benefit all children and young people.

Participants at all systems levels were quick to point out that anyone can experience difficulties in their lives for any number of reasons. Lots of examples of difficulties that could affect the social and emotional wellbeing of a child or young person were given by those working with them as well as from the children and young people themselves. These included bereavement, parental relationship breakdown, extreme poverty, neglect, self-harm, illness or experiences of stress and anxiety. Being equipped with social and emotional skills was reported as being an important protective factor in the face of such adverse experiences. Therefore, the opportunity to learn SES was viewed as something that should be available to all, regardless of background or upbringing. This is illustrated in the following quote:

*‘It’s really tricky, because as soon as you pick out some groups of kids and say they would particularly benefit, you’re slightly failing to recognise that actually this is pretty core and something that’s sensible for all young people.’ (National strategic, education, N9)*

Nevertheless, there was recognition amongst participants, particularly those familiar with the research in this area, that the evidence does support the fact that disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people have more to gain from learning SES, because it is less likely they will be exposed to these skills in their home lives.

Staff at the PRU talked about the fact that young people at risk of exclusion would often be lacking in SES. Participants working with the most disadvantaged young people in the youth sector, those who were marginalised and excluded from mainstream society, described how the biggest barriers facing this group were directly as a result of their lack of social and emotional skills.

*'Some of the barriers that they've experienced...can only be alleviated by improving their personal social development...[referring to session observed by researcher] communicating, setting and achieving goals, working with others is the basis, the foundation of empowering a young person to take control of their lives, to have the toolkit that can apply at any stage, whether you're 13 and at school or 25 and looking for employment.'* (Setting, youth, S8)

### 2.2.1 Being in a 'fit state' to learn

It was reported that children and young people, usually from the most deprived and disadvantaged circumstances were not always having their basic needs of food, shelter or warmth met at home. Children and young people's safety could also be at risk, either at home or in the wider community, from domestic violence, sexual abuse or exploitation or gangs of other young people.

It was clear that education and youth settings could play an important role in meeting these basic needs of children and young people. Staff talked about the fact that for some young people, their school, youth club or Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) could be *'the one place of safety'* in their lives.

At the education settings visited, care was taken to try and meet these basic needs so that the child or young person was able to access the curriculum. For example, a pastoral care worker at one of the primary schools explained that he would always be in the playground when children arrived at school in the mornings and would look out for children who might be hungry and made sure they had something to eat before class. The other primary school aimed to ensure that children identified as being at risk of not eating before school would attend breakfast club. For children experiencing difficulties at home, the school would offer breakfast and after school club places free of charge if this would help support that child.

Children who arrived at school upset were also described as being unlikely to be in a *'fit state'* to learn. As mentioned above, the range of issues children could be facing at home were wide-ranging. Regardless of the cause, participants emphasised the importance of helping that child or young person to feel better in order for them to be able to concentrate in class and access the curriculum. What came across strongly during analysis was the importance for a child or young person to believe that someone cared about them. This was seen as the foundation of a trusting relationship, the necessary pre-requisite for starting to build the social and emotional skills of that child or young person.

There were many examples of demonstrating care from across the data, both at an individual and organisational level. Staff in setting talked about the importance of making clear to young people that they care about them. One pastoral care manager put it like this:

*'If they [school pupils] see that the adults in the school care about them that's the absolute critical factor, that the teachers, the pastoral care team, the SEN team are genuinely interested in me as a person and if that happens, those children respond to that.'* (Setting, education, S12)

From an organisational perspective, building a trusted relationship between a young person and the youth worker was seen to lie at the heart of effective youth work, as is explained fully in chapter 3. In the PRU visited, their 'motto' was 'all children succeed: no excuses, no exceptions.' One of the primary school's motto was 'a happy child makes a successful learner'. At one of the academies visited, staff talked about one of their core values being that they would never give up on any child. They have an inclusive, non-selective admissions policy. Not one child has been permanently excluded in seven years.

### 2.3 The role of social and emotional skills in learning

Whether and how social and emotional skills facilitate children to learn was raised in national, local and staff interviews as an important area yet to be fully understood. The current evidence base was reported to show a correlation between learning and SES. Even without this, participants' experiences of working with children and young people convinced them that there was a link. A national stakeholder spoke about SES being 'complementary' to attainment, with resilience and perseverance described as necessary characteristics to enable a young person to focus on a task, complete course work and pass exams. Staff at one of the academies visited reported their attainment levels being above national average despite being in a deprived area. They attributed this to the extensive social and emotional support systems in place at the school.

The point was also made that SES can actually facilitate the cognitive processes required for learning. For example, in one national strategic interview the skill of decoding was described as being partly an emotional process as well as a cognitive one. A child learning to read at school is likely to have to cope with the social context of reading out loud with an adult, which requires them to navigate a range of emotional responses such as feeling shy, nervous or embarrassed; dealing with making mistakes; understanding the meaning of the story as well as just the individual words. One view was that social and emotional skills should be seen as the third pillar of learning, alongside literacy and numeracy.

### 2.4 Social and emotional skills and mental health

Participants pointed out that social and emotional skills do not exist in isolation, but are part of a wider picture of emotional wellbeing. If envisaged as a spectrum, at one end, there is positive emotional wellbeing, with secure, flourishing, happy children, but at the other end are children in distress who are not coping and whose emotional wellbeing and social skills are poor. The adult participants and some of the young people talked about the range of issues children and young people could be facing in their lives, such as bereavement, relationship breakdown, physical or mental illness, sexual vulnerabilities, poverty and misuse of drugs and/or alcohol.

The concept of mental health was one that some settings described being very open about in their dealings with children and young people. Of the school settings visited that had counselling services



available for their students, these were described by staff as part of a package of support available to students, which also included teachers, form tutors, Heads of Year and the pastoral care teams. This was reflected in the way that the children and young people talked about the counsellors – as an accepted part of the pastoral care on offer to them.

Staff were clear that the care and support they were able to provide had boundaries, and that beyond a certain threshold they would need to make a referral to a specialist service. In contrast to how mental health was viewed by families using schools based support for mental wellbeing, barriers were reported in relation to CAMHS services. CAMHS was described as being stigmatising for children and their parents.

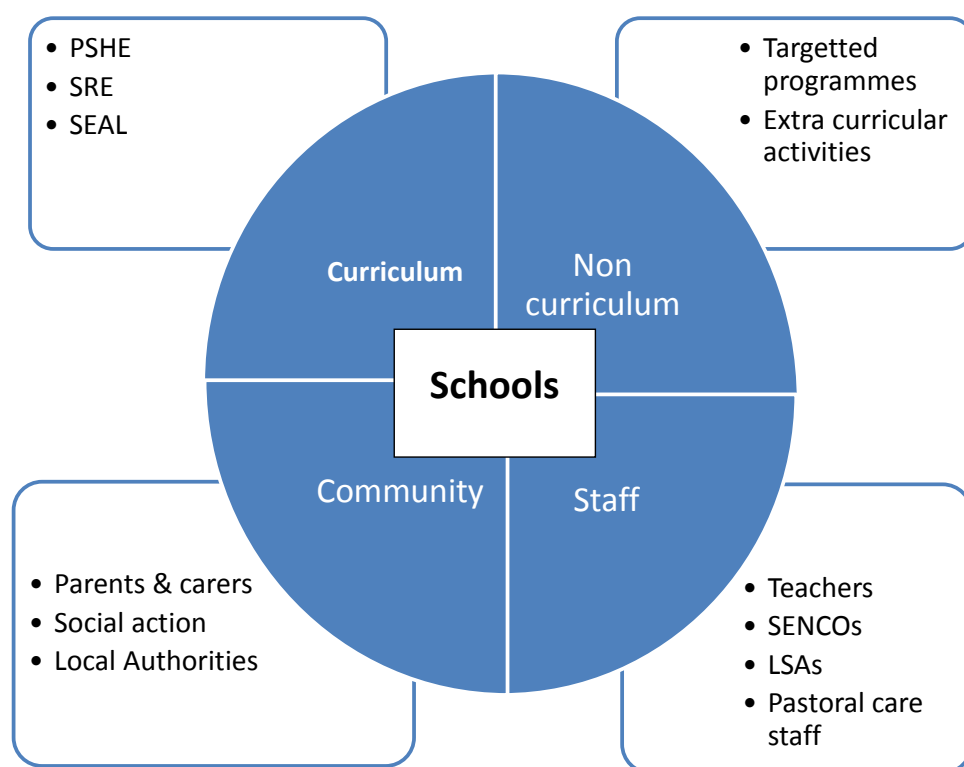
Schools argued that it would be far more effective to offer this kind of provision within schools, where staff know the families and children and can help facilitate relationships with providers and break down stigmas around mental health. One organisation that provides counselling services and support to children in schools reported their attendance rates for counselling sessions to be much higher than at the local CAMHS.

The question of whether there is a difference in the perception of mental health between children and adults is relevant to this review in so far as exploring the potential to equip children and young people with skills that can promote good mental health.

### 3 Mapping SES provision in education

This chapter focuses on SES provision in the education sector. Participants described the number of different ways that children and young people could have access social and emotional learning in schools, as set out in Figure 1 below. However, the key message from the interviews was that, in the absence of statutory requirements, provision was variable. How SES was addressed in the curriculum, which staff might be involved in SES delivery and what wider provision might be available could look very different from school to school. Whereas some schools might have substantial and effective provision across several dimensions, others may have very little. As can be seen in the following sections, provision can also be complex – happening in a myriad of places within a schools’ provision.

#### 3.1.1 Figure 1: Map of education sector SES provision



#### 3.2 SES provision delivered in the curriculum

The amount of time actually spent on SES in curriculum terms, also referred to as ‘*taught*’ provision, was reported as varying from being virtually non-existent to being embedded and woven through all lessons. National stakeholders described the amount of ‘*taught*’ time as decreasing over time between primary and secondary schools. In primary schools, by nature of the age and developmental stage of children they are working with, the issue of social and emotional skills was prominent and visible. Staff talked about the children having to learn a wide range of new skills when they started school, like sitting still on the carpet, learning interpersonal and communication

skills: sharing; taking turns and listening to each other in class, as well as all the challenges that come with friendships: how to deal with disagreements and feelings of rejection if your friends don't want to play with you.

The system of being in one classroom with one teacher was described as facilitating a flexible approach to SES in primary schools. Participants mentioned a number of places throughout the day when there could be a focus on social and emotional skills. For example, in 'circle time', when all the children sit and communicate as a whole class, a particular issue that might have arisen that day could be raised spontaneously by the teacher allowing for discussion and airing of different views. Other ways that SES were reported to be commonly addressed in primary schools were assemblies which focused on a particular theme and were then reiterated through classroom activities. Off-timetable days or weeks also offered opportunities for attention to be paid to SES, such as Black History week, when children would learn about the slave trade, or projects such as the Fire of London, facilitating discussion of what those experiences might have felt like.

By secondary school, some national strategic participants were of the view that SES in the curriculum had '*all but disappeared*'. This was largely attributed to the developmental stage of the students as well as the increasing pressure on attainment described in the later years of school. Although not currently compulsory, PSHE was described as being the place in the curriculum where delivery of SES in schools would typically take place. However, as the deep dive visits demonstrated, some schools do have a strong focus on the delivery of SES. What this review is not able to do is comment on the prevalence of SES/PSHE in schools.

Participants described the SEAL programme as being used to varying degrees in different areas and schools – both primary and secondary. Some Local Authority education teams that had supported the borough-wide use of SEAL and schools continued to promote it even if their resources had been cut, which was highlighted in one of the areas visited. The use of SEAL was, however, not described as being dependent on the Local Authority. Autonomous academies and free schools were also reported to use SEAL.

### **3.3 Staff involved in SES delivery**

The approach to pastoral care could also be wide-ranging. Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) could be involved in providing social and emotional support to students, as well as teachers. Schools may have dedicated pastoral care staff and counselling provision (either in-house or externally provided, for example, by Place2Be). This was the case with each of the four schools visited as part of the deep dive visits.

The role of LSAs was described as being to support the learning of students in class, often in small groups. SENCOs would have the responsibility of carrying out assessments of students if concerns were raised about their performance, which could be to do with a learning disability or a behavioural difficulty. The work of these staff members was reported often to be targeted small group work with children and young people with SES needs. Interestingly, this was rarely mentioned in the strategic interviews and less highlighted in the settings than other types of SES provision. It is possible that this could be because the focus of these interventions is on academic attainment, or

that this kind of targeted work is so embedded in how a school functions that it is not seen as SES provision, but this review does not have evidence for this.

Typically not trained teachers, in the settings visited, 'pastoral care staff' would not be timetabled in class, allowing them the flexibility – *'and the time and energy'* – as one teacher pointed out, to deal with issues as and when they arose. In one of the secondary schools, every year group had a teaching Head of Year who would focus on the academic side of learning and a pastoral Head of Year who would look after the social and emotional aspects of the children's lives at school. The Deputy Head explained that the children would invariably see the pastoral Head of Year as their key point of contact. In the other secondary school, there was a dedicated unit for pastoral care next to the team's office – a huge space with computers, soft areas and tables, which the students were able to access if they needed to and where there would always be someone available to talk to.

As highlighted in 2.2, children and young people could be facing any number of difficulties in their lives. The pastoral care staff were there to provide support to students experiencing problems. One example was given of a secondary school student who was nearly knocked over by a car on the way to school. He arrived in a very distressed state because one of his friends had been killed in a car accident and spent time with pastoral care staff before going to class.

It was clear that the role of the pastoral care staff was understood by the students at the schools. In one of the focus groups, they talked about the range of support available.

F1: *'If we have any problems, there are always staff we can talk to.'*

F2 ' *Like the [name of pastoral care manager, form tutor, counsellor].'*

F1 *'If anything happens, like bullying, they'll always sort it out.'*

F3 *'You can always go and see someone, there's always somebody available who you can go and talk to.'* (Setting, education, CYP, C2)

In independent schools, a long tradition of pastoral care provision was described in the national strategic interviews, reflecting the perceived importance of catering for students' social and emotional needs in this sector. All students were reported to have a personal tutor assigned to this role. The idea was that the student and personal tutor would get to know each other well, with typically a weekly meeting to discuss any issues or problems the student may experience.

The students at the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) were described during the deep dive visit as being highly likely to have experienced some kind of social or emotional need during their lives. Due to the small class size and high staff ratios, the PRU was in a position to provide individually tailored learning support to all its students, often through LSAs. Staff described the *'side by side working'* that allowed the young people to work at their own pace with help and support at hand. The impact this could have on a young person was reported in the following quote from a staff member. She relayed a conversation she had had with one of the students, who had said to her during a maths lesson:

*'I'd never have been able to do this in my old school'. 'Why?' [asked the staff member] 'Cos I'd have lost the plot'. But he's given time - there are only six in the class, someone's sat with him and he can make mistakes and feel secure in making mistakes.'* (Setting, education, S4)

Across the interviews at both national and settings level, participants were clear that when dealing with their students' social and emotional needs, there were thresholds, beyond which the appropriate course of action was to involve specialist staff. Having counselling services on site was seen as being a really valuable way of providing this specialist help. By being a part of the school, staff participants were of the opinion that these services could support the students in an inclusive and non-stigmatising way, compared to CAMHS. Including family members in counselling, either with the student or separately was reported to be far more successful when the service was in school. There was a strong view that being referred to CAMHS was seen as very stigmatising and attendance rates were low.

### 3.4 Non-curriculum SES provision

There also other places that SES provision could be delivered to children and young people in education. Participants at the strategic level were keen to point out the fact that extra-curricular activities were an important part of developing social and emotional skills, allowing a physical or creative outlet for students to express themselves. The importance of extra-curricular activities was reflected in the settings, where schools reported providing a range of such activities, such as sport, art, music, drama, debating and chess. The following quote illustrates the ways in which chess was seen to develop social and emotional skills.

*'Chess is brilliant – there's a strong link to high achievement and numeracy, but also with behaviour and taking responsibility. It's not like football, where it's everyone else's fault...with chess it's 'Ok, I've done that, I've lost my queen...because I made that move'. 'What are you going to do next time?' 'Something different.'* (Setting, education, S7)

One participant referred to evidence demonstrating the important role that drama can play with children who have had traumatic experiences.

What was notably different about extra-curricular activities compared to the rest of a school's offer was that they often happened outside core school hours and attendance was voluntary. Taking part in extra-curricular activities would normally require a financial contribution from parents or carers. For children and young people with little money, this was seen as presenting a significant barrier to involvement. These were also seen as being the students least likely to be accessing these sorts of activities elsewhere, therefore arguably with most to benefit. Using pupil premium money to enable disadvantaged groups of children and young people to access extra-curricular activities was advocated by some participants.

There was, though, a concern expressed in a national strategic interview about focussing SES provision in extra-curricular activities. While extra-curricular activities offer important SES opportunity (and so should be *part* of a school's offer), a risk was seen in placing the focus of

provision outside the core curriculum time. This risk was described as twofold: after school activities being voluntary and therefore not accessed by some pupils even if the cost barrier was removed; as well as the risk of giving a message that SES provision was not a core ‘pillar’ of what a school should be providing to all students.

The tradition of extra-curricular activities in independent schools was also highlighted as a key means through which this sector developed social and emotional skills amongst the students. Sport and debating were mentioned as particularly good examples of SES development, but also the arts and music. Leadership programmes were also reported to be becoming increasingly popular amongst the older year groups. They were described as developing important qualities for future employment, an area parents were increasingly focusing on.

Specific evidence based programmes in SES, such as PATHS<sup>4</sup> (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies), FAST<sup>5</sup> (Families and Schools Together) or ‘Big Brothers Big Sisters’<sup>6</sup> were mentioned by national stakeholders, but were not in place at any of the settings visited.

### 3.5 The wider community

Having an outward-looking or community focus was also described by participants across the sample as being a key feature of SES provision in the education sector.

#### 3.5.1 Parental engagement

There was widespread acknowledgement across the sample of the influence and impact that home and family life had on children and young people. The development of social and emotional skills was cited by participants to begin at home. As highlighted in Chapter 2, young people could be facing any number of challenges outside of school. Staff interviewed in the deep dive settings emphasised the importance of engaging parents and carers in the work on SES that the school were doing with students. Partnership working on SES development both in and out of school was reported to be the most effective approach.

An important role of the pastoral care staff was described as being their skill in engaging with parents and carers. A common barrier to parental engagement with education was reported to be the child’s parent or carer having had a negative experience of schools themselves. By virtue of not being teachers, pastoral care staff were seen as being able to establish relationships with parents and carers, whereas talking to a teacher or a Head could present a real barrier. In one setting, staff also described helping families with benefits or housing problems as a way of helping the whole family and building trust, thereby breaking down barriers to families’ engagement with the school.

Staff were mindful of how difficult and confusing it can be for young people if the messages they are receiving from home around social and emotional skills are very different to what is being advocated in school. Examples were given of negative parental attitudes to race, gender or homosexuality,

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<sup>4</sup>A curriculum-based learning programme focusing on the development of social and emotional skills <http://www.pathseducation.com/>

<sup>5</sup> A programme to develop stronger bonds between schools, children and families to support children’s learning

<sup>6</sup> A mentoring programme.

which staff said could leave the student feeling *'stuck in the middle'*, knowing what they thought was right, but being told something different at home.

### 3.5.2 Social action

Engagement and involvement in the wider community beyond the school was reported to be an important dimension of developing children and young people's social and emotional skills. Examples of this from the deep dive settings included students doing litter picks in the local area, visiting old people's homes and getting involved in local fundraising events. It was also described by as being about inviting the wider community into the school for activities or events or by having visiting speakers.

Such activities, it was argued, increased social trust, promoted empathy and compassion and gave a real life context to social and emotional learning. One local strategic participant explained:

*'It tells me that in order to be outstanding, you need to have a strong offer around SES as well as academic learning. In the best schools you see it throughout the ethos of the school; their policies, their outward rather than inward focus. They mirror their communities. Social harmony forms part of the school's core.'* (Local strategic, education, L2 )

The absence of community involvement at school was commented on in a focus group of young people who noted that some schools *'don't do anything to facilitate this community ethos'*.

Volunteering was another area that the independent sector was reported to be very involved with. In part, this was seen as being a response to their charitable status requirements, but one that nonetheless provided important opportunities for students to develop a range of social and emotional skills.

### 3.5.3 Local Authorities

In both areas, local strategic participants were of the view that SES formed an enormously important part of children and young people's education. This was reflected in the structure and focus of the education teams working in Local Authorities, who were involved in multi-disciplinary working to support the social and emotional wellbeing of their children and young people. One example was of the education advisers working with the police in relation to child sexual exploitation. Another was a specific wellbeing team with representatives from SEN, the PRU, re-engagement team, restorative justice as well as health and social services.

However, cuts in LA funding had impacted on the schools improvement teams, (the teams made up of experienced educationalists whose remit was to support the maintained schools in their areas). They reported having fewer people in the team, meaning fewer resources to support schools generally. This then had a knock on impact on LA education teams to support SES in schools specifically. What time they did have was reported as being focused only on those schools requiring improvement rather than working with all local schools as they had previously done.

#### 3.5.4 **The youth sector**

The role of the youth sector was also raised in connection with the way that schools interact with the wider community. There was little involvement of youth provision with the deep dive schools visited, but it was an area that national strategic participants mentioned as having the potential for significant development and was reiterated at the policy workshops. Youth sector staff here pointed to the variability in schools' engagement and the need to improve the interface between the youth sector and schools to strengthen the SES offer to children and young people.



## 4 Key features and challenges to effective SES provision in education

This chapter looks at the key features identified as helping to support effective SES provision as well as the challenges that were described by participants in the education sector.

### 4.1 Key features

To start with, the factors that were described as helping support effective provision of SES in the education sector are examined.

#### 4.1.1 Whole school approach

The strongest model of delivery was described as being where SES was *'embedded, reinforced and modelled'*. This provision was described as permeating the approach and interaction of every adult in the school from the head to the governing body, teachers, teaching assistants, non-teaching staff and parents. It meant ensuring that school policies, systems (including behaviour and reward systems) NQT support schemes and continual professional development (CPD) included and supported social and emotional skills. Sessions that focussed specifically on SES were an important part of this approach – but to ensure strong SES provision, the whole school approach was described as needed *in addition* to specific curriculum time. This embedded, modelled and reinforced approach was described as having particular component parts.

#### 4.1.2 Leadership

Leadership was emphasised in strategic interviews and settings as a key enabler to strong SES provision. Without a Head who valued SES, participants felt it was unlikely a school would have a strong offer around SES for two reasons.

Firstly, this was reported as being about the fact that the Head teacher is the person with responsibility for setting the budget and making the choices around how resources are spent and allocated. As described in the previous chapter, the schools visited as part of this review all had significant dedicated resource to work with children experiencing social and emotional difficulties. The need for SES provision was seen as being fundamental to enabling students to access the curriculum and was therefore made a school priority. It was also seen as an important way of allowing the teachers to focus on their core task of teaching the children, because children in distress were described as likely to be disruptive. When asked about the cost of having additional staff, participants explained they had no more money than other schools (although levels of Pupil Premium were high), *'it's how we use it'*.

The second aspect of leadership was about the Head teacher setting the values and ethos of the school from which the 'whole school approach' flows. In the schools visited as part of the Deep dive visits, which had strong SES provision, these values often included references to development of the whole child (e.g. *happy children make good learners*). Without this leadership drive, participants at strategic and settings levels said that SES provision in a school would not be effective. Without SES leadership from the Head teacher, SES risked becoming a *'curriculum backwater'*, even where strong staff skills in PSHE and SES more broadly were present in a setting.

Schools leadership was also identified by participants from the two local authorities as a key enabler for strong SES provision. One local strategic participant emphasised the importance of this; the Schools Improvement Team assisted schools with the recruitment of Head teachers and described the importance of considering SES through the recruitment process:

*'[it's] not just on how they'll identify and remedy weaknesses but also on their values and beliefs...[we're] looking for leaders who will instil [SES]. It's about developing the whole child.'* (Local strategic, education, L2))

Young people also emphasised the importance of the head's leadership and noted that they set the tone around interaction with children and young people.

*'It's down to the Head teacher. The other teachers are only basing what they do on the Head... When we got a new Head that cared, all the teachers followed on'* (Setting, youth, CYP, C9)

#### 4.1.3 Embedded

Participants at all different levels talked about the importance of having curriculum areas dedicated to social and emotional skills, like PSHE and SRE, in order for these skills to be systematically and comprehensively addressed. However, on its own, this was not seen as being enough. At the same time, participants talked about the need to embed those skills into other lessons across the curriculum. Examples of this were using history lessons on wartime life to understand resilience and teaching lessons on the Holocaust that focused on compassion and empathy.

One of the secondary schools visited was an academy with a focus on entrepreneurship – an example of where non-maintained schools approached SES in a different way. The academy chain has its own set of SES criteria which are embedded through all aspects of the curriculum via lesson planning.

#### **Case example 1 – Secondary Academy, lesson observation – embedding SES skills in learning.**

The lesson observed was a Year 7 lesson focusing on developing entrepreneurial capabilities through team working. Previous lessons had been spent looking at examples of teamwork and thinking about what a good team looks like. This lesson was moving on to examine the importance of communication in teamwork and the particular skills needed to be effective as a team. In order to do this, the students were all given a bag of marshmallows and a packet of spaghetti. Each table made up a team and the objective of the exercise was to build the highest tower. The teacher facilitated team working amongst the groups by encouraging them to work together to plan the construction of their tower and to problem solve if they got stuck.

A group of these students took part in a focus group after the lesson and were excited and inspired by the activity. They said they had really enjoyed it because it was doing something practical and they got to know other members of the class through working with them rather than arguing.

#### 4.1.4 Modelled

The second element of an effective ‘whole school approach’ was described as being staff modelling positive SES in their interactions with students as well as other staff. Without this, participants believed that any taught content would be undermined. Participants illustrated this by giving examples of having a session on empathy and then seeing an adult shout at a child in the playground, or seeing an adult struggling to respond to confrontational or challenging behaviour.

One example of modelling was described by a Deputy Head at one of the schools about welcoming students to classes:

*‘It’s a big thing that we talk to every member of staff about. When we welcome students, we welcome them. We say hello to them, we greet them at the door, we talk to them, we smile at them. Those very, very simple things, that’s the way we start. Even if this student may have been very challenging in the previous lesson, you welcome them, you say hello, whether it’s through gritted teeth or whatever, it’s very important to us.’ (Setting, education, S2)*

#### 4.1.5 Reinforced

Reinforcing SES was described by participants across the sample as being about having systems and codes in place, such as behaviour policies, which made the expectations around social interactions clear. In primary schools and secondary schools visited, these ‘codes’ or ‘systems’ were observed and described by both staff and students. They were also often on display at a school, either at the entrance, in classrooms or both.

One example in a primary school was of a traffic light approach to behaviour. At the front of the classroom there was a grid which had red, yellow and green cards for all the children in the class. In the classes observed, the vast majority of the cards were green. This reflected the aim (and the name) of this approach, which was to ‘stay on green’. If a child was given a yellow card, they were expected to reflect on their behaviour and a red card was the final sanction. It was clear when talking to the students that they understood the system and knew what was expected of them.

*‘If you get a yellow card, you need to think about what you need to do to get back on green. It’s a warning, makes you feel upset, you feel like, ‘I can change this back to green.’*

*‘You don’t often go beyond yellow because you think about your actions.’ (Setting, education, CYP, C5)*

This approach to rewarding positive behaviour, encouraging reflection and learning when things do go wrong was in evidence at all of the deep dive school settings. They believed that not only was this a better way to reinforce positive social and emotional skills but it was also more effective. The emphasis here was on teaching and learning SES in the same way as happens with core curriculum learning. As one national stakeholder put it:

*'If a child doesn't know how to read we don't punish them for that, we teach them. It should be the same for SES – if a child doesn't know how to behave the emphasis should be on teaching them not punishing them.'* (National strategic, education, N6)

There were many examples of this approach from the settings visited. One of the staff at a secondary school described their response when a student set off a fire alarm deliberately – which was to send the boy to spend the day with the fire service. On another occasion, some students had vandalised a cemetery. The students did not know that the police had informed the school and the school did not tell them. Instead, these students formed part of a wider school party tasked with clearing up the mess, which was reported to have been very effective.

**Case example 2 – Primary school, state maintained primary school with just under 300 children. An example of a school that had sought to embed, model and reinforce SES.**

The last Ofsted inspection rated the school as outstanding. That Ofsted report describes the school population as coming from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, with a high proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school means is well above average as are the number of children identified as having special educational needs.

The Head teacher described SES as fundamental to the smooth running of the school and central to the core values the school works to embody. When the Head teacher first arrived she described trying to improve behaviour at the school through a variety of activities and extra-curricular provision. She *'quickly realised that a whole school approach was needed, so really went for it'*. This values-based approach is, she says, reflected in all staff, from those in the school office to those serving lunches as well as staff in classrooms.

There is a PSHE coordinator at the school and curriculum time is devoted to SES through these sessions. In addition, the Head also expects to see it *'woven'* through other lessons and looks for evidence that this happens in the lesson plans that she monitors. Other opportunities for explicit teaching of SES happen through assemblies, circle times, and word of the week. The theme during the Deep dive visit was recycling and the children would be thinking about the impact rubbish has on the environment.

The school employs two dedicated pastoral workers, who are always on hand to work with a child experiencing difficulties. Another approach is a peer mentoring system, which uses a restorative justice approach. Children describing these systems to a researcher explained that children from Year 5 would be selected to become peer mentors and would undergo training. After this they would wear hi-vis jackets in the playground and be on hand to deal with any problems or issues that arose. The children talked about how they *'have to listen to both sides'*, and use a solution focus. Some of the students described it being easier to talk to another child rather than an adult:

*'We're children, we understand what sort of problems we have, adults they were children but now they're an adult so they have more things to worry about so they kind of forget about what sort of problems they had in the past.'*

In circumstances where tensions have developed in a class (for example, coming up to SATS), teachers have employed techniques such as getting all children to fill in a survey on the issue, reading every response out loud and facilitating a class discussion. SES approaches were also described in use with staff. A recent INSET day had used facilitated 'circle sessions' to explore the challenges staff felt they were facing in school and to focus on improvements the school could make.

#### 4.1.6 Staff skills and wellbeing

Teachers' skills, capabilities and wellbeing were raised across interviews in the education sector as a key factor in enabling the provision of SES.

A widely held view in strategic interviews and amongst staff at settings was that newly qualified teachers were under-prepared for situations they face in the classroom in terms of managing challenging behaviour. An argument was made in strategic interviews that Initial Teacher Training (ITT) should be strengthened with regard to child development and basic child psychology. Although it was acknowledged that ITT is a short, intensive course with little scope for adding in new material, it was nevertheless seen by some to be an important (and currently missing) foundation that teachers need. Some participants said that it would not need much time to cover the basics. It was also felt that the links between 'traditional' curriculum learning, like maths and literacy, and social and emotional skills could also be made more explicit.

Beyond ITT, the task of teachers actually acquiring the skills to embed, model and reinforce positive social and emotional skills would best be facilitated by continuous professional development (CPD), according to national stakeholders. As far as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) were concerned, learning about social and emotional skills was reported to be dependent on the support available to and accessed by the NQT. In schools where SES provision was already embedded, modelled and reinforced, all teachers, including NQTs, were described as being better placed to develop their skills sets. Conversely, where SES was not a school priority, participants described the risk that CPD in this area could be overlooked.

The second issue highlighted in relation to staff skills specifically related to delivering the PSHE curriculum. One national stakeholder felt that teachers were being put in an '*invidious position*', when expected to deliver a subject they have not been trained in. The point was made by national stakeholders that this would not happen in core curriculum subjects, like numeracy and literacy. One of the national strategic participants talked about the potentially negative impact of this with an example of a science teacher with no training in PSHE being required to deliver a session on sexual health and relationships. This would in all likelihood be uncomfortable for the teacher which would in turn make it uncomfortable for the students.

*'Teachers feel out of their depth when it comes to SES & we need to give them a point of entry, give them an understanding about a behaviour or a struggle.'*  
(National strategic, education, N14)

Thirdly, teachers' wellbeing was also raised as an important part of the picture. In order to be able to model positive SES, it was viewed as important by participants across the research that teachers themselves had strong social and emotional skills and were '*emotionally intelligent*'. This was described as being unlikely amongst teachers with limited insight into their own emotional processes or who were feeling very stressed. For this reason, providing support for teachers' wellbeing and the further development of their own SES was seen as desirable.

*'...teachers [need to be] role models...living and breathing those practices - so not kicking the photocopier when it's jammed because they're stressed. We need well-grounded individuals. There's an important difference between delivering something and living and breathing it... it's about authenticity' (National strategic, education, N15)*

In one of the secondary schools visited, the external counselling service ran reflective sessions for staff, which would focus on some of the challenges teachers were facing in relation to their work. The counsellor explained that more often than not, the reason a teacher was struggling with a particular child was because it was bringing up a personal issue for them. Enabling the teacher to understand that helped them to be able to deal with it. In another school, staff described there being no stigma attached to students or staff accessing the counselling service at the school.

In the deep dive to the PRU, the staff interviewed talked about the fundamental importance of SES, describing it as being at the heart of what they do. As the Head teacher put it:

*'We live and breathe social and emotional skills as a group of adults'. (Setting, education, S4)*

There was a particular emphasis on self-reflection and emotional resilience amongst staff and this was reflected in the operational structure. At the end of every day, all staff would have a 20 minute meeting in small groups to review the day. Facilitated by a member of the Senior Leadership Team, this was described as being an important way of supporting staff and identifying strategies for dealing with challenge.

Another example was observed at one of the Local Authorities visited, which developed and piloted a range of training resources for their local schools and the wider market. One of these was a training programme to secure good and better teaching based on the SEAL principles. At the heart of the programme were the principles of self-awareness and reflection. Teachers had to reflect on their own practice in relation to the five dimensions of SEAL, including reviewing a video of themselves teaching in class.

## 4.2 Challenges to effective SES provision

Having examined the supportive factors, the rest of the chapter looks at what participants described as being the key challenges to effective SES provision.

### 4.2.1 Attainment targets

For schools, Ofsted and the curriculum attainment targets were described as being the '*two main drivers for what happens [in schools]*' (NSI-07). Attainment targets were described as a barrier to

improving SES provision across schools. The importance of hitting these targets was described as being so great that it overrode other priorities: teachers and Head teachers' jobs were at risk if they did not reach their targets and so their focus remains necessarily on attainment at the cost of other areas. In response to these pressures, one participant remarked that she felt teaching had become about 'drill & kill'; just preparing children for exams.

*'Heads and governing bodies – schools - are judged on their level 4s and their GCSEs, that is one of the major challenges. .. I'm sure that Heads accept that this [SES] is a good thing to do but when you're faced with 'your results aren't good enough' and Ofsted and irate parents – all of those things are challenges they have to deal with before they can deliver a balanced curriculum that looks at the whole child.'* (Local strategic, education, L3)

The landscape was reported to have become more challenging in light of the new curriculum, which was seen as being more demanding for students. This, combined with attainment targets was described as making it more challenging for many schools – particularly those with poor results or requiring improvement from Ofsted – who were described as having little resource to focus on areas outside the core academic subjects.

This is not to say that academic attainment was *not* seen as being important – there was no doubt across the participant groups and levels that it was. The contention was about the balance between academic learning and other types of learning, including SES. The point was made that as long as the definition of success in school was linked solely with academic attainment, the focus would stay on curriculum-based learning and exam preparation. Participants were highlighting their concern that without more balance in schools between academic learning and other areas, creativity and the enjoyment of learning could be curbed.

Some of the young people who took part in the focus groups also described feeling as though the only thing that mattered to their schools was that they passed their exams. Those with this view felt that exams were all teachers '*cared about*' (especially in KS4) and described this having a negative impact on them. One young person described her struggles at school with her peers, which had left her feeling socially isolated and unhappy. Despite her mother trying to engage the school's support, the young person's perception was that they were not helpful because she was still doing well academically. Another young person described their views of school as follows:

*'I think the atmosphere that school fosters - you go to school, get your GCSEs, get your 'A' levels, then go to uni, get a job. Life isn't that simple. Teenagers aren't exam machines. They're people with emotions and raging hormones. School needs to be catered to teenagers as people with emotions.'* (National youth organisation, focus group, C1)

#### 4.2.2 How Ofsted examines SES

SES does form part of the Ofsted accountability framework in relation to the behaviour and safety of students and consideration of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, participants reported that the variability in the way SES is considered as part of an Ofsted inspection,

(as has been highlighted in recent research<sup>7</sup>) resulted in some children and young people getting ineffective provision. When examining behaviour and safety, Ofsted inspectors could focus on the systems and structures of safeguarding in place at a school. They could look at what information students are receiving about drugs or contraception. What some participants felt could be overlooked in the current system was whether children and young people have the opportunity to explore how they may navigate and negotiate situations, and so develop the skills needed rather than just have factual information.

*‘..A teacher stands in front of a class and teaches about the dangers of drugs rather than thinking about how to manage the situation and their feelings about it. Because it isn’t examined, Ofsted aren’t picking up on this distinction.’  
(National strategic, education, N7)*

Without consistency in its approach and without SES specifically named and recognised within the current framework, the Ofsted regime was described as a barrier to provision. One participant talked about the lack of rigour in the current PSHE curriculum. The content does not build year on year as other curriculum subjects do, meaning that students do not learn effectively and their interest may not be held, also it was seen as being too easy for teachers to use fact-based resources, which do not challenge students thinking.

Young people reflected on this clearly too, especially when it came to thinking about their experiences of PSHE. They valued learning that helped them *‘navigate a situation’* and did more than teach them the facts. One example was discussed, of whether sexual education in the later years of secondary school focussed on facts or gave more explicit space to the social interactions involved and the skills young people would need to navigate a sexual relationship. The following quote is another example:

*‘Our PSHE wasn’t terrible, but it was from powerpoint, sheets, textbooks. [It] didn’t really engage with things. So you’d go into a lesson and come out knowing what drugs are and what they do but you wouldn’t know how to navigate those social situations where you can be put into danger.’ (National youth organisation, focus group, C1)*

#### 4.2.3 Measuring impact

Participants in national strategic, local strategic and settings described the potential for an improved evidence base to promote the value of SES if, as was anticipated, it showed a positive impact. This was seen as particularly important for schools if a positive relationship between SES and improved academic achievement could be shown. Although embedded provision was seen as an effective way for schools to deliver SES, measuring its impact was seen as being a challenge, as this quote illustrates.

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<sup>7</sup> Ofsted PSHE review:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/370027/Not\\_yet\\_good\\_enough\\_personal\\_social\\_health\\_and\\_economic\\_education\\_in\\_schools.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370027/Not_yet_good_enough_personal_social_health_and_economic_education_in_schools.pdf)

RSA ‘Schools with Soul’ <https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/schools-with-soul-report.pdf>



*'It's harder to put your finger on SES or demonstrate which bit makes a difference because it's an underpinning ethos, not a classroom opportunity.'*  
(Local strategic, education, L3)

Schools did refer to some existing measures that they felt reflected the positive social and emotional learning that was happening, such as high attendance rates, high attainment, low or no numbers of excluded pupils. There was little appetite for an additional level of assessments relating to SES to be introduced in schools. Staff felt that there was already significant assessment in place. Adding a new task in without taking anything away was not viewed favourably in terms of teachers' workload. Although currently, the Early Years Foundation Stage explicitly focuses on emotional and social development, which is nationally assessed, this was expected to change with the new EYFS national curriculum with a perceived shift away from SES development towards numeracy and literacy.

#### 4.2.4 Policy leadership

It was widely felt that support at a departmental level would be needed in order for SES provision in schools to be developed further. Under the previous Government, initiatives like SEAL and Healthy Schools were described as having put SES on schools' agenda. The first years of the current Administration were described as having shifted the focus away from SES. Recent policy developments in the Department for Education around character and resilience were welcomed as a means of putting SES 'back on the agenda', although it was felt this would take time to filter through to schools.

*'Schools don't respond quickly to the straws in the wind of policy, they carry on, on track. Gradually they'll get a feeling of 'oh, we've got permission to do this again.'* (National strategic, education, N6)

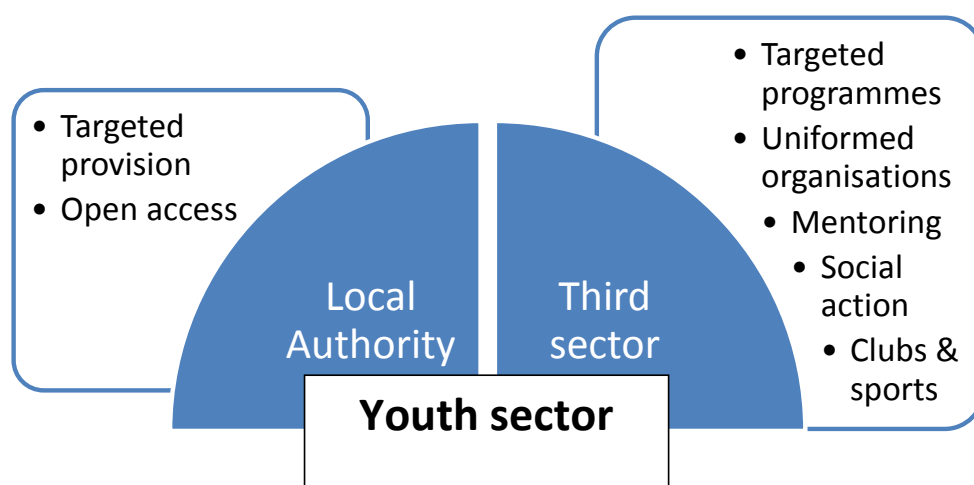
The fast pace of change in the education sector was described as impacting on the focus that could be given to SES by schools. This point was made particularly with reference to the recent introduction of the new curriculum but also related to the different role played by Local Authorities (as a result of funding reductions) and the changes in the structure and autonomy of the schools' sector. Participants again described schools as having to prioritise what they are measured on (Ofsted and attainment targets), leaving little resource or time for SES.

The overriding message was that where large scale change happened fast, attention becomes focused on adjusting to that change, to the possible detriment of the quality of the SES provision.

## 5 Mapping SES provision in the youth sector

Participants talked about SES provision as being ‘at the heart’ of much of the diverse work across the youth sector. This chapter outlines the range of provision described in strategic interviews and the key issues influencing the map of that provision.

### 5.1.1 Figure 2: Map of youth sector SES provision



Youth sector provision was described by strategic participants as broadly split by sector. Local Authority provision tended to be comprised of services delivered by qualified youth workers either through open access youth clubs or activities, targeted small group or one to one work. Small group work could be theme-based, for example schools might refer children to groups looking at knife awareness or online bullying. One youth worker talked about working with young mothers and their babies at a supported accommodation unit on subjects such as budgeting and cooking. Attendance at open access services was voluntary, whilst the targeted work could be voluntary or compulsory, the form of attendance at interventions or programmes with youth justice system or through child protection.

Youth work in the third sector was described as much more diverse and fast growing, with lots of different types of organisations and activities coming under this broad umbrella term. This included uniformed organisations, social action organisations and targeted programmes for those children and young people with identified barriers or needs (although these are not exclusive categories since the uniformed organisations often engage in social action activities). A wide range of clubs, sports and societies similar to the extra-curricular provision within schools were also reported. The deep dive visits were not able to include settings from across this diverse range of provision, for example, targeted Local Authority youth work and third sector mentoring as well as clubs, sports and societies were not visited.

The fast pace of change in recent years was emphasised across strategic interviews; the shape of provision today is strikingly different from that five or more years ago. The important issues seen as shaping the current youth sector provision were:

### 5.1.2 **Reduction in Local Authority provision, moving from early to late intervention**

Youth services used to be part of a typical Local Authority offer, with youth clubs and youth workers widely available. However, strategic stakeholders reported a widespread reduction in LA provision as a result of austerity and the reductions Local Authorities have been required to make. This related to one of the key challenges facing the sector, discussed in detail in 6.2.2, which was the need to evidence the impact of youth work, an area reported across strategic level interviews as being underdeveloped, to date. As a result of not being able to demonstrate the benefits of their work, LA youth work was described as having lost out in the commissioning process.

As a result of less funding, Local Authority youth provision was reported to be increasingly targeted on disadvantaged areas and the more vulnerable groups. The interviews at local strategic level highlighted this issue. In one area, the number of sessions being delivered had reduced from 68 to 34. The risk that those currently just under the threshold of targeted provision would end up hitting the statutory requirements was evident and undesirable. As one participant put it:

*'We want to prevent them from hitting those criteria.'* (Local strategic, youth, L5)

Participants described this shift as a reduction in the early intervention or early help on offer to children and young people. There was a view amongst some in the sector that this was a regressive move that was likely to be counter-productive. By not being able to support young people before they were at high risk was not only seen to be an undesirable scenario for them personally, it would also end up costing more money. In a strategic interview, one participant predicted that this drop off in early help will show up in increased anti-social behaviour and an increase in need for targeted work.

Also emphasised at local strategic level was the need to *'get smarter'*, about provision. This involved consideration of how services might be reconfigured to enhance reach and impact. Examples given of this were where group work could happen instead of one to one work, looking to make outreach work more effective and strengthening partnerships to make sure needs are met, such as looking to work jointly with schools in the areas of PSHE and SEAL. There were some suggestions that Local Authorities could take on a new and different role in relation to youth work, acting as a co-ordinator and broker for the different organisations and sectors working with children and young people to maximise opportunities for joint working and partnerships.

### 5.1.3 **Expansion of third sector provision and social action**

The increase of youth provision focusing on social action was a second key theme identified by national stakeholders in relation to the current landscape in the youth sector. This was described as being a focus of the coalition Government's youth policy, with funding for a range of organisations, including National Citizens Service (NCS), vInspired and uniformed youth groups. Participants in strategic interviews emphasised the work that has gone into growing the reach of these

organisations so that the opportunity to take part is widely available to young people around the country. Being inclusive was highlighted as a core part of this approach, for example, the uniformed organisations have a particular focus on including disadvantaged and 'hard to reach' young people.

Work in this area relied in large part on volunteers. Although there was much evidence of the passion, enthusiasm and commitment of the people who work on a voluntary basis with children and young people, some drawbacks were highlighted. One national stakeholder described finding volunteers as the '*hardest part of the process*'. She explained how core funding had been invaluable. By enabling a paid member of staff to be recruited in a local area, they could then develop networks in the local communities through partnerships with existing services and local businesses which could identify and nurture volunteers.

Recent changes in the sector had created an opportunity for development and innovation in the work taking place. Participants in strategic interviews spoke about this being the case particularly in the spheres of social action but also in looking at provision that promoted entrepreneurship or targeted provision that was used by schools and Local Authorities. This opportunity for development was described as an upside to a period of difficult transition in some parts of the sector.

#### 5.1.4 **SES is embedded in other activities**

Rather than delivering specific SES programmes, participants explained that a lot of youth work built social and emotional learning into other activities, so the young person might not see SES as being part of what they are doing. For example, an outward bound session on caving might be looking to improve self-confidence, team work and communication. There may be explicit goal setting or facilitated reflection about the use or development of SES during an activity, but the young person's experience of a session is likely to be first and foremost about that activity. The nature of this provision – described by a member of staff in a setting as '*SES by stealth*' - was seen by strategic participants to have perhaps contributed to a view of youth provision as hard to measure.

## 6 Key features and challenges to effective SES provision in education

In order to understand what constitutes effective SES delivery within the youth sector, participants were asked what they saw as being the key feature of good SES provision. This chapter sets out what these features were described as being and highlights them with examples from the settings fieldwork. Also important to understand was what gets in the way of effective delivery – the challenges to strong provision, a discussion of which concludes this chapter.

### 6.1 Key features of provision

Participation in youth sector activities was described as being largely voluntary. The activities themselves mostly took place outside of school. Both of these factors were seen as making a big difference to many children and young people. The voluntary nature of the youth sector was seen to set the tone for a different kind of relationship between the adults working in the provision and the young people. The adults' role was not to get them through their exams, but was about supporting the young people. Secondly, for children and young people who may be experiencing difficulties with their peer groups at school, having another place to go and other people to be friends with could be invaluable. This was mentioned by many of the young people in the youth sector who took part in the research.

Development of children and young people's social and emotional skills were seen as lying at the heart of qualified youth workers' roles. It was described as the '*crux*', '*core*' and '*foundation*' of youth work. One of the big questions resulting from the changing youth sector was raised as being the likely decrease of qualified youth workers, with concerns expressed about the negative impact this could have on the quality of youth provision. Whilst the model of using volunteers, as with the uniformed organisations, was seen as effective and sustainable, the skills and expertise of qualified youth workers were held in high regard.

While the current youth sector was described as much more diverse in its make-up than traditional youth work, the core features described below were seen as still core to effectively supporting the development of SES in the work that happens across the sector. The key features of effective provision were described as:

#### 6.1.1 The '*trusting relationship*' between staff and young people.

This was described throughout interviews in the sample and echoed by young people. Staff talked about effective work with young people only taking place within a '*trusting relationship*'. This was particularly emphasised in relation to targeted provision which works with young people facing multiple barriers. According to participants, a trusting relationship was best established by demonstrating to a young person that the youth worker genuinely cares about them. Once the young person felt they were valued within their provision this created a '*safe space*' in which work can begin on developing or strengthening their self-esteem or aspirations for themselves.

This kind of relationship was described and observed in the settings visited for the research. In the police cadets, for example, young people spoke about the staff leader having '*got our backs*' and

offering them support and advice. They also talked about him having gone *'the extra mile'* for them in securing funding for a particular activity.

Participants were mindful that this trust could take time to build. Outward bound activities were described as being a good method for speeding up the development of trust, especially in the *'safer'* environment of taking young people away from their usual social groupings in a residential setting. Putting young people into challenging new situations was described as a *'good opportunity'* to demonstrate this care. Young people too spoke about this kind of activity building trust quickly, although it may also be that the residential element described as part of this activity assists the speed in which trust is developed. Two of the providers included in this research offered this kind of provision.

*'I think you're forced to trust... You're put in a situation where you have to face fears and do things that aren't necessarily what you feel comfortable in, so you have to take comfort from people unknown. That trust can take months and months normally.'* (Setting, youth, CYP, C9)

### **Case example 3. Girls' youth club - trusted relationships and a 'safe space':**

One of the deep dive visits was to an open access youth club session, which was for girls between the ages of 13 and 19 years. Set in a local community centre, there were two experienced female youth workers who facilitated the group. Eleven girls attended, but this could vary widely. The youth workers described a range of challenges the young people could be facing in their home lives, such as misuse of drugs and alcohol, relationship breakdown, internet grooming or self-harm. At the youth club, there would always be an activity on offer. At the session observed, in one room the girls were supplied with banners and decorations that they could make for their bedrooms, whilst in the adjacent sports hall there was a street dance class which the youth workers had secured funding for.

The session was relaxed and informal. The girls were under no obligation to attend or to engage in activities whilst they were there (although all did) and there were clear ground rules (on display in the room), setting out what behaviour was acceptable. The youth workers were very clear about their roles in nurturing the social and emotional development of the young people they worked with. By giving positive encouragement and valuing their contributions, they could create a safe space in which the self-esteem of the young people could be improved.

The girls talked about enjoying having somewhere out of school and home that they could go to where they felt safe and could talk openly. For some, not having boys who would *'tease'* you was a positive and others talked about how their confidence had improved. They also talked about the *'camp'* they went to: a basic hostel in the countryside which the youth workers would take groups to for weekends or week holidays.

### 6.1.2 Promoting agency and control.

A second feature described as core to effective SES provision in the youth sector was ensuring that young people were empowered to make decisions about their activities and goals within a setting. It was seen as a crucial part of a relationship established in more informal settings outside of schools, and was the part of the relationship premised on trust. Young people also talked about being given responsibility and how this in turn promoted and developed their self-confidence. The voluntary nature of engagement was a core foundation for enabling this type of independence to develop.

In a social action programme both staff and young people described the importance of promoting agency and self-control. The voluntary nature of engagement was emphasised as important, and promoting agency was a key part of the programme's approach.

*'At 16, young people are not coming out of formal education feeling that they're authors of their own destiny, able to express themselves. Those kind of skills are lacking.'* (National strategic, youth, N15)

A phase of the programme put young people in socially mixed groups where they devised, planned and presented a social action project. They were then expected to carry out their project in order to complete the programme.

Young people were asked to work together to choose the topic and project, plan and execute it. Both staff and young people described this as an empowering experience that built their self-confidence because they had been trusted to choose and do something beneficial for others. Both groups also talked about how it promoted empathy and compassion because the topic or issue chosen for the project inevitably was more personal or meaningful to some group members than others.

*'It really shows young people that they can be doers, not just done to. There's a big difference in the mind-set of someone who thinks life happens to you and the person who feels they can shape their world.'* (National strategic, youth, N15)

### 6.1.3 Facilitating reflection and promoting self-awareness

A third core feature of effective SES provision in the youth sector was described as work (within the trusted relationship) that facilitated young people's reflective skills and self-awareness.

This was also emphasised in counselling approaches. In youth work, participants described using guided reflection sessions (with groups or individuals) or by using tools like Kolb's Learning Cycle<sup>8</sup>. Here young people were facilitated to reflect on their plans or goals before an activity or session, take part and then reflect afterwards on how it had gone: what had gone well and what they had taken away from it.

In two of the settings in the research, this was described as a core feature of their provision. They described a mix of using guided facilitation sessions at the end of a day or activity to ask young

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<sup>8</sup> Kolb, D. A., & Fry, R. E. (1974). *Toward an applied theory of experiential learning*. MIT Alfred P. Sloan School of Management.

people as a group to reflect on what they had taken from the day and what they had learnt. The settings also described using one to one sessions to help young people identify their own development goals and log them in a personal plan. This personal plan was revisited in activities where young people were asked to identify for themselves which goal they would use an activity to work on and staff too wrote individually on each young person's plan at the end of an activity, noting their achievements and behaviours that demonstrated their identified area of development.

This type of approach was described by settings staff and young people as working on an attributes rather than deficit model – emphasising young people's successes and seeing mistakes as learning opportunities.

*'You were allowed to make mistakes. At school you used to get told off for mistakes and I associate that negatively. I get perfectionist because of that. I apologised for making a mistake at [NAME OF ORG] and the staff said, 'Don't apologise. There aren't any mistakes, there's just try again, I know you'll get there.'* (Setting, youth, CYP, C9)

#### 6.1.4 Modelling SES

An important feature described in strong SES provision in the youth sector was the modelling of those skills. This was described as taking place in every element of a youth worker's role. An example given was of how a youth worker would react if there were a dispute between two young people in a youth club. Strong SES provision would see a youth worker in this situation calmly facilitate a discussion, listen to both sides, acknowledge the emotions experienced and facilitate the young people to identify a resolution.

One of the deep dive visits was to an organisation working with multiply disadvantaged young people not in education employment or training (NEET). They were young people described as facing multiple barriers or disadvantages to gaining employment or education. The programme consists of three discrete stages, a two-day residential, a series of activities and skills focused tasks selected by young people from the programme on offer and facilitated by a qualified youth worker with the third stage preparing the young people to move on from the programme. The aims of the programme were described as centring on the development of SES, or personal social development (PSD), the language used by this organisation.

*'It's the crux, the centrepiece of everything we do. Change can only be affected when young people can make decisions for themselves. Improving their PSD alleviates the barriers they face.'* (Setting, youth, S8)

#### Case example 4. Targeted youth provision – an example of modelled SES.

The research visit was with a group of four young people, who were doing a session on cooking. In order to develop their social and emotional skills, the organisational approach was to consistently work through a process of planning, execution and reflection: 'Plan, do, review'. At the cooking session observed, each young person set a goal for themselves, based on the areas they had each previously identified with their key worker as important for their development.



Throughout the session, the youth worker consistently commented on positive behaviours and encouraged the young people to achieve their goals by noting the steps they took towards an objective. For example, the youth worker asked one of the group to introduce what they were going to be doing in the session to the researcher. She made eye contact with one of the girls, Jo, who volunteered to make the introduction. Once the cooking had commenced, the youth worker said quietly to Jo, *'Thanks for introducing us, it's great to see you having the confidence to speak up'*. She also noted it on Jo's personal development plan.

Equally, when the young people were experiencing difficulties or there were disagreements in the group, resulting in unacceptable behaviours, the youth worker consistently challenged them. Her manner was never confrontational. She would calmly ask questions about negative or inappropriate comments, asking them to reflect on their feelings and the feelings of others in the group, thus modelling the behaviour she expected from them.

For example, when Ameer, one of the group, received a phone call from a college that he was really excited about, Daniel teased him for his enthusiasm. Daniel invited the other young people in the group to join him in making fun of Ameer, and imitated him taking the call. The youth worker intervened and asked Daniel to think about Ameer's emotions, i.e. that he was excited by the phone call and that the effect of teasing him might be to take away from that excitement. A minute after this conversation, Daniel approached Ameer, put his arm around his shoulder and said *'You're my man; let's work together on this next shit'*. They paired up for the next activity.

### 6.1.5 Staff skills

Staff in the youth sector were seen to be highly skilled in the provision of SES, especially those who were qualified youth workers. Changes in the sector in recent years were seen as expanding services that rely on volunteers for their delivery and as such it was felt that careful thought needs to be given to the selection, training and ongoing support of workers to maintain the sector's strong skills in delivering SES.

Young people who participated in this research because of their involvement in the youth sector sometimes drew a distinction between their experiences of staff in youth sector provision compared to school. They pointed to staff skill in facilitating and supporting their achievements, giving them responsibility and voice and developing their self-confidence, empathy and resilience. The nature of the differences were explained by young people as in part because of youth sector staff's skills sets as well as being down to key differences in the nature of the relationship and the presence or absence of compulsory engagement.

*'On [NAME OF PROGRAMME], it was completely different.. It was like a family by the end of it. I came a long way on it. It was only because [NAME OF STAFF MEMBER] and [NAME OF STAFF MEMBER] supported me so much. They sat with me and encouraged me to do stuff, instead of telling me I was losing out. They pointed out the gains...At school all I heard was all the bad stuff that would happen if I didn't get good exam grades'. (Setting, youth, CYP, C9).*

### 6.1.6 Community focus

This was a feature described specifically by those involved in social action, rather than in other kinds of youth provision. The importance of having exposure and experience of a community was emphasised as beneficial – it helped develop empathy, compassion, self-awareness and improved communication and confidence. Young people talked about the importance of meeting and working with people who were different from them and who could bring to life learning for them. An example here was a young person who talked about having studied Islam at school in Religious Education but had retained little information from having done so. She described meeting people from a Muslim community through her social action who took time to explain to her some of their religious beliefs and cultural practices. This, she said, was much more meaningful and useful to her than her school based study had been.

Young people in the police cadets talked about the developmental effect of spending time with young people outside of their narrow school social circles and placed value on their experiences of camping with different kinds of young people. This was also emphasised by those young people who had been involved in social action programmes.

Young people spoke about the isolation of their generation, living in a ‘bubble’ of school and social media that did not connect them to a real life community outside of school and home. They observed that their schools were full of people like them. They theorised that a resulting sense of isolation may contribute to perceptions of high mental health rates amongst their peers.

*‘Especially with technology the way it is, everyone lives in a bubble. Until you open it up and show them what's out there, you can't blame them for living in there. But schools don't do anything to facilitate this community ethos. Help us open things up, get involved.’*

*..We have such a high incidence of self-harm amongst young people of school age. That's a huge problem. It's something that's gone wrong in the system in education – where else are they spending their time – that people are coming out depressed. But how can you blame them when they feel so isolated?’*  
(National youth organisation, focus group C1)

## 6.2 Challenges to effective provision

In the youth sector the challenges identified in strategic interviews were often the same themes as those described in education, although the way in which they operated differed. These factors are unpacked in the sections below.

### 6.2.1 Resources

The participants from strategic interviews and settings described the challenges of securing funding in the recent financial climate. Local Authorities were reported to have cut their traditional youth provision and/or focused more on targeted services rather than open access services.

Scarcity of resources was seen as a barrier to early help in youth worker led settings. Less plentiful funding was also seen as potentially acting as an enabler too; in order to secure funding, services

and settings need to do more to demonstrate their worth and impact and in doing so it was hoped their offer would be sharper and more effective.

The importance of funding for open access social action programmes was emphasised – to ensure provision is universally available. This was highlighted by participants in strategic interviews as well as young people. A long term commitment to funding programmes was seen by participants in strategic interviews as particularly helpful for programmes to invest in their infrastructures. With targeted provision, settings emphasised the resource-intensive nature of their work and reported that funding had been more difficult in recent years which had acted as a barrier to the quality of their provision in some places.

### 6.2.2 Measuring impact

A limited evidence base in the youth sector was cited as a barrier to provision. This barrier was emphasised across the strategic interviews. An improved evidence base was seen as helpful to facilitate improved provision by demonstrating both the value and importance of SES as well as helping to understand which types of provision would be most effective.

There were seen to be particular challenges in measuring impact within youth provision and especially in youth work. These challenges were described in strategic interviews where they were largely relating what they had heard from settings and practitioners. Staff in settings also expressed some concerns around ascertaining accurate measurements of their work. These concerns were:

- **A lack of capability and capacity** as a result of the **lack of culture in evidence gathering**. What was needed here was described as a cultural change that will take time. Proportionality was also raised, with practitioners mindful of the time needed to complete evaluations and assessments (especially with limited capacity and capability) compared to the time spent actually delivering a service. As one national strategic participant put it – *‘you don’t want to spend all of your time weighing the pig’*.
- **Methodological challenges** in administering even basic before and after measurements – for example that even where a programme or intervention is successful a before and after self-reported measure may not capture this. As one practitioner described it: for a young person to accurately self-report their SES level requires both that they feel safe to do so (i.e. are working within a trusted relationship) and that they have the skills of self-reflection required to do so accurately. If either of these is missing at the outset of service provision, an initial score is likely to be overinflated. At the end of engagement with a service young people can sometimes *‘behaviourally regress’* in response to the anticipated ending. As a result what may happen to their reported SES levels over the course of their engagement with a service may look like a u-shaped curve, with a downward drop at the end.

Other methodological challenges were described too such as the variation in individual outcomes sought or relatively different starting positions. One practitioner illustrated this by explaining that although their service had a core set of outcomes sought, for some of their most disadvantaged young people just establishing engagement with a service may

represent a huge success. Participants also stressed that a small numerical increase in the rating of a particular skill area may have a significant impact for a young person and expressed a concern that the recent emphasis on measurement may not account for these kinds of impacts. A further barrier was seen in that the sector often uses other activities as a vehicle in which to embed SES learning. There may be no structured programme to evaluate and with open access drop in services there is less of a clear ending and attendance may fluctuate over time.

### 6.2.3 **Policy leadership**

The Cabinet Office's investment in social action and flagship programmes was seen in strategic interviews as reinforcing the importance of some elements of SES. At the same time, Local Authorities were described as having made decisions to meet funding cuts that reduced the provision of SES through the reduction of youth work services. What was experienced as a barrier here was a perceived lack of prominence or importance given to the work that the sector does with young people.

## 7 The challenges for policy-makers

Through policy workshops and data collection with national stakeholders, practitioners, children and young people this research has identified three key challenges relating to social and emotional learning in the education and youth sector that any new policy direction would need to consider in order to move forwards with effective SES provision.

These three challenges are:

- **Overcoming variability in provision.** Mapping the current picture of what social and emotional learning children and young people receive in the education and youth sectors highlighted the variability in provision. Some children and young people could be exposed to a wide range of SES provision in school, for example, through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and engagement with the wider community. They could also be involved with activities in the youth sector outside of school through volunteering, sports, or being a member of a uniformed organisation. However, there could also be children and young people who may not be getting any SES provision in school and not be involved in any out of school activities.

To ensure that all children and young people are able to benefit from social and emotional learning, consideration would need to be given to overcoming this variability, ensuring consistency in schools' SES offer and that children and young people are also able to access provision out of school.

- **Ensuring quality in SES provision.** Part of the challenge in overcoming variability in provision is to ensure that provision is high quality and that it employs what participants identified as the key features of effective delivery. The challenge here is not only ensuring that children and young people are able to access SES provision, but that this provision effectively teaches these crucial skills.
- **Designing policy that meets the needs of a complex delivery landscape.** Across the education and youth sector SES provision happened in a myriad of within-school and out of school delivery. Within-school SES provision could be happening within the curriculum or through activities happening outside the classroom. SES provision in the youth sector was happening in a diverse and fast changing environment. A challenge for any policy development will be to meet the diversity and complexity in the delivery landscape.

These three challenges are broad overarching issues for policy-makers to consider. Underneath them lie a range of specific challenges which contribute to these overarching issues.

These specific challenges were:

- Making the case for SES – improving the evidence base
- Accountability for SES provision in schools
- The provision of skills for life
- Staff skills

- Joining up SES provision

Each of these is addressed in the following sections.

## 7.1 Making the case for SES

Being able to evidence the impact and identify the most effective ways of providing SES was seen as key. Participants from both the education and youth sectors recognised the need to improve the current evidence base so that children and young people were getting access to the best provision. This could contribute to a driver for provision in schools and could help settings in the youth sector secure funding for SES provision.

In schools, participants felt that demonstrating the link between SES and later outcomes could create better recognition of the worth of SES provision, especially if the link believed to exist between SES and educational outcomes could be strongly evidenced.

In the youth sector, an historical lack of emphasis on evidence was described as having disadvantaged elements of the sector in securing funding and was in part responsible for the drop-off in early intervention in Local Authority funded open access youth provision. Improving the understanding of the value of this kind of work and helping to demonstrate its positive outcomes could help strengthen provision.

Part of the challenge in improving the evidence base was seen as building capacity and capability amongst providers in carrying out evaluation and measurement. The issue of proportionality was important here too – while improvement was seen as needed in a culture of measuring impacts and outcomes, there was no appetite to introduce an additional level of requirements for schools to demonstrate SES outcomes in the way they do for attainment and in the youth sector front line providers described needing to ensure that they were able to focus on provision and delivery.

## 7.2 Accountability for SES provision in schools

The two strongest drivers of schools' work were described as Ofsted and the attainment targets. Without such a driver and accountability for SES, participants argued it would be difficult to ensure high quality provision across the schools sector. Schools prioritise what they are measured on and are accountable for and without these drivers, the quality of provision is likely to remain variable. In order to make SES a priority *and* ensure consistently high quality, accountability for this would be needed. Participants argued that using the regulatory framework would be the most effective way of achieving this.

In schools, the Head teacher's leadership around SES was seen as a pre-requisite to strong provision. Gaining this leadership consistently across the sector, it was argued, could only be achieved by ensuring schools are accountable for their SES provision.

Young people who took part in this research were able to reflect back on their experiences of school (and KS4 in particular) and articulate what could have been provided in their services and schools to assist the development of their social and emotional skills. They also reflected on the particular pressures of growing up and going to school today – where their school populations were relatively

homogenous and where the only outward focus was often provided by the ‘bubble’ of social media. In policy workshops, participants pointed to the need to include young people’s voices in shaping policy and developing regulatory frameworks to ensure relevance and salience to them in provision.

### 7.3 Skills for life

Within the current framework, Ofsted inspectors were not seen to have a consistent approach to how they assessed SES provision in schools. Variation was described in what areas inspectors looked at (e.g. pupil behaviour around the school or the content of PSHE lessons) and, importantly, in *how* they looked at it. What was important, according to participants, was that inspectors looked at the skills based learning embedded in PSHE lessons and not just the content. So, for example, to inspect a lesson on drugs education, the focus should not just be on the facts provided about substances and their effects but on how well the lesson equips young people to navigate a social situation in which they are offered illicit substances. It was also felt that in planning lessons, teachers were trained to rely on resources and content, rather than to plan with these underpinning skills in mind. Ensuring an emphasis on underpinning skills was described as a challenge but one that needed to be addressed in order to ensure high quality SES provision.

Recognising the achievements children and young people make in social and emotional learning was also described as being really important. The process of reflecting on their progress was seen as an important way for young people to see their skills develop and could help broaden the definition of success beyond academic attainment. A nationally recognised award or certificate was raised by some participants as being a way of providing tangible benefit to young people in their onward journeys into education or employment. This would also help to positively reinforce the message that SES are valued and important.

### 7.4 Staff skills

New teachers were described as ‘under-prepared’ to effectively provide SES. While recommendations were made to strengthen training in child development and psychology in Initial Teacher Training (ITT), there was also recognition that there was little scope to do this in an already densely packed curriculum. Continual professional development was seen to be where teachers often gained these skills, although this is largely dependent of the extent of focus for SES and the quality of provision in each particular school. Given that the key features of effective delivery were seen as embedded, modelled and reinforced SES alongside taught provision, staff skills are a crucial ingredient in consistently high quality provision.

In the youth sector, qualified youth workers were seen to have this skill set at the core of their professional practice. In the fast changing young sector where the expansion of third sector provision relies increasingly on volunteers, ensuring the skills in the sector remain in place was raised as an important challenge.

## 7.5 Joining up SES service provision

Improving the join between the youth and education sectors was described as an area where provision could be strengthened. Youth workers were seen to have expertise and skills that schools may be able to learn from and vice versa. In a rapidly changing and expanding youth sector, one suggestion was for Local Authorities to act as central co-ordinators of the different agencies, sectors and organisations working on SES with children and young people, including education and the youth sector, but also health, social care, local businesses, charities looking for volunteers, the youth justice system and so on.

Ensuring an 'outward' focus was seen as a core feature of SES provision and a means by which the quality of the offer could be improved. Social action programmes have sought to develop empathy, social connectedness and compassion by engaging young people in the issues within their communities and have done so by using existing organisations, networks and skills to build a sustainable element to their offer.

Across this piece of research, SES were viewed as crucial to the potential for children and young people to go on to develop happy and fulfilling adult lives. Providers in the front line of targeted delivery described the lack of these skills being the biggest barrier faced by disadvantaged young people. This points to a case for a policy direction that can take account of the complex picture of delivery and help to ensure that all children and young people have the opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills both within and outside of school.



## 8 Appendix A – Research Methods

This report sets out the findings from the third strand of the Social and Emotional Skills (SES) review commissioned by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), Cabinet Office and Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCPC).

This strand was tasked with identifying *what* and *how* social and emotional skills are being delivered to children and young people across the education and youth sectors and what are the key issues effecting delivery. Through interviewing stakeholders at both national and local level, visiting settings and speaking to providers, children and young people, this part of the review takes a systems approach to understanding the current state of play and identifies key facilitators and barriers to SES provision. Based on these findings and on follow up policy workshops amongst stakeholders, the report also asks what are the challenges that future policy would need to overcome should policy-makers seek to strengthen SES provision both in and out of school.

### 8.1 Method

This strand adopted a qualitative approach, involving participants at different levels of the ‘system’ – those in strategic leadership positions, those working in strategic roles in Local Authorities, settings delivering SES and children and young people. Participants were from both the education and youth sector.

The research was designed as a best fit to the timetable and resources available and ran from November 2014 to February 2015.

The participant groups involved in the research were:

- **Strategic stakeholders working at the national level.** Telephone interviews were conducted with this group to provide a broad overview of SES provision in education and the youth sector. The aim of these interviews was to highlight the key issues, challenges and questions being faced.
- **Staff in strategic roles in two Local Authorities** gave an overview of the provision in the education and youth sector, identifying key issues as well as recent changes in provision, and challenges and enablers to strong SES provision.
- **Nine ‘deep dive’ visits to settings**, undertaking in-depth interviews with staff in leadership positions as well as staff who delivered SES provision. Observation of provision and/or focus groups with children and young people were also carried out.

This work did not set out to robustly or comprehensively map the existing SES provision at a national level, which would have required reliable survey data. What this approach sought to achieve was an understanding of SES from a range of different perspectives and levels, from senior decision-makers and experts in the field, to those with responsibility for service delivery at a local area level as well as frontline staff and the children and young people in receipt of provision. The picture of SES

provision drawn in the national strategic interviews could be compared with what was happening on the ground and vice versa. In this way, the validity of the themes and issues raised could be tested against each other, resulting in a robust set of research findings.

In order for the research to carry validity, the selection of participants, settings and areas was of key importance. The principles of qualitative **sampling** are to include range and diversity of the participant population in relation to the research objectives, not to measure or count. For the national stakeholders, the criteria for selection were to include different perspectives on SES. In collaboration with the commissioners, the Steering Group and the Advisory Group<sup>9</sup> the key stakeholders to include were agreed as follows: government departments responsible for driving policy in the youth and education sectors; those involved with training and development of staff; accountability, evaluation and evidence as well as front line service delivery.

Table 1 summarises the final sample of national stakeholder interviews achieved.

### 8.1.1 Table 1. Sample achieved: National Strategic Interviews

Education	Youth
Department for Education	Cabinet Office
Ofsted	National Youth Agency (NYA)
EIF Trustee & SEAL expert	National Youth Council for Voluntary Services (NYCVS)
Teach First	Prince’s Trust
National Union of Teachers	Youth United
Independent Schools Association	Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC)
PSHE Association	National Citizens Service (NCS)
Place2Be	

We are confident that this sample provides an accurate overview of current provision across both sectors at the time of the research and identified the key themes in relation to SES provision. This is firstly because of the saturation achieved in the sample, whereby at the end of the fieldwork period no new themes were being raised in interviews. Secondly, these key themes were then echoed in both the local strategic interviews and were also seen and heard about in the Deep dive visits. While the sample of local authorities and settings lacked the ideal diversity, the resonance of findings across the three sample levels adds confidence to the reliability of thematic findings.

The areas and settings were also selected in collaboration with the commissioners and the project Steering and Advisory Group. The aim was for these areas and settings to illuminate and show

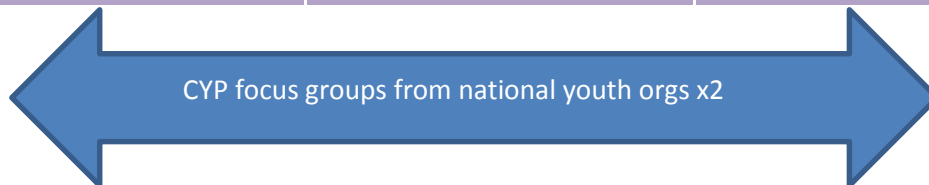
<sup>9</sup> The Steering Group and Advisory Group were convened for the three strands of the review. Composed of the commissioners and experts in the field, meetings were held at key points in the research process and participants were available for comment and advice throughout the review.

examples of how issues identified in the national strategic interviews played out in practice. Areas were selected from EIF places. These are Local Authority areas committed to delivering early intervention who are already working with the EIF to develop their offer. This pre-existing relationship was an important way of facilitating access to settings within the time available.

The main consideration was the range and type of SES provision in the different areas. The EIF places were able to advise on this, as were members of the Steering Group and Advisory Group. This information was then supplemented with desk research to come up with a desired sample matrix for the areas and the deep dive settings. In the education sector, this was a combination of mainstream primary and secondary schools (some of which offered specialist SES provision) and a Pupil Referral Unit. In the youth sector, we aimed to visit a universal open-access Local Authority youth provision, a uniformed organisations, one focusing on social action and an organisation working with very vulnerable groups. Table 2 sets out the sample achieved.

**8.1.2 Table 2. Sample achieved in local strategic interviews and Deep dive visits**

North-west		
Secondary Community Academy	Pupil Referral Unit	Youth club
Inner-city		
Primary School	Primary School	Targeted youth programme for YP at risk
South-east		
Place2Be secondary school (academy)	Uniformed organisation	National Citizen Service (NCS)



It is also worth noting that the settings visited were seen as examples of best practice, which were displaying many features of outstanding provision as reflected in their outcomes and achievements. However, some less positive experiences of SES provision were captured in the focus groups with young people from the national youth organisations.

The recruitment process was as follows. Letters or e-mails and information leaflets were sent to all strategic participants and settings explaining the reasons for the review, what taking part would involve and the voluntary and confidential nature of doing so. The information for settings outlined the 'ideal' deep dive visit, which included interviews with staff at senior leadership and frontline delivery level; observation of provision followed by focus groups or interviews with children and young people who had taken part in the provision.

To meet the timetable, we needed to be flexible about the observations of provision and the fieldwork with children and young people. Where research did take place with children and young people under 16 the school had pre-existing consent from parents for children to take part in social research. Young people aged 16 or over who took part were invited to do so and the researchers ensured their informed consent and emphasised the voluntary nature of participation.

It was neither feasible nor appropriate to observe provision and conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with children and young people at all of the settings, for a number of reasons:

- Insufficient time to gain parental consent to include children and young people under the age of 16 in all settings.
- The nature of the service provision was of a private and sensitive nature, such as specialist counselling services, which it would not have been ethical to observe for the purposes of this research.
- The children and young people were at a vulnerable point of their engagement with the service, and the priority was to concentrate on strengthening their experiences rather than the potential disruption of a research interview.

We were able to supplement the settings based work with children and young people by including two focus groups with young people from a national youth organisation. This was an important means of increasing the number of children and young people who contributed to this strand of the review. Table 3 below shows the total number of participants who took part in the review and the number of observations and research encounters carried out.

8.1.3 **Table 3. Sample size**

Participant group	# research encounters	# participants
National strategic interviews	15	17
Local strategic interviews	4	6
Staff at settings	9	19
Children and young people	10	77
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>119</b>

As part of the consent process, it was agreed that the places, settings and individuals would not be identified. This is important to note particularly in relation to the national stakeholder interviews.

Care has been taken to report the findings thematically rather than singling out individual organisational perspectives, both to maintain the confidentiality offered and to avoid the risk of presenting one stakeholder's perspective as wholly representative of an organisation or government department.

Topic guides were used to conduct all of the interviews and focus groups<sup>10</sup>. These set out the key areas to be covered during the fieldwork, but are used flexibly to allow the researcher scope to follow up on areas of interest and for unanticipated issues to be explored. Most of the national and local strategic interviews were conducted by telephone whereas deep dive visits were carried out face to face. Interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate and comprehensive coverage when it came to analysis. It was not always possible to record the interviews during the deep dive visits if the activity involved the researcher moving around. At some of the settings, the agreement had been that the researcher would observe the session rather than speak directly to the participants. In these cases, detailed notes were taken and an observation schedule completed by the researchers.

The framework method of **analysis** was used in this strand. This involves summarising the data from each research interview into a thematic framework. Columns represent themes and each participant's data is summarised (charted) across the row. The strength of this approach is that it enables systematic and comprehensive analysis of the complete data set in a manageable way. Analysis can be done both thematically, looking down a column, or individually by reading across a row. In this research, this analytical approach also assisted in looking at thematic issues from the systems perspective; summarising data from all participant groups in the same thematic framework.

A note about how the findings are **reported**. The strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide explanation and understanding of the subject being researched. As mentioned above, the national strategic interviews provided the key themes relating to social and emotional skills and therefore have furnished the main structure. Local providers, both strategic and frontline as well children and young people themselves provided in-depth examples of what these themes looked like in practice.

## 8.2 Limitations of the methodology

As discussed, the design of the research provides us with confidence that the key themes pertaining to the current provision of SES have been captured in this review through the strategic interviews. These issues were then seen in practice in the field during the deep dive visits. There are, though, limitations in the methodology, which are important to be aware of.

The first is that this research visited a small number of settings seen to offering strong SES provision. Without the inclusion of a wider range of settings, especially schools who placed less emphasis on this area, it is likely that there are front line issues and experiences not illuminated here. Secondly, although specific interventions were sometimes mentioned in the strategic interviews, (such as PATHS and Big Brothers Big Sisters), this strand did not capture detail about the relative strengths and weaknesses of this type of evidence based programme, and they were not in place at any of the deep dive settings visited. Thirdly, there are a whole host of groups of children and young people

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<sup>10</sup> See appendix 1

with specific needs, such as those with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, those in the youth justice system, in care, asylum seekers and refugees. This strand of the review was not able to map the types of provision on offer to these targeted groups.

Throughout the report, verbatim quotes and case examples are used to illustrate the findings. They are labelled to show the type of participant: national or local strategic interview; setting; child or young person (abbreviated to CYP). The focus groups conducted with young people from a national youth organisation are labelled as such. It is also indicated whether they were from the education or youth sector. Each participant type has a number, which allows readers to see the distribution of quotes across the data set.