



Department  
for Education

# **Universal SEND Services process and impact evaluation**

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## Glossary

<b>ADHD</b>	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
<b>AET</b>	Autism Education Trust
<b>AP</b>	Alternative provision
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing professional development
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>Diarists</b>	People who contributed to the research by writing reflective diaries
<b>ECT</b>	Early career teacher
<b>EEF</b>	Education Endowment Foundation
<b>EHC plan</b>	Education, Health and Care plan
<b>ETF</b>	Education and Training Foundation
<b>EYP</b>	Early years practitioner
<b>FE</b>	Further education
<b>INSET</b>	In-service training
<b>Interviewees</b>	People who contributed to the research by taking part in interviews
<b>MI</b>	Management information – data provided by the organisations that are the subject of the evaluation
<b>nasen</b>	National Association for Special Educational Needs
<b>NASENCO</b>	National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination
<b>NPQ</b>	National Professional Qualification
<b>Respondents</b>	People who contributed to the research by answering surveys
<b>SEMH</b>	Social, emotional and mental health
<b>SEN</b>	Special educational needs
<b>SENCo</b>	Special educational needs coordinator
<b>SEND</b>	Special educational needs and disabilities
<b>SLT</b>	Senior leadership team
<b>Support staff</b>	In this report, the term includes learning support assistants, higher level teaching assistants and pastoral support

<b>TA</b>	Teaching assistant
<b>Teachers</b>	Classroom teachers, including EYPs and tutors
<b>USS</b>	Universal SEND Services
<b>WSS</b>	Whole School SEND

## Executive summary

Universal SEND Services (USS) is a programme of training and continuous professional development (CPD) in England and is funded by DfE until 2026. Up until March 2025, USS was delivered through the Whole School SEND (WSS) consortium led by the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen), in partnership with the Educational and Training Foundation (ETF), the Autism Education Trust (AET) and other delivery partners in the education community.<sup>1</sup> The programme provides school and college staff with free, flexible training and resources designed to fit around school and college life. A series of 20 Online CPD Units, developed in partnership with sector specialists with a focus on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), form the backbone of the programme – together with Specialist Spotlight Sessions, live Webinars, interactive and downloadable Toolkits, and regional networking and support. USS therefore offers a diverse menu of CPD and training that responds to the education sector's needs, and with content appropriate for staff at all levels and educational settings.

USS aimed to develop the skills and knowledge of the mainstream school and further education (FE) workforce, so that the needs of more children and young people with SEND were identified earlier and met effectively. The training programme also sought to drive change in attitudes and approaches to SEND across mainstream settings and encourage the development of more inclusive cultures that would better serve the needs of children and young people with SEND. Achievement of these objectives was intended to enhance the learning experience of children and young people with SEND, and lead to improved outcomes – including wellbeing, attendance, behaviour and attainments in the short-to-medium term, and successful transitions and sustainable employment in the long term.

## Evaluation aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of USS were outlined in a theory of change (see [Appendix 2](#)). This provided the framework for the theory-based evaluation, which explored the effectiveness of USS, the extent to which it was achieving its objectives in the short term, and progress towards its intended outcomes and impacts in the longer term.

The evaluation focused on the period from the programme's launch in 2022 until the end of March 2025, and had 2 main objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> From 1 April 2025, the programme is delivered by nasen in partnership with the ETF. AET is no longer part of the consortium. New Autism Training – a combination of Train the Trainer and Online Units – will be launched for the academic year 2025/2026.

- to assess how, and to what extent, USS has resulted in improved quality of mainstream provision of support for children and young people with SEND
- to assess how, and to what extent, USS has resulted in improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND

To achieve these objectives and test the programme's [theory of change](#), CFE Research implemented a mixed-methods approach, which addressed the following key research questions:

1. How did the mainstream school and college workforce engage with USS?
2. Is the USS well-designed, targeted and delivered?
3. Does USS work to improve teaching practice?
4. Are more children and young people with SEND having their needs identified and met earlier in mainstream settings?
5. Have outcomes improved for children with SEND since USS was rolled out?

Evidence about the reach of USS and the characteristics of those who engaged in the programme was explored, through an analysis of management information (MI) for the period spanning the academic years 2021/2022 to 2024/2025.

A survey of programme delegates<sup>2</sup> was administered in order to capture views and experiences of USS, and perceived outcomes and impacts on individual practice, education settings' approaches to supporting children and young people with SEND, and pupils' outcomes. The survey was administered on 3 occasions between January 2024 and April 2025, to achieve maximum coverage. A total of 1,660 usable responses were received, which represented less than 1% of individuals who engaged in the programme during this period, according to the MI.

To understand how USS supported individuals and the education workforce, 7 case studies were undertaken, involving a total of 17 in-depth interviews with delegates and wider staff within primary, secondary and sixth form/FE settings. A further 5 individual interviews were carried out with delegates from secondary settings, to ensure there was equivalent coverage across all key phases. In addition, 34 delegates across all mainstream settings completed reflective diaries over a 6-week period, to document how they applied USS learning in their roles.

Although the characteristics of survey respondents do not reflect the total population in the MI – with special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs), support staff and leaders overrepresented, and those in teaching roles underrepresented – the survey data, triangulated with findings from the qualitative research and MI, provides insights on

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'delegates' is used throughout to refer to individuals who engaged with USS.

how USS has supported the professional development of the education workforce, and shaped policy and practice in a range of settings.

## **Key findings**

### **Programme reach**

- Since April 2022, approximately 255,207 individuals in a range of roles and settings have engaged in USS. Most have participated in AET provision (94%) (which is delivered across all phases), followed by nasen (5%) (targeting schools), and ETF (1%) (targeting sixth form/FE colleges).
- The number of individuals who engaged in the programme has increased year on year, aside from the 2024/2025 academic year when it reduced.
- Coverage has been achieved across all English regions, with the highest level of engagement in Yorkshire and the Humber, and the lowest in the North East.

### **Engagement and usefulness of USS**

- Survey respondents were most likely to have heard about USS from either a work colleague in their setting (33%) or directly through nasen, AET or ETF (33%).
- The most common motivations for survey respondents to engage in USS were to help keep up to date with the latest thinking on SEND (66%) and to plug knowledge gaps (51%).
- Survey respondents were most likely to have engaged in 1 activity (38%), while around one-fifth participated in 3 (19%) or 4 or more activities (20%). Those in senior positions engaged in more activities than those in support roles.
- Most respondents, irrespective of the activity they engaged in and their role, found them useful. The downloadable resources, ETF's College SEND Provider Review, and nasen's Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders, were perceived as the most useful.

### **Effectiveness of design and delivery**

- Most survey respondents (83%) rated the support they received through the USS programme as excellent or good, and nearly all respondents (95%) reported that they were likely or very likely to engage with USS activities in the future.
- The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the content of USS was appropriate to their position/role (85%), while a similar proportion (83%) agreed the content was appropriate to their setting.

- Delegates particularly valued the case studies and practical elements of USS. Printable resources supported delegates to cascade and implement learning at their setting.
- Less than one-third (29%) of survey respondents had engaged in other CPD that was not part of USS. Of those who engaged in other provision, most (78%) perceived the quality to be comparable to USS.
- Most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that communication from the training provider was clear (92%), facilitators were knowledgeable and engaging (91%), and they were able to access the activities at a convenient time (86%).
- Improved communication and promotion of USS would help to ensure more delegates were fully informed about the suite of high-quality resources available.
- Most (90%) respondents have shared the learning and insight gained through USS with at least 1 other individual or group of staff within their setting. A lack of time was the main barrier to sharing insight.

## Impact on delegates

- Individuals who engaged in 4 or more activities tended to find USS more impactful than those who had participated in 1 or 2 activities.
- Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS increased their knowledge about how different SEND can affect the ways in which children and young people engage with their learning, and how different SEND can affect children and young people physically, socially and emotionally.
- More than two-thirds of survey respondents (70%) agreed or strongly agreed that USS increased their knowledge about the different types of SEND, and 78% felt that it equipped them with the skills to adapt their teaching practice in response to the needs of children and young people with SEND.
- Most survey respondents (89%) reported that to some or a large extent they have drawn on the learning from USS to adapt their teaching and support practice.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS supported them to enhance their leadership skills.
- Three-quarters (75%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that engagement in USS increased their confidence in identifying the needs of children and young people with SEND. A similar proportion agreed USS had a positive impact on their confidence in liaising with parents or carers (71%) and other professionals (75%).
- Over three-fifths (62%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS increased their job satisfaction.

## Impact on educational settings

- Almost three-fifths of survey respondents (57%) indicated that their setting had made changes to its SEND policy by drawing on the learning from USS.
- Two-thirds of survey respondents (66%) reported that their setting had made at least some changes to its processes for identifying SEND needs, including the ways in which staff liaise with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND.
- Three-fifths (60%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of engaging with USS, the needs of children and young people with SEND in their setting were being identified earlier.
- Around two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the needs of children and young people with SEND were a higher priority (65%), and that there was increased capability to respond within their setting (66%), as a result of their engagement with USS.
- Most survey respondents (87%) reported that their setting had made changes to teaching practice, informed by learning and insight from USS.
- Around three-quarters of respondents indicated that their setting had made changes to the ways in which children and young people are supported at key transition points (73%), and changes to their pastoral support (70%), informed by learning from USS.
- Around two-thirds of survey respondents (67%) agreed or strongly agreed that due to USS, there was a more inclusive culture and ethos in their setting.

## Impact on children and young people

Changes in outcomes for children and young people take time to occur, and measuring these was beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, there was evidence, based on staff perceptions, that adaptations to teaching and support practices, informed by learning and insight from USS, were starting to have a positive effect on pupils:

- nearly three-quarters (72%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teacher and student relationships within their setting had improved
- over three-fifths of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that children and young people's sense of belonging (66%), motivation (61%), engagement in learning (61%) and enjoyment of school/college (60%) had increased
- over half of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that behaviour (56%), peer to peer relationships (56%), and children and young people's engagement in wider school/college life (54%) had improved
- around half of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that attainment (54%) and attendance (50%) had improved

## Progress towards the programme's objectives

USS has delivered a valuable, well-designed CPD offer that addresses gaps in the SEND training landscape. There is strong evidence, in line with the theory of change, that the programme has made a positive contribution towards the first of its core objectives: to enable staff across educational settings to improve the quality of mainstream provision to support children and young people with SEND. Quality has been enhanced by improvements in staff's knowledge of SEND, and their skills and confidence to identify and respond to SEND needs – including by adapting teaching and support practice. However, while respondents reported that the knowledge, skills and confidence gained through USS contributed to improved job satisfaction, there was no evidence that this had resulted in better staff retention. Wider evidence suggests that this is more influenced by other factors such as pay and terms and conditions, than by engagement in CPD and training.

The majority of delegates did not fulfil strategic roles within their schools, and most drew on 1 or 2 USS activities to address specific gaps in their knowledge and skills. Although many reported sharing the learning with their peers, this was primarily with a view to ensuring a consistent approach to supporting individual pupils or groups with similar needs, rather than to embed inclusive approaches designed to meet the needs of all pupils. Consequently, evidence that USS has affected change at a whole-setting level, at scale, across the sector, is more limited. In settings where change at this level has occurred, those in strategic roles were likely to have engaged in USS and disseminated the insight to others in positions to drive the implementation of new approaches. Although there is some evidence of changes to policies and processes for identifying SEND needs, most changes were associated with teaching and support practice.

The vast majority of survey respondents reported improvements in their knowledge, skills and confidence to identify and respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND; however, in a substantial minority of schools, respondents did not perceive that more pupils were having their needs identified and met earlier. Furthermore, it is not certain that USS has achieved its second objective: to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND based on the current evaluation evidence. Changes in both of these outcomes are likely to take longer to emerge, as new policies, processes and practices becomes fully embedded within settings. Nevertheless, the evaluation has identified examples that illustrate progress is being made – particularly in relation to individuals' sense of belonging, motivation, engagement in learning, and enjoyment of education. These are all important prerequisites for improvements in other outcomes, such as attainment, in the longer term – which suggests that USS can make an important contribution.

## Areas for consideration

Based on insight from this evaluation, the impact of USS on mainstream support for, and the outcomes of, children and young people with SEND could be maximised by:

- greater engagement by strategic leaders with the power to implement change at the whole-setting level
- clearer branding and improved signposting to introductory, intermediate and advanced content, to ensure training is matched to individuals' existing level of knowledge and skills, the requirements of their role, and/or current challenges within their setting
- enhancing the content of the training to include more practical, context-specific examples and interactive elements
- supporting individuals to draw on the range of training and resources available through USS, in order to develop a coherent programme of CPD which sustains their engagement, in line with the DfE standards for teachers' professional development
- collecting and sharing examples of effective whole-school change and evidence of impact on pupil outcomes

## Introduction

The 2022 SEND Review<sup>3</sup> recognised that the SEND and alternative provision (AP) system was failing to deliver for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. The review identified 3 central challenges: improving the experience for parents and families; ensuring financial sustainability; and achieving better outcomes for children and young people. The SEND and AP Improvement Plan<sup>4</sup> (published under the previous government) set out proposals to create a more efficient, inclusive system – including through the introduction of national standards, improved transition support, clearer accountability, and a revised funding model. The plan also recognised that workforce development and effective leadership were critical mechanisms for equipping mainstream schools and further education (FE) colleges to provide high-quality, timely support for all learners with SEND. Early intervention and stronger parental trust were central to the plan's vision. Independent analysis of consultation responses to the SEND Review<sup>5</sup> highlighted that there was general support for a national SEND and AP system that was underpinned by SEND training for different professions, including teaching staff.

The number of pupils requiring support for SEND has been steadily rising, from 1.5 million in 2022<sup>6</sup> to over 1.7 million in 2025.<sup>7</sup> The proportion of pupils with SEND who require an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan has also increased from 2.8% in 2017 to 5.3% in 2025.<sup>7</sup>

Despite early intervention and stronger parental trust being central to the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, a recent National Audit Office (NAO) report found that families' confidence in the SEND system remained low, with many reporting inconsistent provision

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<sup>3</sup> Department for Education and Department of Health and Social Care (2022) *SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time*. London: HM Government. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1063620/SEND\\_review\\_right\\_support\\_right\\_place\\_right\\_time\\_accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063620/SEND_review_right_support_right_place_right_time_accessible.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> HM Government (2023) *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. Right Support, Right Place, Right time*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan>

<sup>5</sup> Sinclair, F. and Zaidi, A. (2023) *Independent analysis of the consultation responses to the SEND review: Right support, right place, right time*. Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-review-right-support-right-place-right-time>

<sup>6</sup> Department for Education (DfE) (2022) *Special educational needs in England: Academic year 2021/22*. [online] Explore Education Statistics. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2021-22>

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2025) *Special educational needs in England: January 2025*. [online] Department for Education. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-to-2025>

and delays in receiving specialist support.<sup>8</sup> A 2023 study found that two-fifths of parents/carers (38%) were not confident in the school's ability to support their child.<sup>9</sup> The NAO report recommended that whole-system reform and progress towards inclusive education was required, to increase parental confidence that their children's needs could be identified and met.

Positively, staff confidence in supporting children and young people with SEND appears to have improved in recent years. According to the 2022 School and College omnibus, less than three-fifths of teachers (57%) felt equipped to support pupils with SEND.<sup>10</sup> More recent data indicated that around three-quarters of primary (78%) and secondary setting staff (76%) were fairly or very confident that they could meet the needs of pupils with SEND (with and without an EHC plan).<sup>11</sup>

Foundational SEND training is provided as part of general teacher training and is guided by the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF).<sup>12</sup> This framework outlines the core learning expected during teacher training and the first 3 years of a teacher's professional development, including content on adaptive teaching and strategies for supporting pupils with SEND. DfE introduced a new mandatory National Professional Qualification (NPQ) for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in 2024, replacing the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCO). This new qualification ensures that current and aspiring SENCOs receive consistent, high-quality training to improve SEND outcomes for pupils – by equipping them with leadership skills and a strong understanding of SEND legislation and supporting them to champion inclusive school cultures.<sup>13</sup> SENCOs without the NASENCO qualification must complete the NPQ SENCO within 3 years of appointment. In addition to foundational training, internal training, input from SENCOs and peer support are the most common sources of support that teachers draw upon to meet the needs of children and

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<sup>8</sup> National Audit Office (2024) *Support for children and young people with special educational needs*. [online] National Audit Office. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/support-for-children-and-young-people-with-special-educational-needs-summary.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Department for Education (2023) *Parent, pupil and learner panel: 2022 to 2023 – February wave*. [pdf] Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/parent-pupil-and-learner-panel-2022-to-2023-february-wave>

<sup>10</sup> IFF Research (2022) *School and College Panel – February 2022 wave*. Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>

<sup>11</sup> Department for Education (2025) *School and College Voice: January 2025*. London: Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-voice-omnibus-surveys-for-2024-to-2025/school-and-college-voice-january-2025>

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education (2024) *Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework*. London: Crown Copyright. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-and-early-career-framework>

<sup>13</sup> Department for Education (2023) *Transition to national professional qualification for special educational needs co-ordinators*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-qualification-for-sencos/transition-to-national-professional-qualification-for-special-educational-needs-co-ordinators>

young people with SEND in their setting.<sup>14</sup> SEND-specific continuing professional development (CPD) is integral to improving teaching quality as well as effective support for pupils. However, a lack of time, cost, and perceptions of poor efficacy often mean that SEND-related CPD is not always prioritised.<sup>15</sup>

Effective CPD requires partnership working between leadership, teachers and training providers. The DfE standards for teachers' professional development stipulate the conditions for effective partnerships, which include: a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes; ensuring CPD is underpinned by robust evidence and expertise; is collaborative and involves expert challenge; and is sustained over time.<sup>16</sup>

The Whole School SEND (WSS) programme was launched in 2019 to provide accessible, high-quality, evidence-based information, resources and CPD, to support the development of more inclusive approaches. Universal SEND Services (USS) superseded WSS in 2022 and was one of a number of DfE programmes<sup>17</sup> included in the SEND and AP Improvement Plan.<sup>18</sup>

## Universal SEND Services

DfE is funding USS until 2026. USS draws on evidence-based research to address to some of challenges in the system identified in the SEND Review, through: (i) the provision of training and resources designed to strengthen the mainstream education workforce's ability to identify and respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND earlier and more effectively; (ii) valuing parents' and pupils' voices in shaping policy and practice within schools and colleges; and (iii) driving changes in attitudes and approaches to SEND, and encouraging more inclusive cultures across whole settings and within sector leadership. The overarching aim of the programme is to improve the learning experience of children and young people with SEND, leading to more successful transitions and improved lifetime outcomes, including sustainable employment.

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<sup>14</sup> IFF Research (2023) *School and College Panel – June 2023*. Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-panel-omnibus-surveys-for-2022-to-2023>.

<sup>15</sup> Wall, K., Van Herwegen, J., Shaw, A., Russell, A. and Roberts, A. (2019) *A study of the drivers, demand and supply for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) – Related continuing professional development (CPD) for school staff*. Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10082917/7/PDF4%20-20Drivers%20Demands%20and%20Supply.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Department for Education (2016) *Standard for teachers' professional development*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a819db8ed915d74e6233385/160712\\_-\\_PD\\_standard.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a819db8ed915d74e6233385/160712_-_PD_standard.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Other programmes included Autism in Schools and Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)

<sup>18</sup> HM Government (2023) *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan. Right Support, Right Place, Right time*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-and-alternative-provision-improvement-plan>

Until March 2025, USS was delivered through the WSS consortium led by the National Association for Special Educational Needs (nasen), in partnership with the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), the Autism Education Trust (AET), and other delivery partners in the education community.<sup>19</sup> The programme provides free, flexible training and resources designed to fit around school and college life, and tailored to the needs of staff at all levels working in different educational settings. A series of 20 online SEND CPD units, developed in partnership with sector specialists, forms the backbone of the programme, which also offers Specialist Spotlight Sessions, Live Webinars, interactive and downloadable toolkits, and regional networking and support.

To maximise engagement in the programme, USS has been promoted through a range of channels, including its website<sup>20</sup>, delivery partners' electronic newsletters, and social media. Although participation is voluntary, delegates<sup>21</sup> are required to register their interest in activities that are relevant to their role, area of interest or training need. USS has been delivered alongside and complements other national CPD programmes such as Autism in Schools<sup>22</sup> and Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS),<sup>23</sup> which share similar aims of improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

## About the evaluation

DfE commissioned CFE Research to deliver a theory-based process and impact evaluation of the USS programme, with 2 main objectives:

- to assess how, and to what extent, USS has resulted in improved quality of mainstream provision of support for children and young people with SEND
- to assess how, and to what extent, USS has resulted in improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND

To achieve its objectives, the evaluation addressed the following research questions:

1. How did the mainstream school and college workforce engage with USS?

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<sup>19</sup> From 1 April 2025, the programme is delivered by nasen in partnership with the ETF, with AET no longer part of the consortium. New Autism Training – a combination of Train the Trainer and Online Units – will be launched as part of the fourth year of USS for the academic year 2025/2026.

<sup>20</sup> The USS website can be found here: <https://www.wholeschoolsend.org.uk/page/universal-send-services>

<sup>21</sup> The term 'delegates' is used throughout to refer to individuals who engaged with USS.

<sup>22</sup> More about the Autism in Schools programme can be found here: <https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/autism-schools>

<sup>23</sup> More about the PINS programme can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/partnerships-for-inclusion-of-neurodiversity-in-schools-pins/partnerships-for-inclusion-of-neurodiversity-in-schools-pins-programme>

2. Is the USS well-designed, targeted and delivered?
3. Does USS work to improve teaching practice?
4. Are more children and young people with SEND having their needs identified and met earlier in mainstream settings?
5. Have outcomes improved for children with SEND since USS was rolled out?

## Approach

The anticipated outcomes and impacts of USS for delegates, education settings and pupils were summarised in a theory of change (Appendix 2). In the absence of a suitable comparator or control group to establish the causal effects of USS, the evaluation tested the assumptions of this theory by addressing the key research questions and capturing the programme's self-reported contribution to the short-term outcomes achieved, as well as emerging impacts. An indicator bank was developed containing the metrics against which changes in the anticipated outcomes could be measured. Together with the theory of change, this provided the framework for the evaluation and informed the design of the data collection tools.

A mixed-method approach was adopted for the evaluation, involving primary research with delegates and other stakeholders, and secondary data analysis, as summarised below:

## Management information (MI)

nasen, AET and ETF collected MI for the time period spanning the academic years 2021/2022 and 2024/2025, to understand the level of engagement and reach of the programme.<sup>24</sup> MI included data fields on delegates' roles, settings, geographical locations, and the type(s) of training they engaged in. The original intention was to use the MI to create a sampling frame for the delegate survey (see below), and to link this data to the survey responses for the purposes of the impact evaluation. However, it was not possible for delivery partners to share data at the individual level. This meant that the MI and survey data were analysed separately. Pseudonymised variables were provided to enable the number of individuals who engaged in USS to be calculated.

nasen, ETF and AET provided separate MI datasets on activity engagements that took place between April 2022 and March 2025. CFE merged these datasets and analysed the data to assess the programme's reach. In the absence of a unique identifier, it was not possible to remove duplicates from the merged dataset, to identify individuals who participated in activities delivered by different delivery partners. This meant that it was also not possible to analyse the combinations of activities delegates participated in, using

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<sup>24</sup> The MI data does not include data from other providers of USS training (i.e., University of Derby or Sea View Trust).

the MI. The survey provided the opportunity to explore the combinations of activities delegates engaged in; however, it is important to note that this represents only a small subsample of all delegates.

The USS activities in the MI were coded to reflect those utilised within the delegate survey (see Appendix 3 for further details).<sup>25</sup>

AET provided data in 2 formats:

- aggregate counts of delegates at each training session, including data fields on session date as well as region
- individual delegate data collected via feedback forms, including fields on setting and role. This data represented around 50% of the aggregate counts

When reporting MI results for AET, aggregate counts have been used to provide programme reach (e.g., overall number of individuals and provider, as well as geographic reach). Individual delegate data was used to understand delegate characteristics (e.g., delegate setting and role).

Including the AET aggregate counts, 255,207 individuals engaged in the programme.

### Survey of programme delegates

The survey was designed to capture delegates' views and experiences of USS, and their perception of impacts on individual practice, education settings' approaches to supporting children and young people with SEND, and pupil outcomes, in line with the theory of change. The survey was disseminated at 3 time points to maximise the response rate:

- **On-programme (process) and impact survey (January 2024 to March 2024):** Disseminated to delegates who first participated in the programme between April 2022 and July 2023, to explore experiences of USS and perceived impacts (n=519). Delegates that had participated in USS for the first time in the 2023/2024 academic year were asked about their experiences of USS only (n=154).
- **On-programme (process) survey only (September 2024 to October 2024):** This captured perceptions from additional delegates who had engaged in the programme since January 2024 (n=256), to explore their experiences of USS. This survey did not explore perceived impacts of USS.
- **On-programme (process) and impact survey (February 2025 to April 2025):** Disseminated to all delegates who had engaged in the programme since April 2022,

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<sup>25</sup> The MI does not include any data relating to the following activities included in the survey: Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders (nasen), downloadable resources (nasen), Action Research (University of Derby), Lesson Study (University of Derby) and Big Idea for SEND (Sea View Trust).

to capture insight from additional delegates who had engaged in the training, and their perceptions about its impact (n=731) since October 2024.

While the survey addressed most questions to all respondents, it asked those in leadership positions specifically about the changes made within their wider setting (e.g., to their SEND policy).

A total of 1,660 usable responses were received, which represents less than 1% of individuals who engaged in programme, based on the MI. Survey respondents consisted of delegates from a range of settings, including primary (n=642; 39%), secondary school (n=334; 20%), and sixth form/FE college (n=311; 19%). Respondents were most likely to be SENCoS (n=465; 28%), followed by those in support roles (n=442; 27%) and leadership roles (n=378; 23%). A smaller proportion had teaching roles (n=252; 15%), and a minority were from other roles (n=123; 7%).<sup>26</sup> A full breakdown of respondents' characteristics can be found in Table 12 to 17Table 17 in Appendix 4.

The characteristics of survey respondents did not reflect those of the total population in the MI, as there were key differences between the samples in terms of setting and role. For example, the survey sample included more respondents in leadership and SENCo positions, while the MI included more individuals in teaching and support roles. This and other limitations of the evaluation are explored further below.

Differences in survey outcomes by respondent characteristics<sup>27</sup> were explored using column proportion tests (z-test) to test for statistical significance. Only findings that were statistically significant at the 5% level or below are reported, where the sample was equal to or greater than 30. Any minor differences in percentages provided in the charts and main text were due to rounding. To improve readability and accessibility, percentages below 5% have been removed from stacked bar charts and multi-category visualisations.

## Qualitative fieldwork

In line with the theory of change, the qualitative fieldwork sought to understand how USS helped the education workforce to:

- acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively identify and respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND
- drive change in attitudes and approaches to SEND at the whole-setting level, to foster more inclusive cultures

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of those in other roles include consultants, as well as those who work for local authorities.

<sup>27</sup> Characteristics included in the column proportion tests include educational setting, respondent role, no. of USS activities engaged in (dosage), year first engaged in the programme, and proportion of CYP in a setting with special educational needs (SEN) or an EHC plan.

- adapt teaching and support practice, and the extent to which these changes resulted in perceived improvements in the outcomes of children and young people

This was achieved through:

- **In-depth case study interviews** with 17 USS delegates and wider staff in 7 settings: 3 primary schools, 1 secondary school, and 3 sixth form/FE colleges. A further 5 interviews with delegates from secondary schools, to ensure equivalent coverage across all settings.
- **Reflective diaries** completed by 34 delegates in 2 early years, 14 primary, 10 secondary, 7 sixth form/FE college settings and 1 all-through school. Delegates completed reflective diaries over a 6-week period, to document up to 3 weekly examples of how they applied USS learning in their roles. Diarists were also asked to reflect on any enablers or barriers they experienced while implementing their training, as well as any perceived outcomes for themselves, their wider setting, or children and young people.

Within this report, the terms ‘interviewees’ and ‘diarists’ distinguish between insights from the different strands of the qualitative research. References are made within examples to specific USS activities where possible. Where it is not possible to identify a specific activity, the term ‘USS training’ has been used.

## Evaluation limitations

The MI and survey datasets were analysed separately as it was not possible to link them. It is important to note that the characteristics of survey respondents do not reflect the total population in the MI, and some significant differences were found including:

- more individuals in the MI were from primary (57%) and early years (9%) settings than in the survey (41%; 6%)
- more survey respondents were from secondary (20%) and sixth form/FE colleges (19%) than in the MI (16%; 4%)
- more survey respondents were from leadership (23%) or SENCo (28%) roles than in the MI (4%; 7%)
- more individuals in the MI were from teaching (42%) and support (36%) roles than in the survey (15%; 27%)

Although all roles are represented in the survey sample, it is skewed towards individuals in leadership and SENCo roles, which is not the case in the MI; this could be due to teachers having less time to engage in the evaluation. Given the overrepresentation of these groups in the survey, caution is advised when interpreting the results.

Furthermore, the proportion of individuals within the MI who engaged with AET activities is higher than in the survey. This difference is likely to be due to the fact that survey invitations were not distributed to AET delegates directly, but via local authorities.

## Chapter 2: Programme reach

Effectively engaging a diverse range of staff is a prerequisite for achieving USS's objectives, as set out in the theory of change. To understand the extent to which the programme reached its target audience, this chapter presents MI data on the number and characteristics of staff who engaged in the different elements of the programme between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2025.

### Profile of individuals engaged in USS

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025, 255,207 individuals engaged in USS. Most engaged in AET provision (which targeted all phases of education),<sup>28</sup> followed by nasen (targeting schools) and ETF (targeting FE) provision (Table 1). MI indicated that individuals participated in 2.5 activities on average, with the number of activities engaged in per individual ranging from 1 to 43.

**Table 1: Number of individuals engaged, by provider**

Provider	No.	%
AET	239,718	94%
ETF	3,820	1%
nasen	11,672	5%
Total	255,207	100%

Source: MI data

The number of individuals who engaged in the programme increased year on year from 2021/2022 to 2023/2024 (Table 2).<sup>29</sup> However, in 2024/2025, this number reduced by 38%, compared with 2023/2024.

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<sup>28</sup> AET figures are based on aggregate counts for each training session. They do not reflect the total numbers of individuals partaking in the training.

<sup>29</sup>The number of individuals within Table 2 (n=253,297) differs from the total number of individuals within the MI data (n=255,207) due to missing or inconsistent data on year of engagement.

**Table 2: Number of individuals engaged, by academic year**

Academic year	No.	%
2021/2022	18,551	7%
2022/2023	81,048	32%
2023/2024	94,797	37%
2024/2025	58,902	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>253,297</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: MI data

The programme has achieved coverage across all English regions. Yorkshire and the Humber had the highest level of engagement, with the least engagement in the North East (Table 3) – a region that does not have fewer schools or colleges than others. The reasons for lower take-up warrant further investigation, to help increase future engagement.

**Table 3: Number of individuals engaged, by English region**

Region	No.	%
Yorkshire & the Humber	46,003	18%
East Midlands	40,553	16%
South East	31,338	12%
London	30,949	12%
West Midlands	29,490	12%
North West	23,688	9%
South West	23,251	9%
East of England	19,767	8%
North East	9,838	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>254,877</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: MI data

## Delegate characteristics

### Setting

Individuals who engaged with USS were from a range of settings<sup>30</sup> (Table 4). Over half (53%) were staff working in primary settings, followed by secondary settings (15%) and early years (9%). Those in other roles included staff from specialist settings.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 4: Number of individuals engaged, by setting**

Setting	No.	%
Early years	12,501	9%
Primary	75,545	53%
Secondary	21,712	15%
All-through school	367	0%
Sixth form/FE college	5,820	4%
Other setting	25,385	18%
Total	141,330	100%

Source: MI data

### Role

The individuals most likely to engage in the programme occupied roles in teaching (42%) or support<sup>32</sup> (36%) (Table 5).<sup>33</sup> Staff in SENCo and leadership roles accounted for 7% and 4% of all engagement respectively. Over one-in-ten individuals (11%) held other positions, including roles not in education.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The number of individuals in Table 3 (n=141,330) differs from the total number of individuals within the MI data (n=143,515) due to missing or inconsistent data regarding role information.

<sup>31</sup> The MI data includes AET figures based on individual delegate data, which represents around 50% of the total number of individuals within AET training sessions.

<sup>32</sup> Support roles include positions such as teaching assistants, administrative staff, technicians, and other staff.

<sup>33</sup> The number of individuals in the table (n=143,448) differs from the total number of individuals within the MI data (n=143,515) due to missing or inconsistent data regarding role information.

<sup>34</sup> Those from other roles include both staff who work within (e.g., technical staff) and outside (e.g., consultant) educational settings.

**Table 5: Number of individuals engaged, by role**

Role	No.	%
Leadership	6,454	4%
SENCo	9,876	7%
Teaching	60,837	42%
Support	51,109	36%
Other	15,162	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>143,438</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: MI data

## Activity types

Most individuals who participated in the USS programme engaged in the AET Autism Training (89%), followed by nasen Online Units (5%) and ETF SEND Events (2%) (Table 6). This reflects the number of individuals who engaged with each provider.

**Table 6: Number of individuals engaged, by activity type**

Activity	No.	%
AET Autism Training	128,023	89%
nasen Online Units	6,609	5%
ETF SEND Events	3,035	2%
nasen Live Discussions	2,626	2%
nasen Responsive Webinars	1,476	1%
nasen PD Groups	743	1%
ETF Community of Practice	716	0%
nasen Preparation for Adulthood	218	0%
ETF College SEND Review	69	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>143,515</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: MI data

## Engagement by provider and role

The way individuals engaged with each provider differed according to their role. According to the MI data, nearly half (45%) of those who engaged with AET activities were in teaching roles, with over one-third in support (36%) roles. Nearly two-fifths (38%) of those who accessed nasen activities were in support roles; a further fifth (21%) were in teaching positions. For ETF activities, nearly two-fifths (36%) of delegates were in leadership positions, a third (33%) were in teaching roles, and a quarter (26%) were in support roles (Table 7).

**Table 7: Number of individuals engaged, by role and provider**

Provider	AET (n)	AET (%)	ETF (n)	ETF (%)	nasen (n)	nasen (%)
Leadership	3,886	3%	1,375	36%	1,194	10%
Teacher	57,152	45%	1,241	33%	2,444	21%
SENCo	7,964	6%	24	1%	1,889	16%
Support	45,771	36%	963	26%	4,374	38%
Other	13,250	10%	165	4%	1,747	15%
Total	128,023	100%	3,767	100%	11,648	100%

Source: MI data

## Engagement by activity type and role

Engagement with each activity type varied according to role. Nearly half of those who engaged in AET Autism Training were in teaching roles. In contrast, nearly two-thirds (62%) of those who participated in the ETF College SEND Provider Review were in leadership positions. The proportion of leaders who engaged in other ETF activities was lower: 40% for the ETF Community of Practice, and 35% for ETF SEND Events. For nasen activities, engagement among individuals was split more evenly across roles. Over half (53%) of those who engaged with nasen's Online Units were in support roles. A full breakdown for each activity can be found in Table 8.

**Table 8: Number of individuals as a proportion of activity type, split by role**

	<b>AET Autism Training</b>	<b>ETF College SEND Review</b>	<b>ETF Community of Practice</b>	<b>ETF SEND Events</b>	<b>nasen Online Units</b>	<b>nasen Live Discussions</b>	<b>nasen Responsive Webinars</b>	<b>nasen PD Groups</b>	<b>nasen Preparation for Adulthood</b>
<b>Leadership</b>	3%	62%	40%	35%	6%	11%	19%	22%	26%
<b>Teaching</b>	45%	13%	29%	34%	22%	24%	15%	11%	15%
<b>SENCo</b>	6%	0%	1%	1%	8%	20%	36%	36%	16%
<b>Support</b>	36%	20%	25%	26%	53%	21%	8%	26%	14%
<b>Other</b>	10%	4%	6%	4%	11%	23%	23%	5%	29%
<b>Base</b>	128,023	69	701	2,997	6,608	2,620	1,468	736	216

Source: MI data

## Chapter 3: Engagement in USS

CPD programmes, including USS, can only deliver impact if participants actively engage with the offer, and the content responds to the needs of staff in different roles and settings. To address the first research questions, on how delegates engaged with USS, this chapter draws on evidence from the survey, case study interviews and reflective diaries to identify how they first heard about USS, their motivations for engaging in the programme, and a breakdown of the specific activities undertaken. It also explores individuals' perceptions of the training's usefulness for informing their teaching and support practice, to provide insights for addressing research question 3.

### How delegates first heard about USS

Survey respondents were equally likely to have heard about USS from a work colleague in their setting (33%) or directly through the providers (nasen, AET or ETF) (33%). Fewer respondents found out about USS from a website search (10%) or through their local authority or regional support (8%).

Interviewees and diarists had heard about USS from a range of colleagues in their setting, from members of the senior leadership team (SLT) to support staff. For example, a member of support staff in a secondary setting described how they were introduced to nasen through a group of teaching assistants (TAs):

The setting I work in has a group of 9 TAs who meet weekly to discuss students, offer advice, support and share any useful CPD. I was introduced to nasen in one of these sessions. *Diarist – Support staff, Secondary setting*

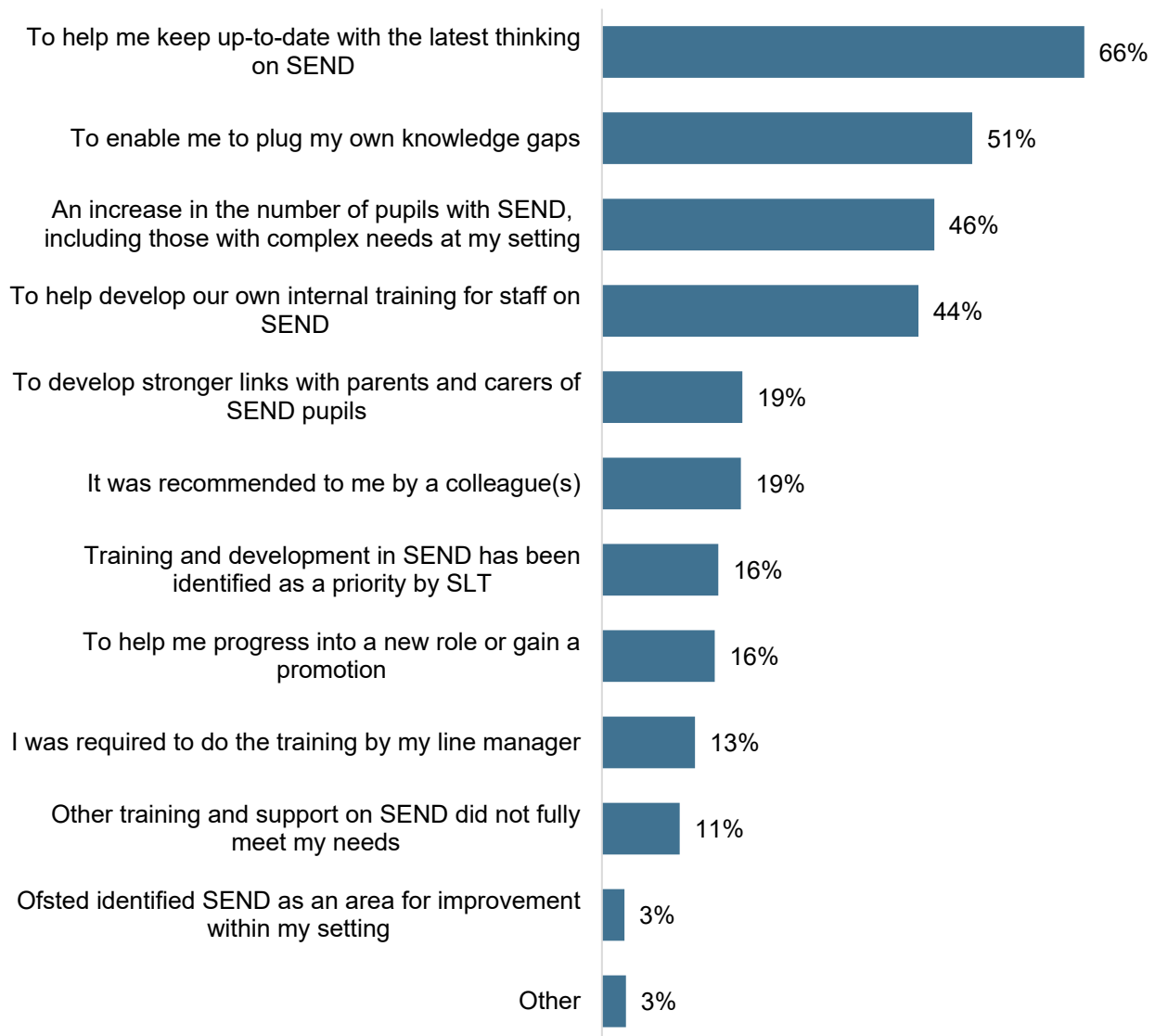
### Motivations to engage in USS

Respondents were attracted to the programme for a range of reasons; the most frequent motivation was keeping up to date with the latest thinking on SEND (66%).<sup>35</sup> Plugging knowledge gaps was another common reason for engaging in USS (51%). Further motivations included the increase in the number of pupils with SEND, including those with complex needs, in their setting (46%), and to help develop their own internal training for staff on SEND (44%) (Figure 1).

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<sup>35</sup> This survey question about motivations to engage in USS was added at a later date to the second on-programme and final on-programme and impact survey, resulting in a total base of 964.

**Figure 1: Survey respondents' motivations for taking part in USS (n=696).**



Source: Survey data

Keeping up to date with the latest thinking on SEND and plugging knowledge gaps were the most common motivations for engaging in USS for all delegates, irrespective of role. A significantly higher proportion of SLT (51%) and SENCos (57%) than those in support roles (37%) were motivated to engage in USS because of an increased number of pupils with SEND at their setting.

While keeping up to date with the latest thinking on SEND was the most frequent motivation across all phases, staff in primary settings were more likely to be motivated by an increased number of pupils with SEND in their setting (60%), compared with those in secondary (38%) and college settings (29%).

Case study interviewees who sought to engage in the programme to plug gaps in their SEND knowledge, in the context of increasing pupil need, described how USS had enabled them to access resources that were appropriate to their specific needs and existing level of knowledge:

My motivation was for my own knowledge gap or further interest. There are some areas that I have got a relatively large amount of knowledge on, and then there are other areas that I haven't. A lot of my personal interest has been around mental health because it's on the rise in my setting. *Case study interviewee – SENCo, Primary setting*

A further motivation for case study interviewees was to gain support in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND more effectively, which is a high priority for many settings. Training and CPD offered via programmes such as USS has enabled senior leadership teams to identify and address aspects of their support provision that require improvement:

The first thing I would say is that our starting point with SEND, EHC plans and high needs learners was it was already a focus of the college, and an area that we knew we could improve and needed to do more with. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

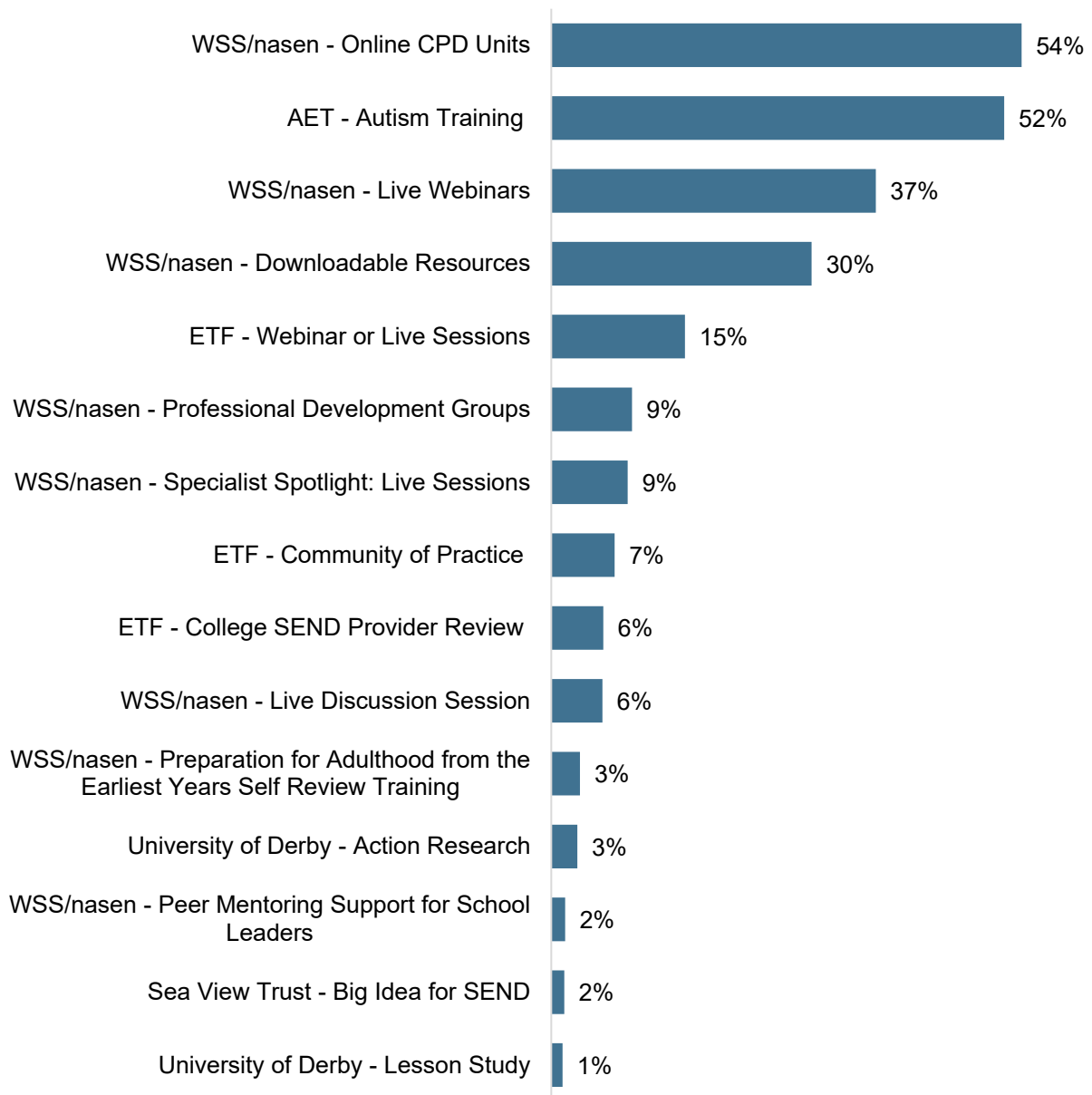
SLT and SENCo staff were motivated to access USS to further enhance the CPD provision within their setting. A college interviewee described how they made some nasen Online Units a mandatory part of their internal CPD for learning support workers. The aim was to help upskill staff so that they could more effectively support children and young people with SEND:

We've used the Online Units to form part of what we call 'great supporting'. So, it's a whole-year training and familiarisation programme for learning support workers... We've chosen 6 or 8 units that staff will all complete before the end of this year. Mainly about mental health and safety in the classroom. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

## Profile of activity engagement

Survey respondents most commonly engaged in nasen Online CPD Units (54%), followed by the AET Autism Training (52%) and nasen Live Webinars (37%) (Figure 2). A further 30% of respondents reported that they had engaged with the downloadable resources. The University of Derby's Lesson Study and Sea View Trust's Big Idea for SEND were highly specialised, in-depth interventions; therefore, the level of engagement from survey respondents was lower.

**Figure 2: Proportion of survey respondents that engaged in USS activities  
(n=1,654)**



Source: Survey data

Nearly one-third (32%) of respondents engaged with nasen only, 20% with AET only, and 3% with ETF only. Nearly a quarter (23%) engaged with AET and nasen, compared with 8% who engaged with nasen and ETF. Only 6% of respondents engaged with all 3 providers, while 1% accessed only AET and ETF activities.

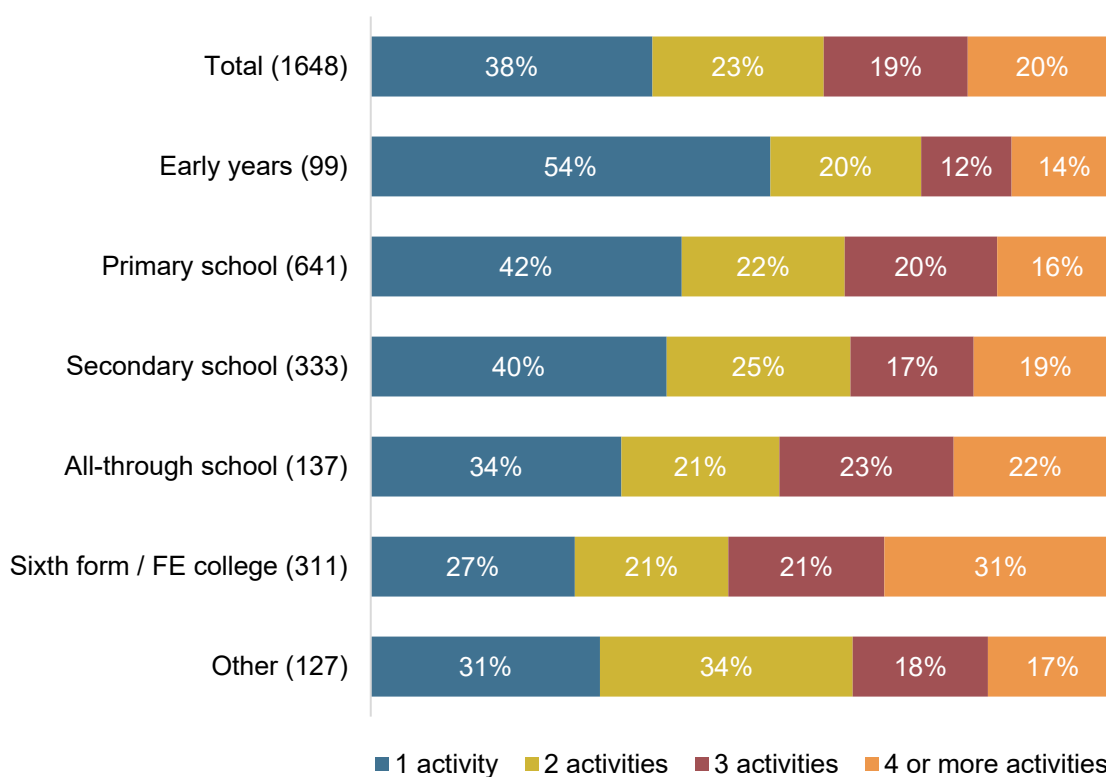
## Number of activities engaged in

Survey respondents were most likely to have engaged in 1 activity (38%), while nearly a quarter (23%) engaged in 2 activities. Around one-fifth of respondents engaged in 3 (19%) and 4 or more activities (20%).

## Setting

A significantly higher proportion of respondents from sixth form/FE college settings (31%) engaged with 4 or more activities than those from early years (14%), primary (16%), secondary (19%), or other (17%) settings (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Number of USS activities survey respondents engaged in, by setting**

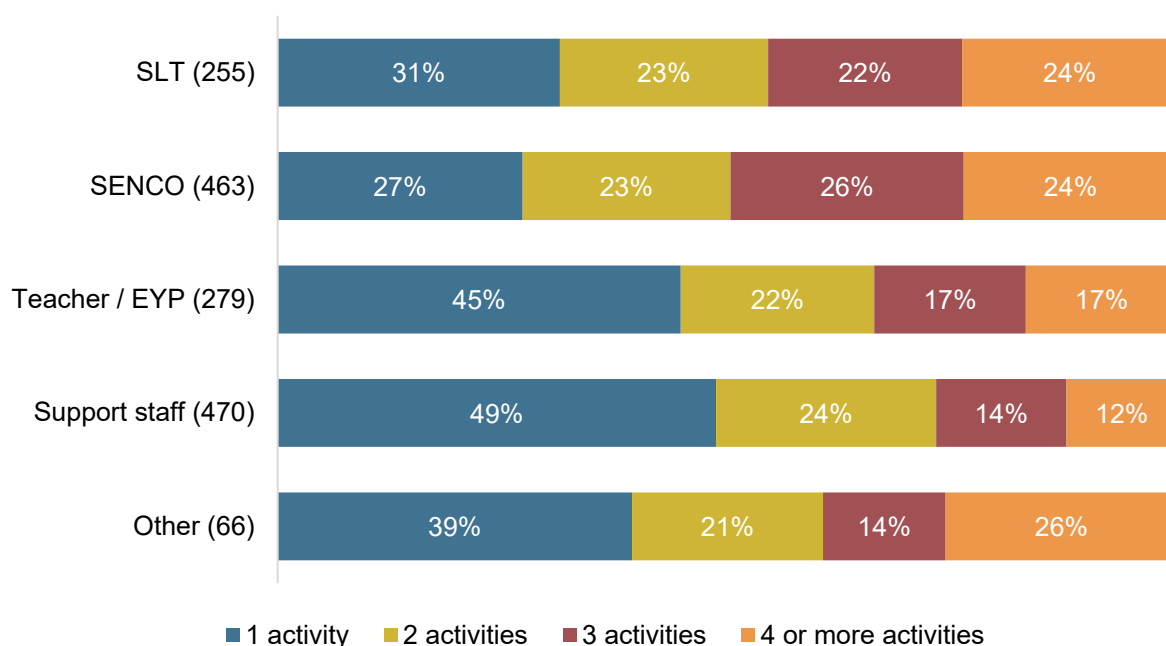


Source: Survey data

## Role

Survey respondents in senior positions typically engaged in more activities than those in more junior roles. A significantly higher proportion of those in middle leadership (30%), SLT (24%) and SENCo roles (24%) engaged in 4 or more activities than those in support positions (12%) (Figure 4). In turn, those in support roles (49%) and teaching staff (45%) were more likely to engage in just 1 activity, compared with SLT (31%) and SENCos (27%).

**Figure 4: Number of USS activities survey respondents engaged in, by role**

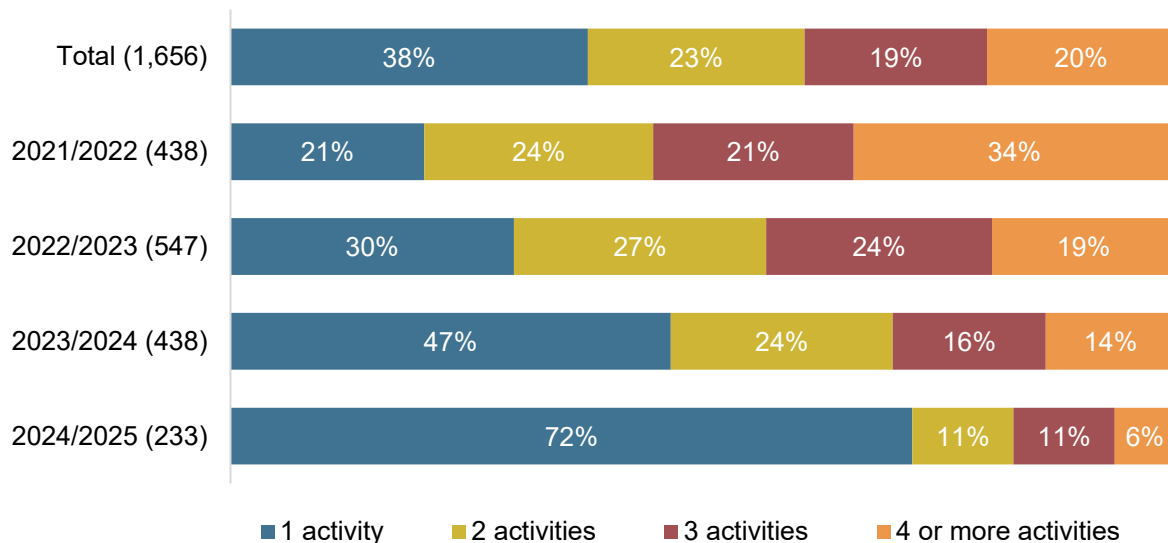


Source: Survey data

### Year of first engagement

A significantly higher proportion of respondents who first engaged with USS in the academic year 2021/2022 (34%) reported that they had participated in 4 or more activities, compared with those who first engaged in 2022/2023 (19%), 2023/2024 (14%), or 2024/2025 (6%). Conversely, respondents who first engaged in 2024/2025 were more likely to have undertaken just 1 activity (72%) than respondents who engaged in any other year (Figure 5). This pattern of engagement is likely to be because recent delegates have had less opportunity to engage in multiple USS activities. However, this indicates the value delegates attach to the programme, and the usefulness of the training and resources (discussed further below) – as well as evidence of sustained engagement in USS, in line with DfE’s standards for teachers’ professional development.

**Figure 5: Number of USS activities survey respondents engaged in, by year of first engagement**



Source: Survey data

## Combination of activities

Survey respondents engaged in various combinations of USS activities, which differed according to how many activities they undertook. For those who engaged in 2 activities, the most common combination was the nasen Online CPD Units and AET Autism Training (23%). Among those with 3 activities, respondents were most likely to have engaged with nasen Online CPD Units, AET Autism Training, and nasen Live Discussion Sessions. For those who engaged with 4 activities, respondents were most likely to have undertaken a combination of nasen Online CPD Units, AET Autism Training, and nasen Live Webinars and Live Discussion Sessions (Table 9).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> We could not complete this analysis on the MI data because the three datasets could not be combined.

**Table 9: Most common activity combinations**

<b>Number of activities engaged with</b>	<b>Most common combination of activities</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>	<b>% of whole survey sample</b>
<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WSS/nasen – Online CPD Units</li> </ul>	337	20%
<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WSS/nasen – Online CPD Units</li> <li>• AET – Autism Training</li> </ul>	89	5%
<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WSS/nasen – Online CPD Units</li> <li>• AET – Autism Training</li> <li>• WSS/nasen – Live Discussion Session</li> </ul>	55	3%
<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WSS/nasen – Online CPD Units</li> <li>• AET – Autism Training</li> <li>• WSS/nasen – Live Discussion Session</li> <li>• WSS/nasen – Live Webinars</li> </ul>	50	3%

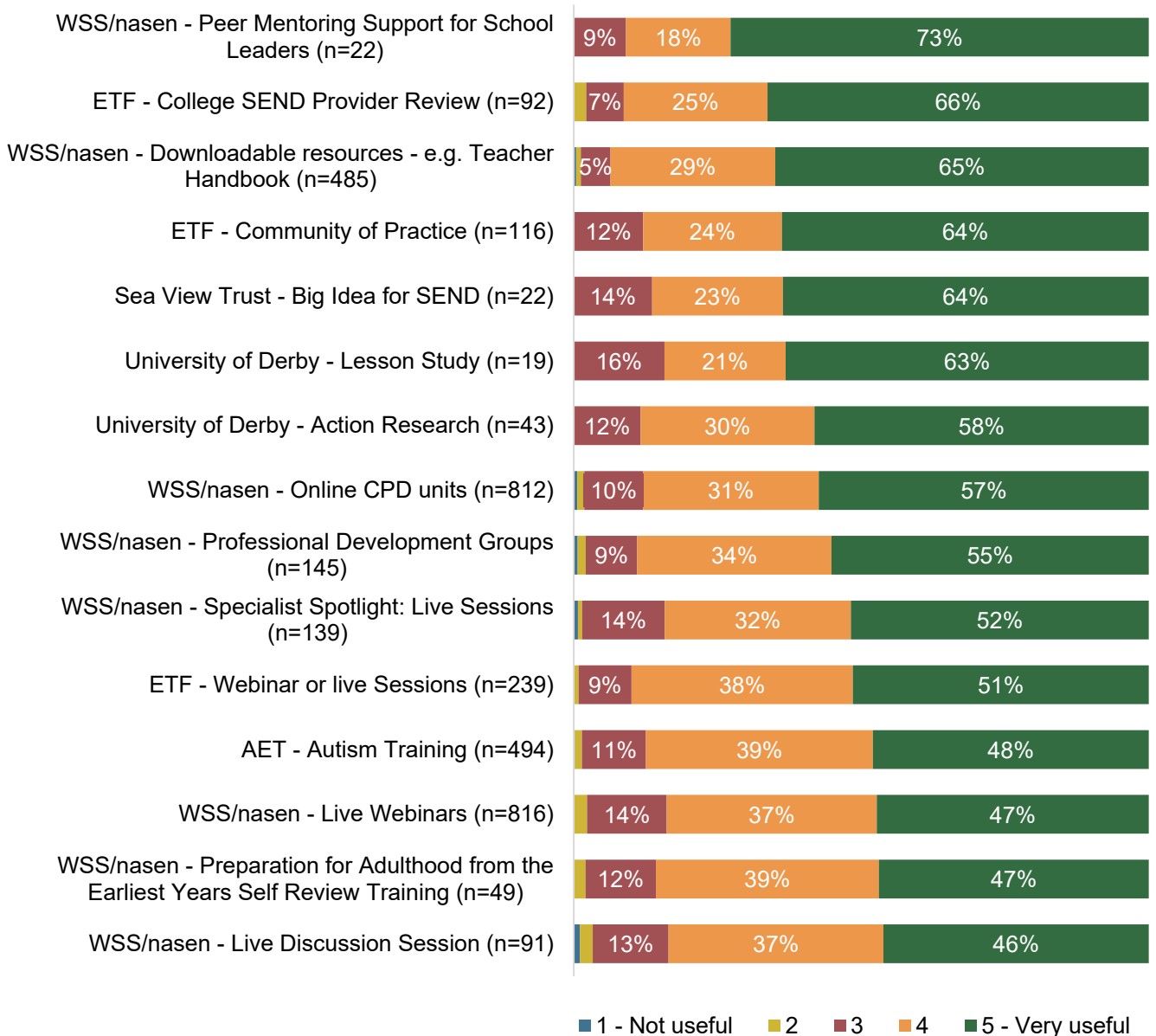
Source: Survey data

## Usefulness of USS to inform teaching and support practice

Survey respondents rated the usefulness of their USS activities, in terms of informing their teaching and support practice. Over half of respondents reported that the activities were useful, irrespective of the type of provision/provider and their role. The activities perceived to be useful by the largest majority of delegates tended to be the more intensive interventions – particularly the ETF College SEND Provider Review (91%) and nasen’s Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders (91%), which more than nine-out-of-ten delegates rated as useful or very useful. However, the exception was downloadable resources, where a similar proportion (94%) rated them as useful (Figure 6).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Some USS activities have low base sizes, including Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders, Big Idea for SEND (Sea View Trust) and Lesson Study – (University of Derby). Caution should therefore be taken when interpreting the percentages.

**Figure 6: Survey respondents' ratings of usefulness of USS activities to inform teaching and support practice**



Source: Survey data

## Chapter 4: Effectiveness of delivery

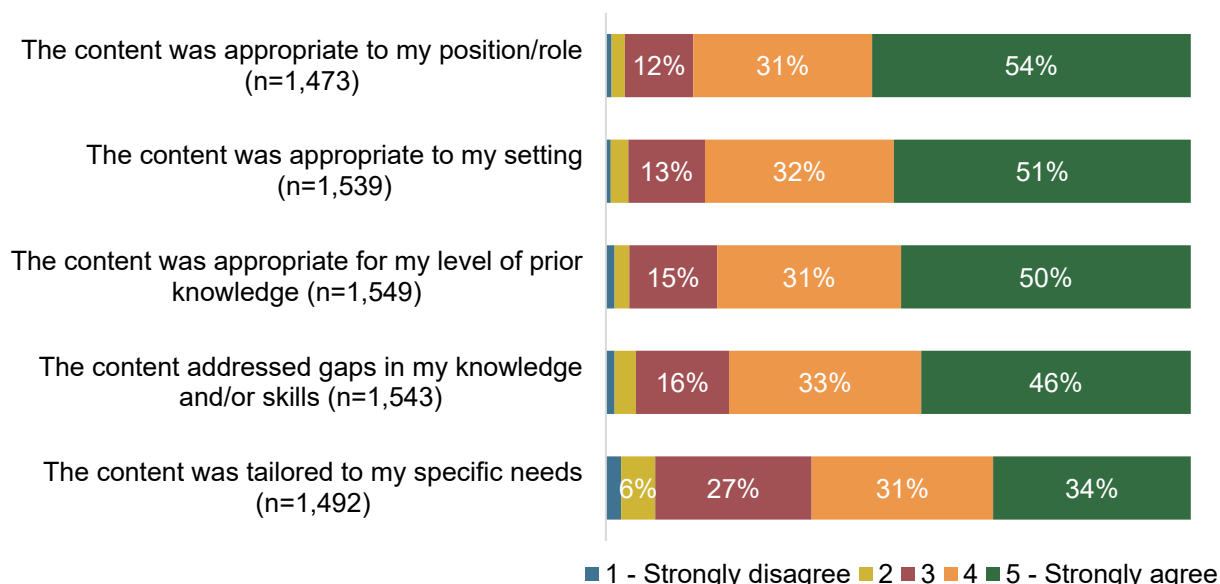
This chapter addresses research question 2 by exploring how well-designed, targeted and delivered USS is perceived to be. It considers the effectiveness of USS delivery, by drawing on delegates' views about the content, facilitation and accessibility of the offer. It also provides insights regarding how USS compares to other training, and how the learning and insight from the programme has been shared and embedded.

### USS content

Over four-fifths of survey respondents (85%) agreed or strongly agreed that the content was appropriate to their position/role, while a similar proportion (83%) agreed it was appropriate to their setting. A significantly higher proportion of respondents working within primary settings (56%) strongly agreed that the content was appropriate to their setting, compared with those working in sixth form or FE colleges (43%).

USS content was perceived to be pitched at the right level. Four-fifths (81%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the content was appropriate given their level of prior knowledge, and a similar proportion (79%) agreed or strongly agreed that the content addressed gaps in their existing knowledge and/or skills. However, there was a slightly lower level of agreement (65%) that the content was tailored to delegates' specific needs (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Survey respondents' perceptions about content of USS**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees and diarists conveyed positive views about the high-quality offer that extended across the suite of training delivered by nasen, AET and ETF. Many case study interviewees, particularly teachers and support staff, from different settings, valued the nasen Online CPD Units, which suggests that the content is appropriate for different roles. They found the units on Understanding Behaviour as Communication and Understanding and Promoting Resilience, as well as those focused on Speech, Language and Communication, particularly valuable. Interviewees explained that this was because the units encouraged them to reflect on their practice and consider the ways in which it could be improved to support all children and young people in their setting. A primary teacher valued the content of the 'Developing Maths Skills' unit because it provided numerous examples of how to use visuals and gestures in teaching.

Senior leadership staff and SENCos across different settings also found the nasen provision to be high quality – particularly the Webinars, Conferences, Peer Reviews, Professional Networks and Teacher Handbook.<sup>38</sup> Interviewees highlighted that these resources covered a broad range of subjects, and provided practical examples and case studies that they could translate and embed in their own settings, together with information about how to effectively track the progress of any changes made.

The most impactful part of the USS training was the Teacher Handbook. It is a comprehensive collection and guide to key areas of SEND, with practical applications across the curriculum and evidence-based approaches for use in the classroom. *Diarist – SLT, Secondary setting*

Staff in other roles also emphasised how much they valued the practical, case study content in USS activities, such as the nasen Online CPD Units. In addition, teachers, support staff and SLT across all settings described the content as user-friendly, easy to understand, and appropriately paced. They also found the content clear and comprehensive, visually well-presented, and effectively organised into manageable sections, so that it was easy to navigate.

I can take bits from each [unit] and use the various information to better understand and support a wide range of different students in my setting. I really enjoy these units as they are not too long that you lose interest. The modules are all relevant and made very easy to understand, and any jargon is explained clearly. *Diarist – Support staff, Secondary setting*

Many interviewees and diarists appreciated that the content was up to date and evidence-based; this was regarded as a key strength of USS. A SENCo in a secondary setting indicated that the evidence-based nature of the nasen Online CPD Units had given them the confidence to share the content with others in their setting and had helped them to secure colleagues' buy-in to the training.

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<sup>38</sup> The Teacher Handbook is a downloadable resource, produced by nasen.

The nasen CPD modules are well researched. The researched content tells us that this is an effective way of working because this is the impact that this work has had in previous schools and environments. *Case study interviewee – SENCo, Secondary setting*

A few senior leaders across different settings reported that they had drawn on the content to enhance staff training in their setting. This was perceived to have led to more effective discussions and a deeper understanding among staff about how to assess and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND.

The clarity of the Teacher Handbook (Section 1: Understanding your role, and Section 6: Graduated Approach) enabled positive discussions and contributions to staff training sessions. Clear links were made between the legislative guidance, teachers' standards and LA [local authority] expectations for the graduated approach. The handbook provided a primary case study that helps staff to identify how needs could be assessed and planned for in the graduated approach. *Diarist – SLT, Primary setting*

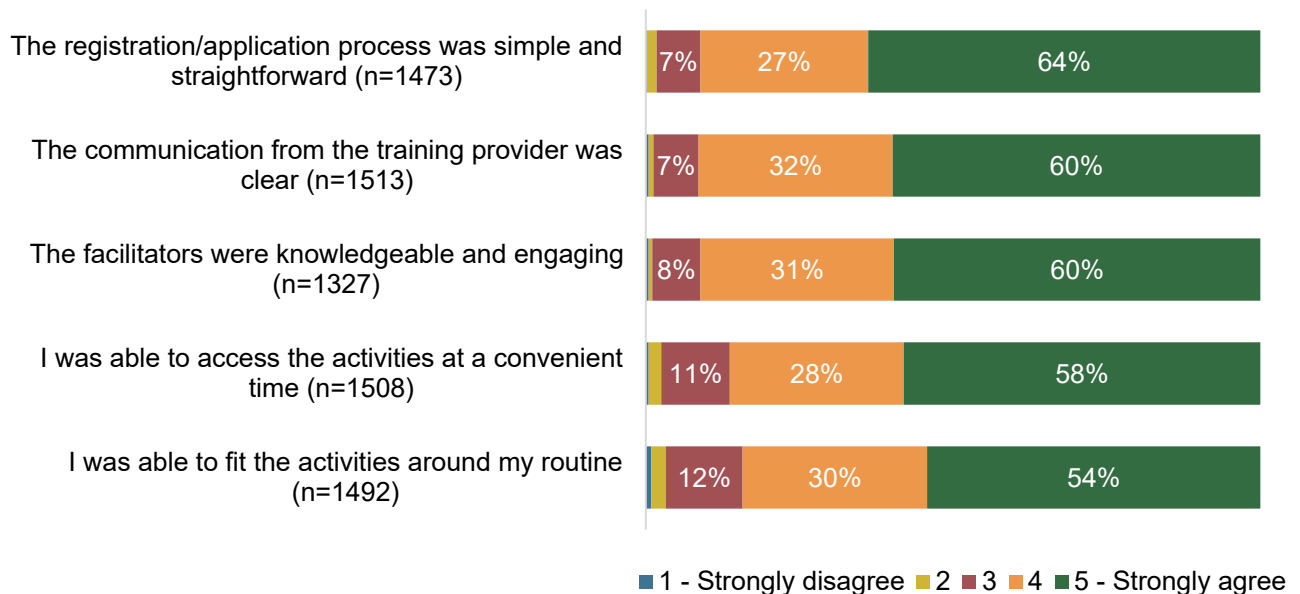
A senior leader diarist in a secondary setting also described how they had used aspects of the Teacher Handbook to deliver staff training on adaptive teaching. The content enabled them to provide staff with both generic and subject-focused strategies to support pupils. Staff who had engaged in the training were then able to cascade these strategies within their departments for other staff to use in their lessons.

Another senior leader in a primary setting described how content in the nasen platform had helped to strengthen their SEND provision, and relationships with families in particular. The training enabled them to identify gaps in their provision and family engagement, which they explored further through their NPQ SEND research and brought into discussions at SLT meetings. As a result of completing the nasen Webinar 'Positive beginnings: Supporting children with SEND at the start of their school journey', they were able to develop an action plan for improving parental engagement.

## **Communication, facilitation and accessibility**

Most survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that communication from the training provider was clear (92%), that the facilitators were knowledgeable and engaging (91%), and that the registration/application process was simple and straightforward (91%). A majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that they could access the activities at a convenient time (86%) and fit the activities around their routine (84%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Survey respondents' perceptions about communication, facilitation and the accessibility of USS**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees and diarists, especially SENCos and SLT across different settings, valued the convenience of the online activities and the opportunity to complete them at a time that suited them. Interviewees described how they could access the Online CPD Units at different points throughout the school year, enabling them to update and refresh their knowledge, as well as to develop staff training. The flexibility to dip in and out of modules at their own pace also helped to fit the training around their demanding schedules.

Online training, which can be accessed as and when you are able, is really convenient. *Diarist – SENCo, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

Interviewees and diarists were also positive about the delivery of in-person, real-time activities, such as the action research study, or visits to other colleges as part of the ETF College SEND Provider Review. One of the peer review activities included 'a day in the life', which involved 2 colleges visiting each other's facilities, observing each other's work, highlighting strengths, and suggesting areas for improvement. Senior leaders at one of the participating colleges particularly valued this element, as it enabled teaching staff to learn from peer practice in another college.

Another college visited our campuses and had a look at what we were doing well and areas that we could consider improving, and then we visited their facilities and engaged in a couple of different sessions. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

Facilitators were described as knowledgeable, engaging and supportive, which helped delegates to get the most out of the activities. For example, a SENCo at a secondary setting highlighted that facilitators were helpful and always available to respond to their questions. Facilitators also engaged in meaningful discussions and acted as a critical friend.

We felt that the facilitators were alongside us all of the way, and worked with us in a coaching capacity, so that we got the most out of the Action Research. We learnt a great deal, and everything that we learnt was considered through the lens of our school and our children. *Diarist – SLT, Secondary setting*

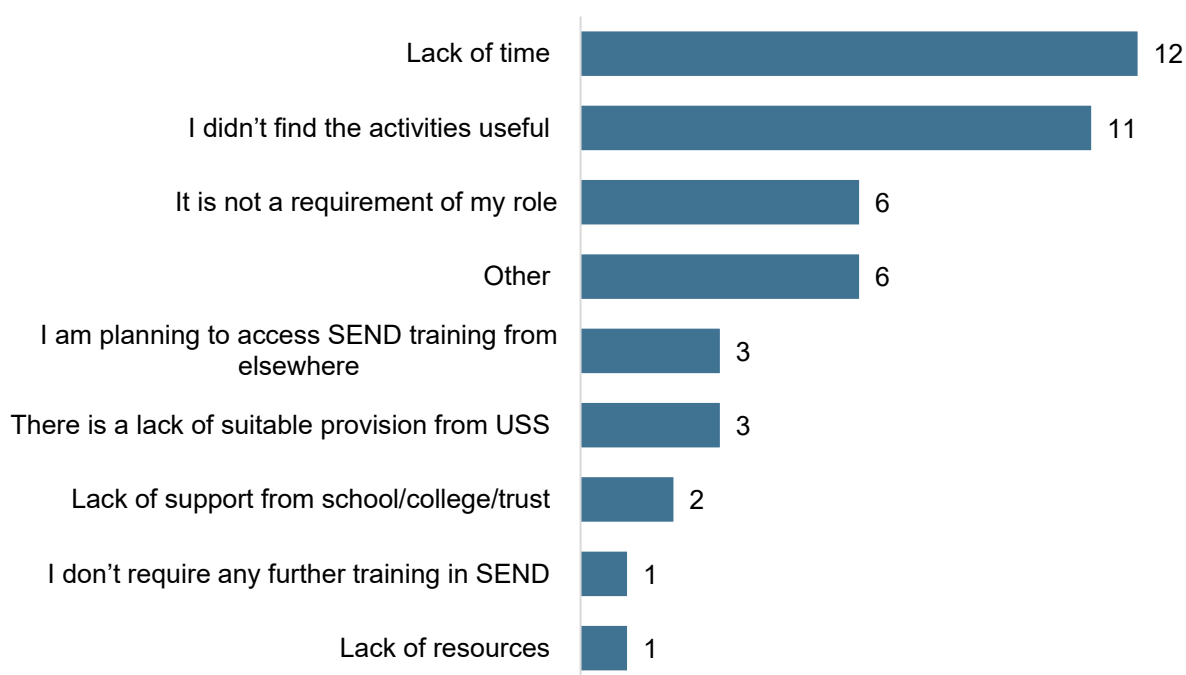
Activities that encouraged delegates to interact with each other, such as the nasen Professional Development Groups or the ETF College SEND Provider Review, were also valued by teachers, SENCos and SLTs across different settings. These activities enabled them to network, learn from other delegates in other settings, and share best practice.

## **Overall satisfaction with support received**

Most survey respondents (83%) rated the support they received through the USS programme as excellent or good. Only a small minority (2%) rated it as poor. A significantly higher proportion of respondents who had completed 4 or more activities (50%) rated the support as excellent, compared with those who had completed 2 activities (37%); this suggests that a positive experience encourages delegates to access further training and resources through the programme.

Nearly all respondents (95%) stated that they were likely or very likely to engage with USS activities in the future. Those who reported being unlikely to engage in USS again (n=45, 5%), were asked why (Figure 9). The most common reasons were a lack of time (n=12, 27%) and not finding the activities useful (n=11, 24%).

**Figure 9: Reasons why survey respondents are unlikely to engage with USS activities in the future (n=32)**



Source: Survey data

## Programme improvements

Although survey respondents, interviewees and diarists were mostly positive about the programme, they identified some aspects of USS that could be further enhanced:

### Content

Some SENCoS and support staff diarists in primary settings reported that the content they engaged with lacked the detail required to meet their needs. For example, they described the AET Autism Training as too general, and they would have welcomed more content about the range of different behaviours and strategies to effectively support and manage pupils with autism in their settings.

USS training [AET Autism Training] has been very surface-level. I don't feel that it extended my existing understanding or experience. I would like training to be more comprehensive and in-depth. *Diarist – Support staff, Primary setting*

A SENCo and SLT interviewee echoed this sentiment, describing how the nasen Online CPD Unit content provided more of a 'taster' and lacked specific and more tangible examples that practitioners could use and implement. There was recognition that a range of training was available through the programme, but that it would have been helpful to

have further information about the content, and signposting about how to locate it. This interviewee also conveyed that individuals need to fully understand what the training covers and how it aligns with their development needs before they enrol, to ensure the most relevant training is accessed.

There is a lot of training on offer, so I think if you have an idea of what exactly you are trying to get from it, you can then manipulate the training available and find what is best. *Case study interview – Primary, Trust Lead and SENCo*

Some early years and FE survey respondents and interviewees perceived that the online content was more ‘school centred’, and therefore not always relevant to their context. However, an early years diarist acknowledged that the content provided a broad overview, which could be applied to other settings.

These reflections suggest that senior leaders and SENCos may require clearer and more specific information about the training on offer, to enable them to make a more informed decision about the training they and their staff access, and at what point. This does not point to a need to make *all* training more in-depth and context-specific.

A small, diverse range of case study interviewees and diarists expressed their preference for interactive elements in the training, such as quizzes. Some individuals across primary and secondary settings would have also welcomed more in-person training. Some found it difficult to fully engage with webinars and videos, with one SLT staff member finding the former quite rushed in parts. A more focused, bite-sized approach could help delegates to engage more effectively, which in turn would aid understanding.

A shorter, more structured and more focused session would enormously enhance staff’s understanding. Training should be in person, not online, and include a more active element rather than simply being lectured at. *Diarist – Support staff, primary setting*

Some case study interviewees and diarists also recommended access to printable resources. In addition to supporting their own practice, printable resources could be shared more widely with other staff.

## **Accessibility**

A minority of individuals reported accessibility issues. Most were related to technical problems experienced when accessing some of the live events; one member of support staff in a college who encountered a problem was able to resolve this by contacting nasen. Some also conveyed that scheduled timings for webinars were a barrier to engagement, and recordings were not always available after the event. One described how the links provided in resources did not always work or had expired.

A headteacher and SENCo case study interviewee in a primary setting recommended a 'layered' approach, to make the training more accessible and appropriate to staff at different levels. This would prevent less experienced/knowledgeable staff from being overwhelmed by the detail.

You could add different layers including 'Introductions to', 'What does dyslexia look like in the classroom?', 'What does autism potentially look like in a classroom for school children?' Because you could spend an hour talking about that, with examples, then explore, 'How do you then support?' *Case study interview, Headteacher and SENCo, Primary setting*

### **Greater awareness of USS**

The need for further promotion and marketing of the programme to schools and within schools was a theme conveyed by a few teachers and SENCos interviewed. Some had been unaware of the suite of USS activities available to them and only discovered them by chance. Improved awareness amongst the education community would help to break down barriers to engagement.

Raise awareness, as I accessed the training accidentally while independently seeking CPD, and when I have spoken to other staff members, they were unaware of it. *Diarist – Classroom teacher, Secondary setting*

### **Engagement in other CPD provision**

For most survey respondents, USS was the only form of CPD they had participated in since the programme was launched. Less than one-third (29%) reported they had engaged with other professional development activities or resources that were not part of the USS. Significantly more SLT (40%) and SENCo (34%) respondents had engaged with other forms of CPD, compared with teachers (22%).

Respondents referred to a wide range of other professional development activities, from formal structured CPD to self-directed learning. Formal CPD was common; it included face-to-face and online internal training courses run by external providers, postgraduate level study, and conferences. NASENCO was referenced, as well as the NPQ for SENCos that replaced it as the mandatory qualification for SENCos in maintained schools. A minority of respondents referenced the PINS programme, which is currently delivering tailored support to participating primary schools, to enable them to better meet the needs of neurodivergent children and young people – in addition to the Autism in Schools and Mental Health in Schools programmes. Informal courses delivered by

various school staff, often the SENCo, as part of INSET<sup>39</sup> days and/or staff meetings were also prevalent. Other less-cited types of professional development included collaborative CPD, such as mentoring, peer observation and professional networks. Collaboration with other SENCos was most commonly mentioned, although local authority and regional networks were also referenced, as well as those resulting from formal CPD programmes. Self-directed learning typically included professional reading, webinars and podcasts.

Although much of the CPD related to SEND more broadly, a high volume was specific to a particular SEND need. This included dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, mental health, and speech and language. A wide range of providers were referenced, such as local authorities, higher education institutions, and local and national independent training providers.

Of those who engaged in other provision, most (78%) perceived the quality to be comparable to USS, while 16% considered it to be better than USS.

## Sharing learning from USS

Most (90%) survey respondents had shared the learning and insight gained through USS with at least one other individual or group of staff within their setting. Learning was most commonly shared with learning support assistants (60%), classroom teachers/lecturers/tutors/early years practitioners (56%), and members of SLT (44%). Sharing learning was not limited to staff within respondents' own workplaces, with nearly one-fifth (18%) sharing learning with people outside their setting (Figure 10).

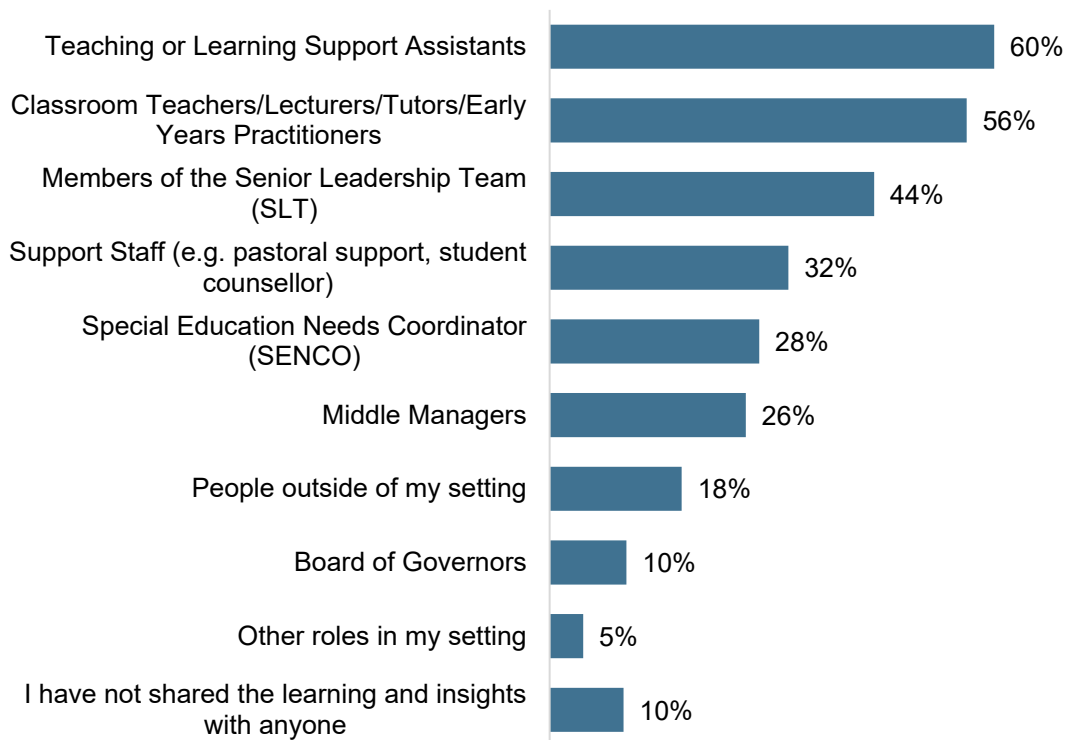
Further analysis highlighted differences by roles in relation to who delegates shared insight with. Most SLT respondents shared their learning with a wide range of staff in their setting, including other senior leaders (76%), classroom teachers/lecturers/tutors/EYPs<sup>40</sup> (67%), and teaching or learning support assistants (65%). This suggests that SLT act as a conduit for disseminating knowledge gained through USS. Similarly, most SENCos shared the learning and insight from USS with staff at all levels, but particularly classroom teachers/lecturers/tutors/EYPs (74%) and teaching or learning support assistants (72%). In contrast, classroom teachers/lecturers/tutors/EYPs (55%) and teaching/learning support assistants/support staff (54%) were most likely to share their learning and insight with peers in similar roles to themselves.

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<sup>39</sup> In-service training days.

<sup>40</sup> Early years practitioner.

**Figure 10: Roles with whom delegates shared USS learning and insight (n=1,511)**



Source: Survey data

Insight from interviews and diarists reiterated the finding that learning from USS is shared widely amongst staff, primarily by those in leadership or SENCo roles. Information and knowledge were shared predominantly via INSET days and staff meetings. However, sharing also occurred in other ways, such as informal training or coaching with specific staff members. Those in more junior roles were more likely to share their knowledge regarding individual children with relevant team members around them, either in person or via email.

### Barriers to sharing learning

The few senior leaders and SENCo diarists who had experienced difficulties in sharing information and knowledge with their wider staff reported that the main barrier was a lack of time – either regarding their own capacity to share the learning, or the ability of teachers and support staff to attend the sessions where the learning was being shared. Time was a particular barrier for those in primary and college settings. A primary senior leader described having only 1 hour in a staff meeting to share USS learning, and this was one of a number of items on the agenda.

A college SENCo described that their workload made it difficult to share the learning from USS; particularly with support staff, because they did not have enough time allocated for CPD during their working day:

My biggest barrier is being able to find the time to cascade information. Particularly with Learning Support Assistants – as they don't get nearly enough CPD time. *Diarist – SENCo, College*

Support staff, including TAs, only get paid for the hours they work, and staff meetings where learning is commonly shared often take place outside their working day. A primary teacher and SENCo reported that this was a further barrier to cascading information to this group of staff. To overcome this, the school decided to pay TAs to attend the training; this also helped to convey the importance and value of the training to staff.

We're very, very lucky that we can claim for the extra time. So, we can either choose to have the pay or time in lieu if it fits round the class and the teacher. *Case study interviewee – TA, Primary setting*

A primary-setting senior leader reported teacher wellbeing as a concern. They had been reticent about asking teachers to attend additional CPD sessions, for fear of putting too much pressure on staff who already had demanding workloads.

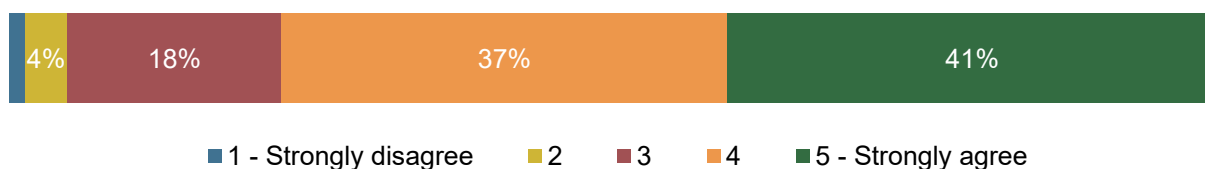
## Chapter 5: Impact on delegates

The USS programme [theory of change](#) sets out a number of outcomes for the school workforce, as well as for settings and pupils. This chapter presents evidence of the changes in outcomes for the individuals who took part in USS activities, based on analysis of the survey data and reflective diaries. This includes the perceived impact of USS on delegates' SEND knowledge, and their confidence in supporting children and young people with SEND. Delegates' perceptions of the programme's impact, in terms of their ability to adapt and improve their teaching and support practice in response to pupils' needs, is also explored, to provide insight into research question 2.

### Increased knowledge about how SEND can affect engagement in learning

Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS had increased their knowledge of how different SEND can affect the ways in which children and young people engage with their learning (Figure 11). Additional analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of support staff (46%) strongly agreed that their knowledge of how SEND can affect pupil engagement increased as a result of participating in USS, compared with SENCOs (34%).

**Figure 11: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has increased my knowledge about how different SEND can affect the ways in which children and young people engage with their learning' (n=1,025)**



Source: Survey data

Some diarists described how the training had improved their understanding of the impact that different types of SEND can have on when or how a student engages with their learning. For example, a SLT diarist in a primary setting explained how they had drawn on the AET Autism Training, and used its practical support pack, in order to gain a better understanding of an autistic pupil's social communication strengths and differences, and their support needs. After monitoring changes in the pupil's behaviour and social interactions throughout the school day, they observed that the student was more focused during the morning and could engage in whole-class activities; in the afternoon, the pupil found it more difficult to concentrate in group settings, and preferred individual activities.

This has been an incredibly useful tool for me, and one I will repeat again, maybe at a different time of day to observe any changes in interactions as the child goes through the routines of the day. I would like to know if these levels [communication and interaction levels with other students] differ at any time. *Diarist – SLT, Primary setting*

The diaries illustrated how increased knowledge of SEND's impact on pupils' engagement in learning has influenced the practice of delegates in different job roles. Those in senior leadership positions and SENCos indicated that their increased knowledge had enabled them to support other members of staff in teaching and support roles. For example, a SENCo in a primary setting had drawn on nasen's Online CPD Units to help address situations when students with autism used socially unacceptable language. In one example, the SENCo supported 2 TAs by taking control of a situation and imparting their knowledge that challenging behaviours can be the result of an underlying, unmet need. The SENCo adopted an 'exploratory' rather than 'accusatory' approach to their conversations with the child, which helped the child to regulate and reflect on the situation. The SENCo was able to draw on their knowledge to help other staff understand how their behaviour and tone of voice influences children's behaviours.

Wider outcomes are reflections on the continuing conversations I have with staff when challenging situations arise, as they may display emotional responses such as raising their voice. *Diarist – SENCo, Primary setting*

Delegates in support roles tended to draw on their knowledge to work more effectively with individual students, although some did share insights with classroom teachers or other key support staff involved. A diarist in a support role conveyed how they worked with another TA and physiotherapist to aid a student with physical disabilities. They had noticed in previous weeks a decline in the student's enthusiasm for learning. Using the nasen Online CPD Unit about Promoting Resilience, they set more achievable goals for the student, to give them a sense of success and increase resilience. They also rewarded the student each time an objective was achieved. The support staff member shared these strategies with other team members.

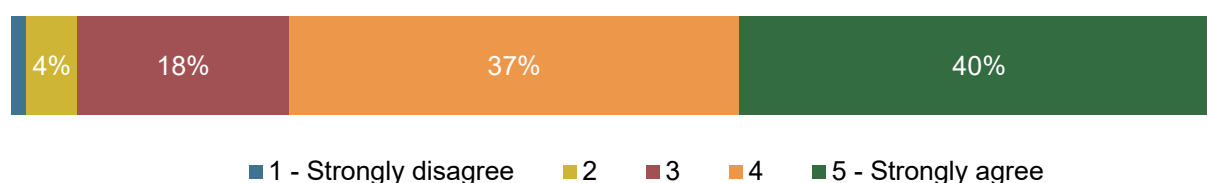
Having the ability to communicate effectively with my team was really beneficial, as it helps everyone to better understand the needs of the student. *Diarist – Support staff, Secondary setting*

## **Increased knowledge about how SEND can affect children and young people physically, socially and emotionally**

Over three-quarters (77%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS had increased their knowledge of the ways in which different SEND can affect children and young people physically, socially and emotionally (Figure 12). Additional analysis

demonstrated that a significantly higher proportion of those who had taken part in 4 or more USS activities (47%) strongly agreed that the given them knowledge of how different SEND can impact children and young people physically, socially and emotionally, compared with those who had completed 3 activities (35%). Perceptions of impact also differed by role: a significantly higher proportion of SENCos (46%) than SLT (31%) and support staff (32%) agreed that engaging with USS had increased their knowledge.

**Figure 12: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has increased my knowledge about the ways in which different SEND can affect children and young people physically, socially and emotionally' (n=1,031)**



Source: Survey data

Around one-third of diarists from all settings reported that engaging in USS had improved their knowledge of different triggers, and how these can affect children and young people physically, socially and emotionally. Triggers come in many forms, including how the child is feeling (e.g., heightened anxiety or a lack of communication skills) or the school environment (e.g., busy classrooms increasing cognitive load). The following example from a diarist shows how engaging with AET training helped to improve their understanding of a child's sensory needs.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The STAR Chart is a tool provided by AET to aid understanding in an individual. This is achieved by recording and analysing incidences of distressed behaviours.

## Using the AET training to effectively support a pupil's sensory needs

A member of SLT at a single-form primary setting described a situation where they had been able to successfully apply Tool 9 (STAR chart) from the AET training 'Good autism practice in schools'. Along with the class teacher, they noticed that a student with autism had been displaying distressed behaviours for several weeks.

The SLT member worked with the teacher, applying the AET STAR chart to help identify patterns of behaviour with the child. The STAR chart (i.e., Strengths, Targets, Actions, Review) is a framework designed to help staff identify students' strengths and needs, as well as to develop specific learning and action plans. The implementation of this tool helped both members of staff to better understand the child's sensory needs and behavioural triggers (e.g., if the child had not slept or eaten enough before school). The diarist remarked that this had enabled them to more effectively pre-empt situations and identify potential triggers within the child's environment. The SLT member commented that staff were now more confident about supporting the child effectively. Adopting a more consistent approach was also helping to foster stronger relationships with the child's parents.

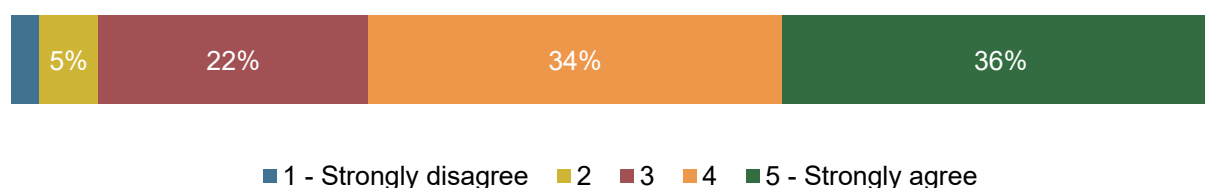
This tool has helped us enormously. We now all feel more confident in being able to support the child throughout their day. We are all following the same tool, which means we are all working from the same page and are familiar with the strategies to support each other, as well as the child. *Diarist – SLT, Primary setting*

The SLT member had shared the tool with other support staff in the setting and hoped all those staff would be able to access the training from AET to develop their own knowledge.

## Increased knowledge about the different types of SEND

Over two-thirds (70%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS had increased their knowledge regarding the different types of SEND (Figure 13). Additional analysis showed that USS was most impactful for those who engaged in more activities. A significantly higher proportion of survey respondents who had taken part in 4 or more USS activities (46%) strongly agreed that the training increased their knowledge of the different types of SEND, compared with those who had completed 1 (34%) or 3 activities (32%). There were no significant differences by role.

**Figure 13: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has increased my knowledge about the different types of SEND' (n=1,016)**



Source: Survey data

A couple of diarists reported that USS had increased their knowledge of ADHD and autism. Others reported that they had acquired greater knowledge about children and young people with language and processing needs and physical disabilities, as well as those with high needs (e.g., children who are non-verbal and/or with social, emotional and mental health needs).

USS had improved some diarists' knowledge of how autistic children and young people process social cues and respond to the emotional reactions of others. For example, a diarist in a support role described how the nasen Online CPD Unit on Speech, Language and Communication Needs assisted in building a stronger relationship with a student.

USS has helped me support a child with autism. They can exhibit challenging behaviour, when they struggle to communicate with others and they get frustrated and lash out. The child really likes crafting activities, so we made emotion cards. We spent around half an hour on this, although lots of time was spent chatting, which gave me a chance to get to know more about their interests, to tailor future sessions. *Diarist – Support staff, Primary setting*

Diarists in more senior roles were more likely to make changes informed by the learning acquired from USS at the setting level, whereas those in support roles tended to implement changes for specific children. For example, a SENCo in a primary setting applied the USS training to support several young children in their setting who had experienced trauma. The SENCo explained how they had implemented changes designed to help the children understand the emotions they were going through. These included referral to therapies and the introduction of wellbeing programmes.

The topic around neuroplasticity was something that we really believe in and feel that we have the opportunity to change and improve the outlook for some of our children who have experienced trauma, by giving them the right support to work through their emotions. *Diarist – SENCo, Primary setting*

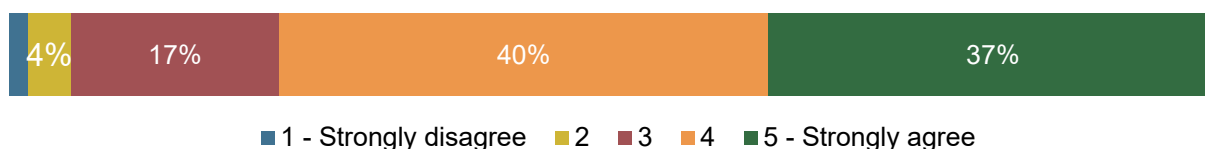
There were instances where either the teacher or those in a support role had embedded their knowledge about specific types of SEND to support individual children. For example, an EY practitioner and TA used ABC charts together, to identify the reasons why a child in their class was biting. After identifying that the behaviour was due to the child feeling frustrated, they collectively changed how they communicated with the child, using options and visual prompts to improve provision.

This situation involves me, an apprentice and another TA in the classroom. We have had a new child start with us who is non-verbal, is clingy, uses a dummy, gets upset frequently and bites. I spoke to staff regarding giving the child options to allow opportunities to communicate and use visual prompts to help. *Diarist – EY practitioner, Early Years setting*

## Adapting teaching practice

Over three-quarters (78%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS has equipped them with the skills to adapt their teaching practice in response to the needs of children and young people with SEND (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has given me the skills to adapt my teaching practice in response to the needs of children and young people with SEND' (n=909)**



Source: Survey data

Additional analysis indicated that USS was most impactful for those who engaged in 4 or more activities. A significantly higher proportion of these respondents (48%) strongly agreed that the training provided them with the skills to adapt their teaching practice to the needs of children and young people with SEND, compared with those who had completed 1 (35%), 2 (33%) or 3 (35%) activities.

Three-quarters (74%) of classroom teachers/EY practitioners strongly agreed or agreed that USS had given them the skills to adapt their teaching practice, while a slightly lower proportion of SLT (68%) and SENCoS (67%) strongly agreed or agreed. There was only one significant difference by role, where a higher proportion of SENCo (50%) than SLT respondents (32%) agreed that engaging with USS had equipped them with the skills to adapt their teaching practice in response to the needs of children and young people with SEND.

Findings also indicated that a higher proportion of respondents who first engaged with USS in the 2022/2023 academic year (45%) agreed that USS has provided them with the skills to adapt their teaching practice to the needs of children and young people with SEND, compared with those who began in 2024/2025 (33%).

### **Embedding skills to adapt teaching and support practice**

Once equipped with the necessary skills, most respondents (89%) reported that they had, to some or a large extent, embedded the learning from USS to adapt their teaching and support practice. Just 2% had not adapted their practice at all informed by USS, while nearly one-in-ten respondents (9%) reported that it was too early to say. There were no significant differences by role.

Additional analysis indicated that USS was most impactful for those who engaged in 4 or more activities. A significantly higher proportion of these respondents (40%) had embedded their learning to adapt their practice to a large extent, compared with those who had only engaged in 1 activity (17%).

Sustained engagement over time is also impactful. Significantly more survey respondents (36%) who first engaged with USS in the 2021/2022 academic year reported embedding learning from USS to inform their teaching practice to a large extent, compared with those who began in 2023/2024 (21%) or 2024/2025 (21%).

Several diarists provided examples of how they had embedded their learning to adapt their teaching practice as a result of engaging with USS. Those in teaching roles across all settings described introducing new activities and/or interventions to ensure that children and young people with SEND could engage in whole-class activities effectively and had a positive learning experience. A member of SLT in a college setting explained how the nasen Online CPD Unit on Behaviour Management and Emotional Regulation helped them to provide an intervention for students who felt overwhelmed with their college work. This diarist adopted positive coping mechanisms (for example, reassurance that making mistakes is part of learning), active listening strategies, and open-ended questions to understand students' concerns. As a result, students were perceived to be able to regulate their emotions more effectively and engage more fully in their learning. Another diarist, a classroom teacher in a primary setting, explained how they had used the nasen Online CPD Unit on Creating an Emotionally Safe Environment, in order to work collaboratively with the classroom TA to help children who were unsettled and found it difficult to self-regulate. The training supported them in introducing a range of activities to help reduce children's anxiety.

We created a plan for regular brain breaks for a couple of children (sensory circuit, walk, ball bouncing, or time in play area followed by breathing techniques), and movement breaks and breathing for the whole class. We looked at checking in with certain children to see how they were feeling. *Diarist – Teacher, Primary setting*

Several diarists described that simple changes informed by USS, which did not require significant time, had been impactful for children and young people with SEND in their setting. For example, a diarist in a secondary setting detailed how engaging in USS had enabled them to make changes to GCSE lesson materials. They had identified that some learning materials were very 'text-heavy' and not suitable for dyslexic students; thus, adapting the font size and text spacing on worksheets had a positive impact for students.

It worked well, and 2 students unprompted made comments about it looking better and being easier to read. I think that this is better for some students, as they found they could be more independent with their reading. *Diarist – Teacher, Secondary setting*

Other diarists described how they had adapted their practice to be more visual, in order to effectively support children and young people with SEND. For example, a classroom teacher in a primary setting embedded learning from nasen's Online CPD Units to help autistic pupils with their communication and social skills, by devising a simple board game with visual prompts. The teacher observed that students were more engaged, keen, and had started to communicate more.

By the end, all students participated with enthusiasm, showcasing improved patience and communication. This reinforced the importance of visual supports and predictability. *Diarist – Teacher, Primary setting*

The following example details how nasen Online CPD Units were used to adapt teaching practice, to support students' development of mathematical thinking.

## Using gesture techniques in maths lessons to help develop mathematical thinking in a reception class

A teacher in a two-form entry primary setting explained how they used the nasen Online CPD Units to plug their knowledge gaps. The insight from the units complemented ongoing training delivered by their SLT. In one diary entry, they described how they had used Unit 17: Mathematical Thinking, to adapt their approach with their reception class.

The teacher explained how children within their class were at different stages in their development of mathematical thinking. In recent lessons, the focus had been on using language to accurately describe the relative positions of numbers from 1 to 10. The teacher outlined how they traditionally use stem sentences, which are structured sentence starters that help students develop their mathematical language and problem-solving skills (e.g., 'The number 5 is made up of 3 and 2'). It was highlighted that these can be 'clunky and unnatural', and children can find it hard to use or remember them.

The teacher detailed how they used training from the Online Units to explore the use of gesture to help further develop their students' understanding of mathematical language. Gesture techniques allowed the teacher to reinforce the concepts being taught by applying visual movement (e.g., holding up three fingers for the number 3). They perceived that using gesture had helped them improve their teaching and supported the children – including those who struggled with communication – to develop their thinking.

Using gesture can help me clarify what I am trying to impart, and the children express their thinking even if their communication and language skills are delayed. *Diarist – Teacher, Primary setting*

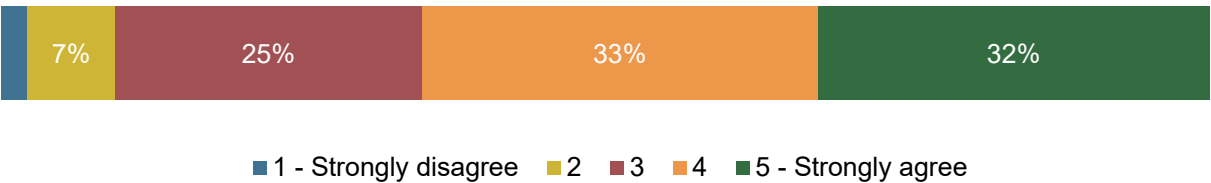
The teacher suggested there would be benefits from the widespread use of gesture in maths across the setting. As a result, the SENCo was planning to organise training to ensure continuity of the approach.

## Increased leadership skills

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS had enhanced their leadership skills (Figure 15). Further analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of survey respondents who had taken part in 4 or more USS activities (45%) strongly agreed that USS had enhanced their leadership skills, compared with those who had completed 1 (28%), 2 (26%) or 3 (31%) activities.

There were no significant differences between role and enhanced leadership skills, although agreement was highest among middle leaders (80%) and SLT (75%), compared with SENCos (64%), classroom teachers (63%) and support staff (59%).

**Figure 15: Survey respondents’ level of agreement with the statement ‘Engaging in the USS has enhanced my leadership skills’ (n=851)**



Source: Survey data

There is some limited evidence from case study interviewees and diarists that USS has improved leadership skills. Some described using learning and insight from USS to inform the design and delivery of internal staff training, or to help mentor newly qualified staff. The diarist in the pen portrait below showcases how engagement with the nasen Teacher Handbook increased their knowledge of the graduated approach, which subsequently supported them in leading internal staff training within their setting.

## How the Teacher Handbook informed internal CPD on the graduated approach

The graduated approach is a cyclical model of support for pupils with SEND, consisting of 4 stages (assess, plan, do, review). A middle leader in a single-form entry primary setting explained how they used Section 6 of the Teacher Handbook to lead a CPD session on the graduated approach, in conjunction with the Assistant SENCo. The aim was to equip staff with a better understanding of this approach and enable them to implement it effectively, in order to set reasonable targets for pupils with SEND across the setting.

All staff attended the training, which included a question-and-answer session that gave staff the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on a one-to-one basis. The middle leader remarked that the training had been a positive experience for staff, who felt comfortable in asking questions about the approach and how it would apply to their practice. As a result of the training and support provided to staff, student targets were more specific and measurable, and tailored to their individual needs. The middle leader also observed that, since the training, the graduated approach had been applied more consistently, as staff became more confident about using the learning in their practice.

Outcomes for staff included the fact that they were really confident with what they now have to do – the opportunity to take part in a carefully planned CPD session really enabled and empowered them.

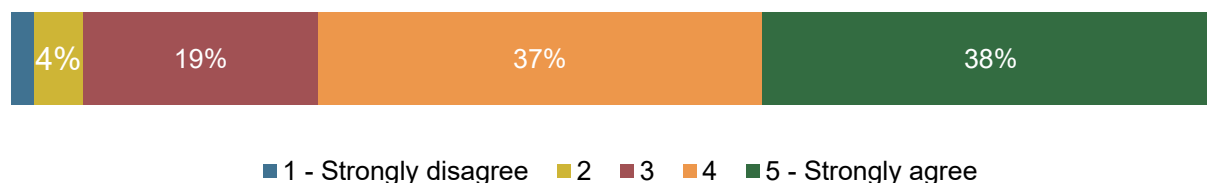
*Diarist – Middle leader, Primary setting*

## Increased confidence

### Identification of needs

Three-quarters (75%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that engaging in USS had increased their confidence to identify the needs of children and young people with SEND (Figure 16). Further analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of survey respondents who had taken part in 4 or more USS activities (49%) strongly agreed that USS had increased their confidence in identifying the needs of children and young people with SEND, compared with those who had completed 1 (31%) or 2 (36%) activities. There were no significant differences by role in relation to this outcome.

**Figure 16: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has increased my confidence to identify the needs of children and young people with SEND' (n=990)**



Source: Survey data

To effectively identify the needs of children and young people, SLT and SENCo diarists described how they shared knowledge with class teachers who interacted with children and young people with SEND on a regular basis. The following pen portrait from a diarist in a primary setting showcases how using the AET individual sensory checklist increased their confidence in identifying the sensory needs of a child.

### Using an AET tool to help identify sensory needs

A SENCo in a single-form entry primary school described how they used USS training to strengthen support for children and young people with SEND. By applying the AET individual sensory checklist, they were able to confidently identify the sensory needs of a particular pupil and better understand how these needs influenced the child's learning.

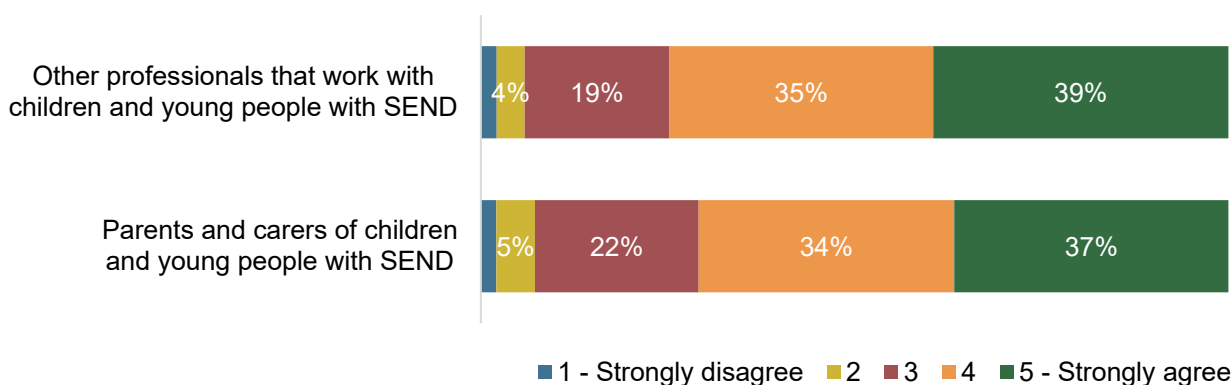
The SENCo, who worked alongside the class teacher to complete the checklist, described it as a 'clear document with well-worded criteria'. Using the tool enabled the SENCo to share key information with the safeguarding team, and to create a sensory profile for the pupil designed to improve their engagement in learning. The SENCo also reported feeling more confident in applying the tool to other pupils, to identify and understand their needs.

Looking ahead, the SENCo plans to embed this approach more widely by creating sensory profiles for all pupils with SEND. This will ensure that sensory needs are recognised and understood consistently across the setting.

## Liaising with parents/carers and other professionals

Around three-quarters of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that engaging in USS had a positive impact on their confidence about liaising with parents or carers (71%) and other professionals (75%) (Figure 17). A significantly higher proportion of survey respondents who had taken part in 4 or more USS activities (49%) strongly agreed that USS had increased their confidence in liaising with parents or carers of children and young people with SEND, compared with those who had completed 1 (31%), 2 (36%) or 3 (32%) activities. There were no significant differences by role.

**Figure 17: Survey respondents' level of agreement that their engagement with USS has increased their confidence levels to liaise with other professionals and parents/carers of children and young people with SEND**



Source: Survey data

There is some limited evidence from case study interviewees and diarists, regarding USS's impact on their confidence in liaising with parents or carers of children and young people with SEND, and with other professionals. In one example, a classroom teacher diarist in a primary setting detailed how their confidence in liaising with a child's parents had increased after engaging with the nasen Online CPD Units on Speech and Language Needs.

I feel better equipped to discuss the report [about the child's speech and language needs] with the SENCo and the child's parents, and to construct a pathway to help the child, in consultation with their parents.

*Diarist – Teacher, Primary setting*

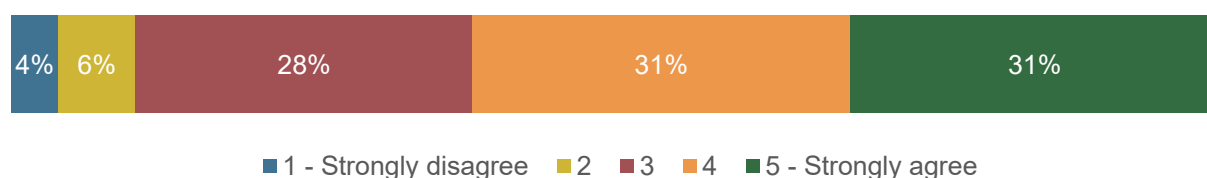
In a further example, an SLT diarist from a college setting explained how the ETF Community of Practice (a professional learning network, providing support for those working in college settings) had given them the confidence to challenge a local authority decision when they placed a student at their college mid-year. The SLT staff member drew on advice from colleagues about good practice, to explain why their college was not a viable solution for the student.

I used the experiences of my peers in the Community of Practice to take part in a meeting with a learner and the local authority. The local authority knows our position on rushed mid-year starts, and also how we can support transition ahead of a September start. *Diarist – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

## Job satisfaction

Over three-fifths (62%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that USS has increased their job satisfaction (Figure 18). Further analysis shows that a significantly higher proportion of respondents who participated in 4 or more USS activities (41%) strongly agreed that the training increased their job satisfaction, compared with those who had completed 2 (24%) or 3 (28%) activities. Analysis by setting showed that a significantly higher proportion of respondents from secondary settings (37%) than those in primary settings (24%) strongly agreed that engaging in USS had increased their job satisfaction. Findings also indicated that a significantly higher proportion of respondents from settings where the proportion of pupils or learners with an EHC plan or SEN is higher than average<sup>42</sup> strongly agreed (34%) that engaging in USS had increased their job satisfaction, compared with those in settings where the proportion with an EHC plan or SEN is lower than average (18%).

**Figure 18: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Engaging in the USS has increased my job satisfaction' (n=935)**



Source: Survey data

USS was perceived to have had a positive impact on diarists' enjoyment of their role, and this increased their job satisfaction. Diarists reported that seeing the difference they made to the lives of children and young people with SEND in their setting, as a result of applying the skills and knowledge gained from USS, was particularly rewarding. A diarist in a support role in a secondary setting described how prior to the training, they were finding it difficult to effectively support students with the transition to secondary school. Engaging with the nasen Online CPD Units increased their understanding of how the

<sup>42</sup> On average, 18% of pupils in England have Special Educational Needs (SEN) or an Education and Health Care Plan (EHC plan).

transition process works, which meant they were better able to support their colleagues; as a result, they were happier in their job.

I actually enjoy this part of my role, which is something I was previously not so keen on doing, as I had very little knowledge on how to best support anxious students transitioning. *Diarist – Support staff, Secondary setting*

## Chapter 6: Impact on educational settings

The USS programme theory of change (Appendix 2) sets out a number of intended outcomes at the setting level. To understand progress towards the achievement of these outcomes, this chapter explores changes at the setting level that have been implemented as a result of staff engaging with USS. These include changes in relation to teaching and support practice, the prioritisation of SEND and the processes for identifying pupils' needs, and settings' culture and ethos. The analysis also considers the extent to which setting-level changes are resulting in more children and young people with SEND having their needs identified and met earlier, to provide insight into research question 4.

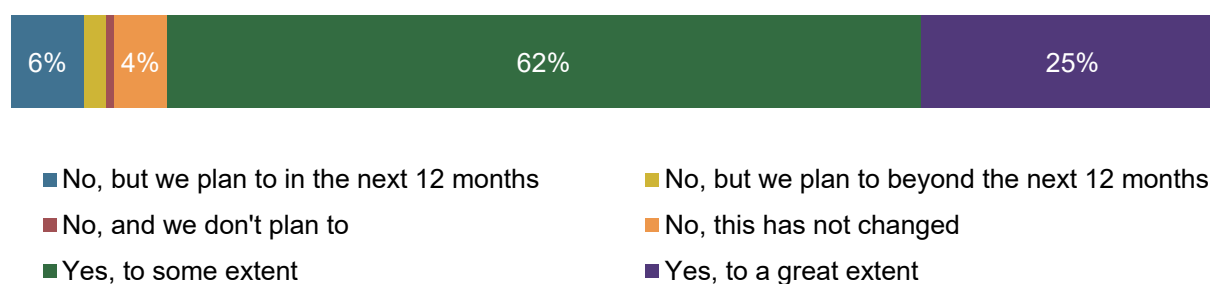
### Changes made across settings

Most survey respondents<sup>43</sup> indicated that their setting had made some changes in areas related to SEND, informed by USS. The area where the most amount of change occurred was teaching practice, followed by support at key transition points. The least amount of change reported was in relation to SEND policy.

#### Teaching practice

Most survey respondents (87%) reported that their setting had made changes to teaching practice (to some or a great extent), informed by learning and insight from USS (Figure 19). A significantly higher proportion of respondents in SLT positions (89%) than those in middle leadership roles (78%) reported that changes had been made in their settings.

**Figure 19: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust has made changes to teaching practice, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=647)**



Source: Survey data

<sup>43</sup> This question was only provided to SLT, middle leadership and SENCo respondents.

The previous chapter provided evidence of changes made by individual practice informed by USS. Examples of changes to practice that had been implemented at a setting level were also identified through the case study interviews and diaries. For example, one SLT diarist in a primary setting reflected on how nasen's Leadership and SENCo Toolkit had improved their understanding of the way in which ADHD affects children's concentration and attention. This led to discussions in staff meetings about existing practices and resources, which identified elements that were not meeting the needs of children and young people effectively. The setting subsequently implemented changes, such as the introduction of movement breaks, to support concentration and regulation for all children, not just those with ADHD. In addition, the setting introduced task planners; all its teachers are now required to integrate them into their lesson plans, to inform learning objectives and outcomes for children and young people with ADHD.

Sharing the resource [Leadership and SENCo Toolkit] with all staff has broadened their understanding about ADHD and enabled discussions between colleagues about our approaches that were previously not best meeting needs. *Diarist – SLT, Primary setting*

Another SLT diarist in a primary setting who had engaged with AET training delivered staff training during an INSET day, regarding how to use visual materials (including objects of reference<sup>44</sup> and widget visuals<sup>45</sup>) to support communication with children and young people with autism. The diarist perceived that staff training had enhanced their understanding of communication needs, equipped them with the skills and confidence to incorporate visual materials into their teaching practice, and ensured a more consistent approach to communication across the setting.

Staff were keen to fully understand the extent to which [the adapted visuals] will help their key children. Students should benefit from having their communication needs better met. *Diarist – SLT, Primary setting*

USS has also informed changes in practice within FE settings. For example, an SLT diarist delivered staff training on individualised support plans for students, informed by the USS training they had engaged in. This led to a more unified approach to supporting children and young people with SEND in their setting.

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<sup>44</sup> Objects of reference are real items that can be used to represent people, places or activities; they help those with communication difficulties to understand or anticipate what might be happening or is about to happen.

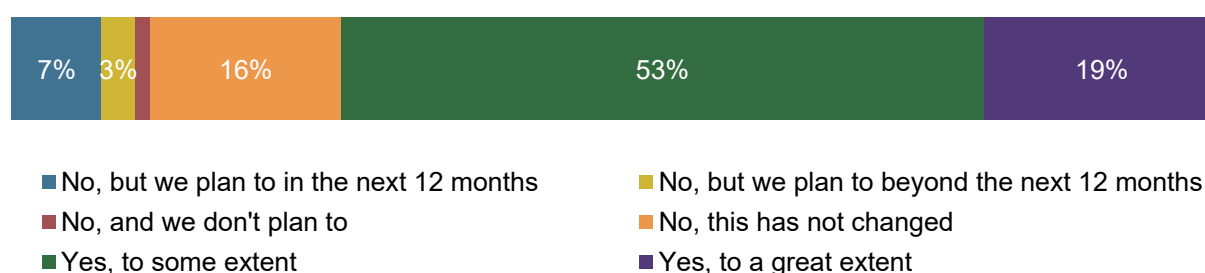
<sup>45</sup> Widget visuals are symbol-based communication tools designed to help pupils with SEND understand, process and communicate information.

We used the tools and frameworks from the training to develop tailored approaches for students. During the 60-minute staff training session, we identified strategies to implement in the classroom, ensuring that each student receives the appropriate level of support for their needs. *Diarist – SLT, Sixth form/FE college setting*

## Support at key transition points

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of survey respondents indicated that their setting had made changes (to some or a great extent) to the ways in which children and young people were supported at key transition points, informed by learning and insights from USS. A further 10% reported that their setting would be making changes in the future (Figure 20).

**Figure 20: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust has made changes to the way in which children and young people are supported at key transition points, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=616)**



Source: Survey data

Several diarists provided examples of how USS had helped them to develop resources and host events to support pupils and their parents/carers at key transition points. For example, a SENCo diarist in a primary setting embedded insight from the nasen Online CPD Unit on Transition, into a workshop for Year 6 pupils and their families, to support the transition to secondary school. The diarist reported that some parents subsequently implemented the suggested strategies to support their child, and the class teacher felt more confident in liaising with parents and addressing any concerns they had about their child's transition to secondary school.

Some parents really took on board the advice suggested by the professionals involved. The class teacher is more confident to approach transition discussion and activities. *Diarist – SENCo, Primary setting*

In another example, an SLT diarist from a secondary setting adapted their transition programme for students starting Year 7 by embedding learning from the nasen SEND Toolkit. The diarist observed that as a result of the changes made, the transition process was working more effectively.

We have adapted our transition programme and the booklet information for parents. It makes the process more consistent, so staff, students and parents now have all the information required to make the transition process smoother than in previous years. *Diarist – SLT, Secondary setting*

Regular school attendance is important at all times, but particularly during key transition points, to help students navigate the change successfully. A secondary-setting participant described how attendance data and information sharing with feeder primary schools had been a focus, to ensure appropriate provision for pupils with SEND was in place when they began Year 7. One SLT interviewee explained how attending the USS Preparing for Adulthood conference had deepened their understanding of the importance of accessing primary school attendance data, when supporting pupils transitioning to secondary school. Following the conference, the interviewee collaborated with the internal attendance lead and visited all feeder primary settings to obtain attendance figures for incoming pupils. This enabled them to proactively identify needs and put appropriate support in place.

I came back [from the conference] and spoke to our attendance lead. I visited all of the primary schools in the next few weeks. One of my jobs will be to record the current attendance figures of all of those young people. *Diarist – SLT, Secondary setting*

The following pen portrait details how a college setting developed its transition process after engaging in the USS College SEND Provider Review.

## How USS strengthened transition processes in a college setting

A member of SLT within a college group described how the USS SEND Provider Review led to significant improvements in their transition processes for learners with SEND, including those with an EHC plan.

One leader explained that, because the college operates across multiple campuses, achieving consistency in processes and protocols had always been a challenge. Engaging in the College SEND Provider Review prompted a full reconsideration of transition arrangements, resulting in clearer, more consistent practice across all sites.

A key change was the introduction of an initial interview with a member of the Additional Learning Support (ALS) team for every learner with SEND. This step ensures that reasonable required adjustments are identified and crucial information (such as safeguarding details) is received from secondary schools promptly. Following this, a collaborative meeting takes place, involving wider stakeholders, including ALS staff, curriculum staff, the learner's parent or carer, and a representative from the secondary school.

We've put this extra step into our transition process, where we have an initial look at the learner and make sure that it's even possible for us to cater for their needs – because once we're the named provider, we're the named provider. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

According to leaders, this strengthened transition process has already led to tangible improvements. Learners are more likely to be placed on the right course, attendance has increased, and achievement levels have improved. The ALS team also feels better prepared to deliver bespoke training and make well-informed reasonable adjustments.

Leaders were clear that these improvements would not have been implemented if they had not engaged in the USS SEND Provider Review:

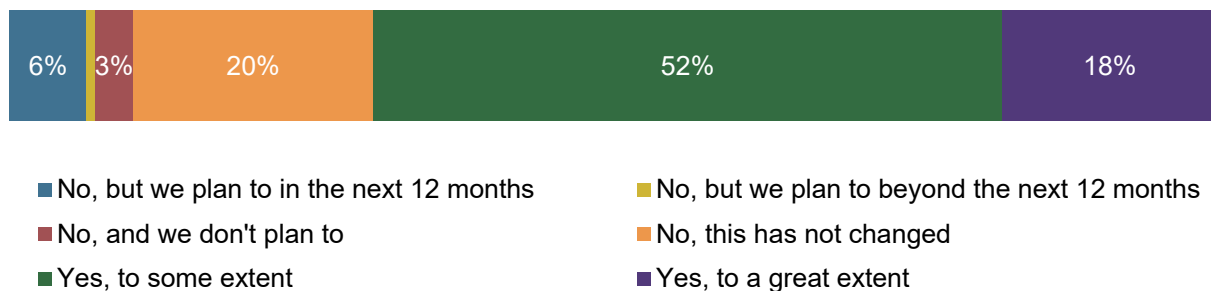
No [when asked if the changes would have been made without engaging in the review]. One hundred per cent not. I think there's so much expertise out in the sector, and what this did was give us the opportunity to bring it all together. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College*

## Pastoral support

Seven-out-of-ten (70%) survey respondents indicated that their setting had changed its pastoral support, informed by learning and insight from USS, and 7% planned to make

changes in the future (Figure 21). Further analysis shows that a significantly higher proportion of respondents from primary settings (79%) than secondary settings (59%) had made changes to pastoral support.

**Figure 21: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust has made changes to pastoral support, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=595)**



Source: Survey data

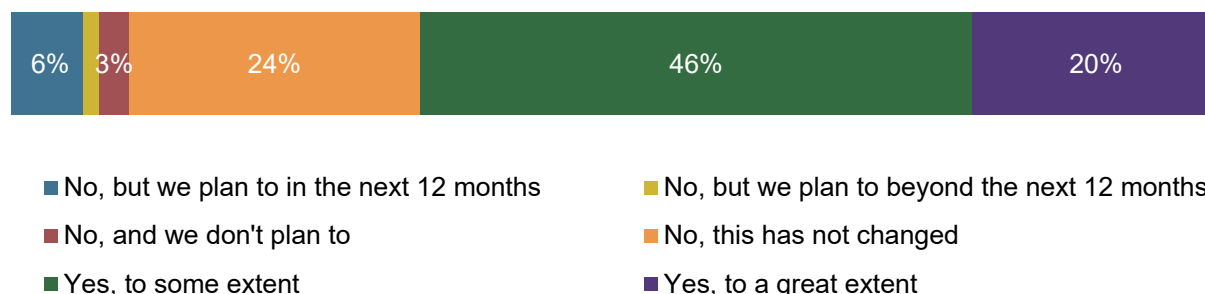
The case study interviewees and diarists tended not to focus on changes made to pastoral care after engaging with USS. However, in one example, a member of support staff within a secondary setting highlighted how they had shared resources from their USS training with their attendance team, to help reduce school avoidance. The insight from the resources enabled attendance staff to feel more confident when gathering the voices of students and parents and supported conversations and meetings with students in their setting. Although it was too early to identify any impacts on the prevalence of school avoidance, staff within the setting were optimistic that the changes would have a positive effect:

The attendance team have said that they are going to rethink how they talk to pupils and parents and now have several new strategies that they are going to implement. They felt as if these resources will have a massive benefit to all students and families where attendance and school avoidance is an issue. *Diarist – Support staff, Secondary setting*

## Process for identifying SEND needs

Two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents indicated that their setting had changed its processes for identifying SEND needs, at least to some extent, informed by learning and insights from USS. Around one-third (34%) had not made any changes to their processes, but 7% planned to make changes in the future (Figure 22).

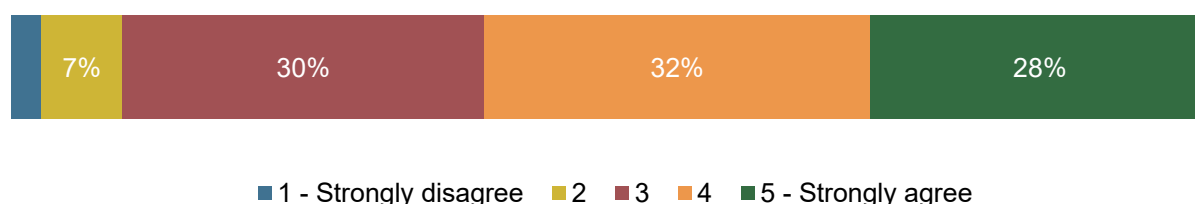
**Figure 22: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust has made changes to processes for identifying SEND needs among children and young people, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=636)**



Source: Survey data

Additionally, three-fifths (60%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of learning and insight from USS, the needs of children and young people with SEND were being identified earlier within their setting (Figure 23).

**Figure 23: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Because of USS, within my school/college/trust the needs of children and young people with SEND are being identified earlier' (n=809)**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees and several diarists, typically SLT and SENCOs across all settings, outlined changes designed to streamline processes for identifying and meeting SEND needs.

In another example, a practitioner working in a college detailed how their USS training had helped their setting to strengthen its processes for identifying SEND needs, particularly for students with autism. The college developed a flow chart setting out the process for identifying SEND. This has made the process more transparent for staff and students, and improved efficiency, so that needs are identified earlier. All new staff members are now trained to use the chart.

We have since written a flow chart schedule of the process which enables everyone, including the learner, to understand where we are and whose responsibility it is. It has taught us across the board that communication is the key, and working together will achieve the fastest results. *Case study interviewee – Practitioner, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

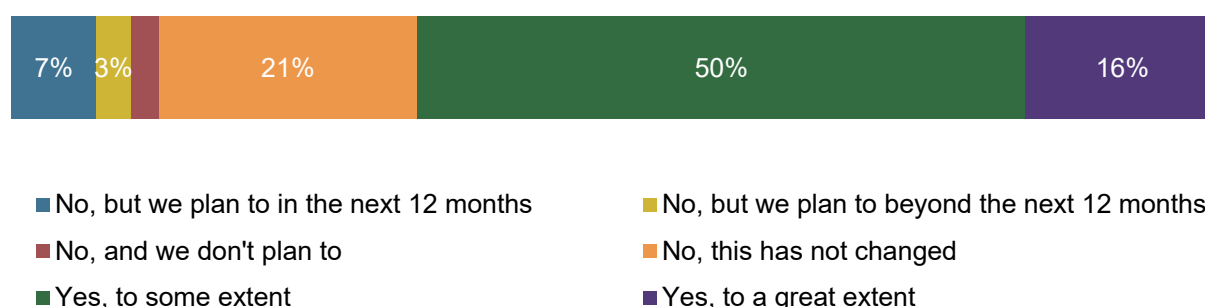
In another example, engagement in the AET Autism Training and nasen Online CPD Units enabled a primary setting to better identify SEND and implement processes more efficiently, in order to ensure accurate diagnosis and support provision:

Engaging in USS has enabled us to highlight and fast-track children that needed further diagnosis or additional external support. *Case study interviewee – SENCo, Primary setting*

## Liaising with parents and carers

Two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents indicated that their setting had made at least some changes to how staff liaise with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, informed by learning and insights from USS. Around one-third (34%) had not made any changes, with one-in-ten (10%) conveying that they planned to make changes in the future (Figure 24).

**Figure 24: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust have made changes to the way that staff liaise with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=616)**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees and diarists provide limited evidence about setting-level changes to how staff liaise with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. However, a teacher diarist in a secondary setting outlined how they had strengthened their communication with parents/carers about core subject interventions

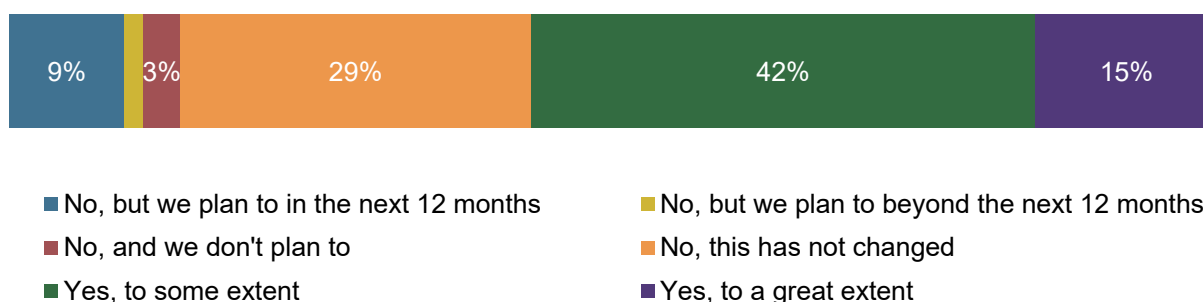
offered to particular children and young people with SEND. Baseline assessments in English and maths identified the level of support required by the students. Level of support was colour-coded, and those rated 'red' – the highest level – were added to the school's SEND register. This process was used to keep parents informed about the support in place.

Letters also mail-merged home to parents/carers, to keep them in the loop with regards to the support being offered. *Diarist – Teacher, Secondary setting*

## SEND policy

Over half (57%) of survey respondents indicated that their setting had made at least some changes to their SEND policy, informed by learning and insights from USS. While two-fifths (43%) indicated no changes to date, just over one-in-ten (11%) planned to make changes in the future (Figure 25).

**Figure 25: The degree to which survey respondents' school/college/trust has made changes to SEND policy, informed by learning and insight from USS (n=623)**



Source: Survey data

Additional analysis indicated that a significantly higher proportion of survey respondents who had engaged with 4 or more (66%) or 3 activities (65%) reported that changes had been made to the SEND policy in their setting, compared with those undertook only 1 activity (45%). Furthermore, changes were more likely to have been made in settings where staff first engaged with USS in the 2021/2022 academic year (66%, compared with 50% of those who started in 2023/2024, and 44% of those who began in 2024/2025). This suggests that changes in policy take longer to implement and embed than other changes, such as adaptations to individual practice.

Interviewees and diarists affirmed that changes to SEND policy take longer to implement; as a result, there is limited evidence of any associated impact at this stage. However, an SLT diarist in a secondary setting described how their engagement in the Action Research project with the University of Derby had resulted in changes to their setting's

behaviour, which were being trialled within the classroom. The Action Research project enabled them to focus on the ways in which feedback to children on their behaviour was provided within their setting. The learning was cascaded to all staff across the setting via a series of staff meetings, with time built-in for teachers and support staff to consider how they would apply the learning in the classroom. The staff training was perceived to have deepened their understanding of how feedback can impact pupils, especially those with SEND. Staff were given autonomy over the types of alternative approaches and methods they would trial in their practice, and recorded observations on their effectiveness in a reflective diary. The new approaches included one-to-one feedback from the teacher or member of support staff, and giving pupils different options on how they could receive the feedback. The diarist explained that further meetings with all staff were planned, so that they could share their findings and policy changes could be agreed.

This allowed teachers and learning assistants autonomy over practice, and they appreciated the opportunity to shape policy moving forward.

*Diarist – SLT, Secondary setting*

Staff within a secondary setting reported that, after completing a Big Idea for SEND project with the Sea View Trust, they created an internal course for teachers. The 6-session programme provided an overarching introduction to SEND, along with information about the setting's approach to SEND support. Staff were also given further reading between sessions. The SENCo perceived that the course had increased staff's awareness and understanding of different SEND, and the processes in place for identifying and responding to needs within the setting. As a result, consultations involving staff, about specific children and young people, were more streamlined and efficient; this enabled earlier identification and more effective implementation of support provision. A teacher within the setting described the positive impact the course had on them:

As a teacher, it can be frustrating to be told several times a term to change your seating plans, or to see a child taken out of lessons for an intervention, but the training helped me to see the importance of that.

*Case study interviewee – Teacher, Secondary setting*

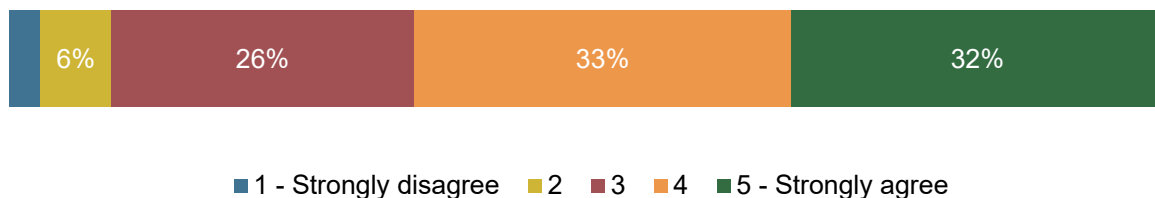
## **Perceived impact of setting-level changes**

### **Prioritisation of SEND needs**

Around two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that as a result of engaging in USS, the needs of children and young people with SEND were a higher priority within their setting (Figure 26). Additional analysis revealed that USS was most impactful for settings where individuals had engaged in 4 or more activities. A significantly higher proportion of these respondents (42%) strongly agreed that because of USS, the needs of children and young people with SEND were a higher priority within

their setting, compared with those who had only engaged in either 1 (28%) or 2 (26%) activities.

**Figure 26: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Because of USS, within my school/college/trust the needs of children and young people with SEND are a higher priority' (n=853)**



Source: Survey data

Evidence from case study interviewees and diarists is more limited regarding the extent to which the needs of children and young people with SEND are a higher priority because of engagement in USS. However, the following pen portrait describes how engagement in the ETF College SEND Provider Review has led to changes being implemented, both in the participant's college and partner campuses.

### **How the peer review process helped to prioritise SEND**

A college group participated in a peer review process involving reciprocal visits with another institution. During the visits, the focus was on SEND provision, exploring both strengths and areas for development. The process included staff meetings, a learning walk, a tour, and lesson observations with particular attention to the support provided for learners. A report was then produced and discussed with the SLT.

The review informed significant changes to enhance the college experience for students with SEND. Their needs are now a higher priority – as reflected in the appointment of a Director of SEND Inclusion and a Head of Foundation Learning. This has strengthened leadership, which was previously described as inconsistent.

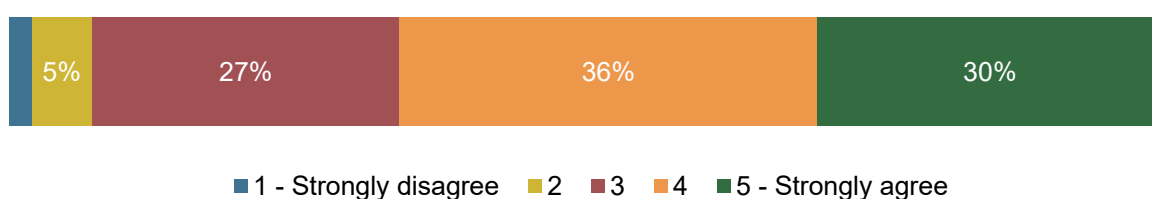
Practical improvements followed, including the introduction of a sensory room and a quiet hub; further adaptations are planned, such as repainting the sensory room in black to optimise its environment.

The peer review had wider impact. Another SLT member noted that the reciprocal visits prompted a review of SEND provision across the wider college group, leading to better communication between campuses and a more joined-up approach.

## Increased capability to respond to needs of children and young people with SEND

Two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that because of USS, there was increased capability to respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND within their setting (Figure 27). There were no significant differences by setting or role.

**Figure 27: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Because of USS, within my school/college/trust there is increased capability to respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND' (n=881)**



Source: Survey data

The previous chapter provided evidence that individuals' capability to identify and respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND had been improved as a result of engaging in USS. By sharing this learning and insight with the wider workforce and implementing changes in policy and practice at setting level, some settings' overall capability to meet their pupils' needs was perceived to have increased. A further example of increased setting-level capability is a FE setting that engaged in the EFT College SEND Provider Review; subsequently, the setting developed its processes and support provision for students with higher-level needs.

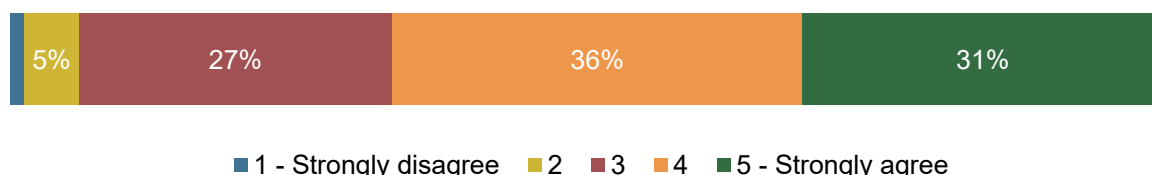
I do strongly feel that there's now a strong mechanism in place for staff to go, 'I've not come across a learner with Down's Syndrome before. How do I support that learner? I could go and talk to this person. If they can't help me, they'll point me to one of the team members that can.'

*Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/ FE College setting*

## More inclusive cultures and ethos

Just over two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that because of USS there was a more inclusive culture and ethos within their setting (Figure 28). Further analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of SENCos (42%) agreed that their setting's culture and ethos was now more inclusive, compared with those in support roles (29%). Significantly more respondents who engaged in 4 or more activities (37%) than 2 activities (24%) strongly agreed that there was a more inclusive culture and ethos within their setting because of USS.

**Figure 28: Survey respondents' level of agreement with the statement 'Because of USS, within my school/college/trust there is a more inclusive culture and ethos' (n=850)**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees and several diarists, particularly those in leadership positions, described how USS had contributed to an improved culture and ethos within their setting. For example, a secondary-setting participant described how changes implemented, following internal training inspired by nasen Online CPD Units, led to a more collaborative, whole-school approach to supporting children and young people with SEND.

There's been such a shift. I think previously, some of our more established members of staff saw SEND students as a 'problem' and that they were to be 'dealt' with by the SEND team. And now, that culture does not exist here at all. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Secondary setting*

In another example, engagement in the ETF College SEND Provider Review resulted in the appointment of a Director of SEND and Inclusion. This new post was instrumental in increasing knowledge and understanding, and driving changes in attitudes to SEND – thus creating a more inclusive and supportive culture:

I think the whole culture, for every campus and every department, has changed now compared with where it was previously. I remember walking around and asking staff if they knew how many EHCPs or high-needs students they had in their class, and they couldn't answer. And now you go in and they will just reel it off. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

There is evidence that USS had helped settings to adopt more consistent policies and approaches for supporting children and young people with SEND:

Wider outcomes included an increase in staff awareness and a more unified approach to SEND across the school. The USS training has encouraged ongoing discussions on best practices, which we anticipate will continue to enhance our SEND provision in the long term. – *Diarist, SLT, College setting*

This greater consistency was perceived to foster more inclusive environments:

The team's shared understanding of inclusive strategies also strengthened communication and collective problem-solving, creating a more cohesive support network for our learners. – *Diarist, SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

USS was also reported to have inspired changes to the physical environment in some settings, which have made them more inclusive for children and young people with SEND. For example, an SLT college case study interviewee remarked that engagement in the nasen Online CPD Units, as well as ETF activities, had prompted conversations about the college environment's suitability for students with SEND. As a result, changes were made to reduce the level of noise in the reception foyer at one of the campuses, to ensure students were not overstimulated on arrival.

There's always music, there's always loud places and a banging radio in reception. We turned it off. Even our principal said, 'We've been doing this for 15 years, nobody has ever said to us, why is that on?' You can see some students shrinking away and then learning support staff having to work harder and harder because of that stimulated environment. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth form/ FE College setting*

## **Building a more inclusive culture in a primary setting**

A rural three-form entry junior school first engaged with USS in response to a growing number of pupils with a wide range of SEND. Leaders recognised the need to strengthen their whole-school approach, including how they supported pupils through the transition to secondary school. All staff undertook AET training; senior leaders, teachers and support staff also completed nasen's Online CPD Units. The SENCo accessed nasen Webinars and shared insights with colleagues across the school.

At the whole-school level, staff drew on their training to make learning environments calmer and more inclusive. Every classroom was adapted to reduce clutter. Weekly planning sessions were introduced to help pupils and staff prepare for events and ensure appropriate support was in place (e.g., ear defenders for large gatherings).

Interviewees also described changes in practice. An SLT member explained they had reflected on their presentation style and adapted their tone of voice and body language. A member of support staff reported changes to their approach, such as repeating instructions to give pupils more time to process them, and tailoring interventions to individual need.

Learning and insight from USS was also perceived to have helped embed a more inclusive culture and ethos within the setting. Interviewees described a shift in staff attitudes towards SEND, including a willingness to view behaviour through a different lens, and a stronger focus on nurturing, supportive relationships. The SENCo highlighted that the nasen Online Units on Behaviour were particularly influential in driving this change:

We were already on our path to developing a fully inclusive approach, but engaging in USS training has given us an explicit way forward.

*Case study interviewee – SLT, Primary setting*

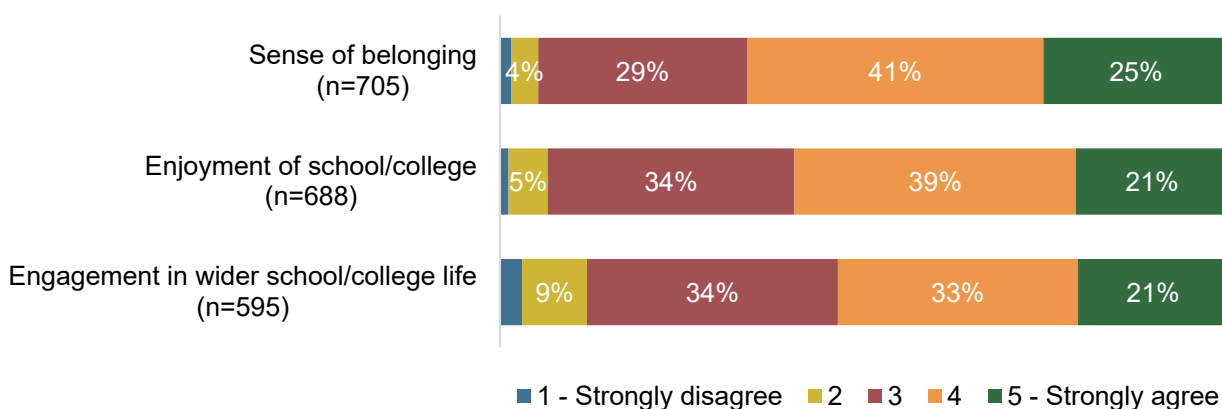
## Chapter 7: Impact on children and young people

The goal of USS is to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND, so that they are able to attain and successfully transition through education and training into sustainable employment in the long term. This chapter considers the extent to which USS-informed adaptations to teaching and support practice, along with emerging changes to policy, culture and ethos at a setting level, have resulted in better outcomes for children and young people with SEND. As to measure impacts on children and young people within the scope of this evaluation, evidence is based on the perceptions and observations of delegates and colleagues within their settings.

### Student belonging, and enjoyment and engagement in school or college life

Two-thirds of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, had improved children and young people's sense of belonging (66%). Three-fifths (60%) also agreed or strongly agreed that children and young people's enjoyment of school/college had been enhanced. Just over half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and supported practice had increased pupils' engagement in wider school/college life (Figure 29).

**Figure 29: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adaptations to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved the following outcomes for children and young people in their school/college/trust**



Source: Survey data

Case study interviewees provided some emerging evidence, particularly in secondary settings, that changes across settings have improved children and young people's enjoyment of school or college. For example, an SLT interviewee in a secondary setting observed that engagement in the nasen Online CPD Units had increased staff's knowledge about the different types of SEND. As a result, staff were adapting their

practice and implementing more inclusive language. The leader observed that students appeared to be more engaged in their learning and were enjoying school more because of this.

There's been a big shift in understanding among staff. We see happier young people enjoying school. *Interviewee – SLT, Secondary setting*

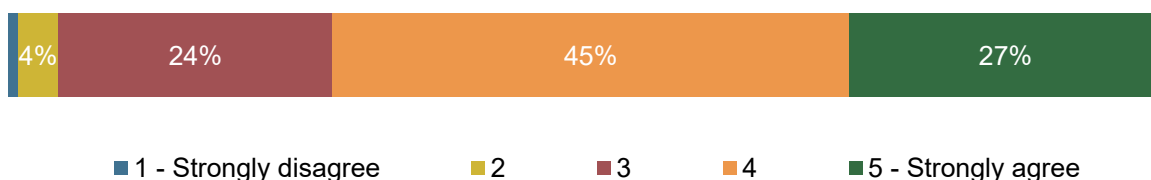
In another example, a SENCo in a secondary setting described how engaging with the nasen Professional Development Groups and online CPD modules had helped staff to embed knowledge on safe spaces for children and young people with SEND in their setting. The SENCo drew on this insight to deliver short, bite-sized staff training sessions, and designed a SEN space within the school. The SENCo explained that these changes had improved children and young peoples' engagement in school life, particularly those with SEND. In some instances, as a result of the more tailored support provision offered, some students have felt confident enough to stop using the SEN space.

I think for the students, the work that we've done around the emotionally supportive spaces has been really powerful. It's really nice when they stop using them; you know that they've found their feet. It's really good to see them leave the safe spaces we create, because that is a really good indicator of success. *Interviewee – SENCo, Secondary setting*

## Teacher and student relationships

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, have improved teacher–student relationships within their setting (Figure 30). Additional analysis revealed that a significantly higher proportion of teachers (38%) than SENCos (20%) strongly agreed that these adaptations had improved teacher–student relationships within their setting.

**Figure 30: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adaptations to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved teacher and student relationships for children and young people in their school/college/trust (n=738)**



Source: Survey data

Insight from 2 diarists in teaching roles suggested that changes to teaching practice and/or the classroom environment, informed by USS, had led to improved relationships with students. For example, a teacher at a secondary setting detailed how they used the nasen Online CPD Units on Creating an Emotionally Safe Environment to modify their classroom layout. Introducing motivational posters on the classroom walls prompted discussions with the students about how to deal with different situations. Adding personal touches to the classroom also encouraged informal discussions, which further improved the relationship between the teacher and the class.

I think the changes made to the classroom have helped students build a rapport with me faster, as well as feel more comfortable around me. This has made my provision much more effective. *Diarist – Teacher, Secondary setting*

In a further example, a support staff member in a primary setting implemented the PACE<sup>46</sup> approach following USS training, to support a student's more positive interactions with adults. This approach provided a framework that enabled the support staff member to acknowledge and validate the student's emotions. The student subsequently became less anxious and was able to remain at school for the whole day, which they had previously been unable to do.

Initially, the pupil did not want to speak to me. I followed a PACE approach, explaining that I could see they were feeling strong emotions and that I would just stay in the hall with them to make sure they were safe. This seemed to help, and the pupil seemed less anxious. I continued with this approach and the pupil was able to regulate their emotions. *Diarist – Support staff, Primary setting*

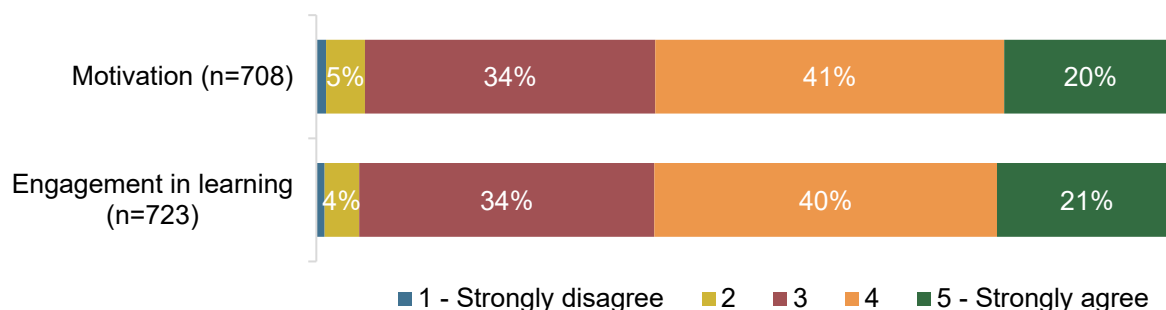
## Student motivation and engagement in learning

Around three-fifths of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, had improved children and young people's motivation (61%) and engagement in learning (61%) (Figure 31).

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<sup>46</sup> PACE stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy; this is a model that enables practitioners to create a safe and trusting environment.

**Figure 31: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adaptations to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved the following outcomes for children and young people in their school/college/trust**



Source: Survey data

A diarist in a support role described how insight from a nasen Online CPD Unit on Creating Emotionally Safe Environments had informed changes to their classroom environment. These changes were perceived to have improved pupils' motivation and engagement in their learning. In this instance, the support staff member ran an intervention for a particular student, who was identified as disengaged from class activities. The student disclosed they had been ridiculed by other students during lessons, which had made them withdraw from school life. The support staff member worked with the class teacher to facilitate a group discussion about how their classroom was a safe and supportive environment for all students. This led all students to feel more comfortable about contributing in class.

The outcome for the class teacher was that their students now feel more emotionally safe in their classroom and will contribute to lessons more. I believe there are positive outcomes for the students in the class, including feeling more relaxed, [that it's] safer to make mistakes and explore their thought processes and answers in a more relaxed way.

*Diarist – Support staff, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

Another SLT diarist in a college setting applied insight from USS during a staff meeting about classroom communication strategies for students with autism. Teaching and support staff participated in the meeting, which considered ways to reduce sensory overload for students – including the creation of quiet zones and sensory breaks. These strategies were subsequently implemented within the classroom; staff perceived that they had improved student engagement in learning.

I observed that students who previously struggled with emotional regulation were calmer and more willing to participate in lessons. *Diarist – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

The pen portrait below describes how a diarist in a primary setting applied learning from their Action Research project to improve support, for a child to engage more effectively in lessons.

### **Using insight from an Action Research project to develop play and communication skills**

A member of support staff at a two-form entry primary setting engaged with the Action Research project to enhance support provision for a preverbal pupil. They described how they applied strategies learned during their training, with the aim of developing the child's play and communication skills.

The staff member adapted their interaction with the child based upon whether they were under- or over-stimulated. They also used videos of songs to help contextualise the learning environment. For example, alongside playing with a Noah's Ark toy set, they showed the child the video for the song 'The Animals Went in Two by Two' to provide meaning to the play. The diarist perceived that the introduction of the video prevented the child from reverting to their usual repetitive behaviour of lining up new toys.

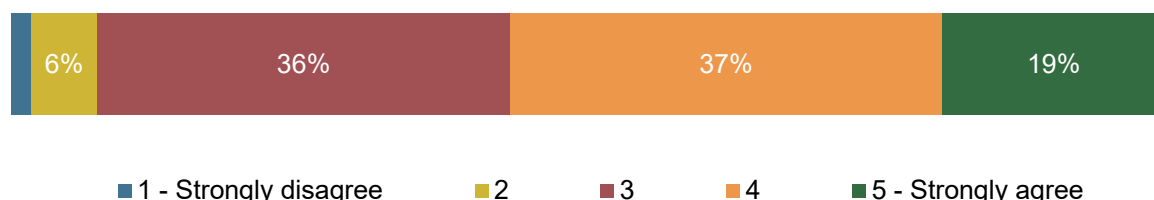
As a result of the adjusted interaction strategy, the child sustained a focus on the activities for 5–10 minutes and held their attention on other activities for up to 20 minutes. Increased engagement with the activity also improved the child's communication, as the support staff member observed the child pointing and clicking their lips as if to vocalise the names of the characters in the play set. The sustained focus helped the child transition to other activities.

Because of the child's sustained focus, I was able to switch from a play activity to a learning activity without having to give the child a break, as I had to do in the past. *Diary – Support staff, Primary setting*

## **Student behaviour**

Nearly three-fifths (57%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, had improved student behaviour within their setting (Figure 32). Further analysis showed that a significantly higher proportion of respondents from classroom teachers/EY practitioners (27%) than SENCos (14%) strongly agreed that adaptations had improved student behaviour within their setting.

**Figure 32: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adaptations to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved behaviour for children and young people in their school/college/trust (n=713)**



Source: Survey data

Two diarists observed improved behaviour among individual students and in wider classroom environments. For example, a diarist in a primary-setting teaching role outlined how engaging with the nasen Online CPD Unit on Understanding Behaviour had helped them to appreciate that poor behaviour can be a form of communication. The teacher observed the student's behaviour in order to understand triggers, and identified that the student found noise difficult, during transitions between classes and at break/lunchtimes. Implementing a visual schedule for the pupil and allowing them to change their routine resulted in reduced disruptive behaviour: they became calmer, more comfortable and confident. The support in place for this child had a positive impact for other students, as there were fewer disruptions in class. This enabled all students to engage more effectively in their learning.

The child now transitions more smoothly, with less anxiety, and can focus better when entering a new activity. *Diarist – Teacher, Primary setting*

A SLT diarist in a primary setting detailed how they had applied the AET training on autism in their classroom setting, which led to a calmer environment and improved student behaviour, as shown below.

## Using the AET environmental checklist to create positive learning environments

An SLT member of staff at a single-form primary setting used the Environmental Checklist from the AET practical support pack on Understanding Autism and Anxiety in Schools. The setting wanted to better understand how a particular classroom looked through the eyes of the children.

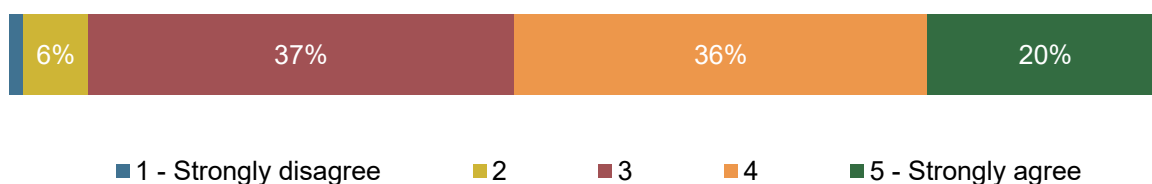
The diarist remarked how the tool revealed how cluttered the classroom environment was, with a lack of clear wall space. As a result, students were identified as feeling potentially claustrophobic. They reorganised the space and moved posters and other materials into the store cupboard.

After completing the checklist again, the diarist recorded a much more positive result. With the classroom less visually stimulating, the students appeared calmer. This checklist was shared across the setting, and they have decided to assess every area with it. The diarist explained how teachers will be expected to complete it for their own classroom every half-term.

## Peer-to-peer relationships

Nearly three-fifths (56%) of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adoptions to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, had improved peer-to-peer relationships within their setting (Figure 33).

**Figure 33: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adoptions to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved peer-to-peer relationships for children and young people in their school/college/trust (n=675)**



Source: Survey data

Few case study interviewees or diarists detailed changes in outcomes related peer-to-peer relationships. However, one diarist in a support role at a college setting reported that the learning from a nasen Spotlight Activity on Executive Function enabled them to have a one-to-one session with an autistic student, who was aggrieved that their peers had not contributed to a group activity. The diarist encouraged the student to engage in

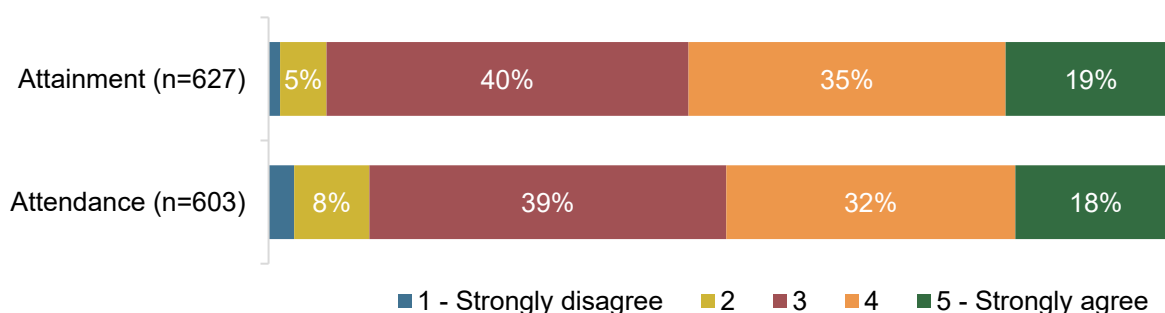
critical thinking; they were subsequently able to resolve the situation with their peers and felt less frustrated.

I believe my intervention worked well, as it allowed the student to critically reflect on their situation and identify a way forward. *Diarist – Support, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

## Attainment and attendance

Around half of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that adaptations to teaching and support practice, informed by USS, had improved children and young people's attainment (54%) and attendance (50%) (Figure 34).

**Figure 34: Teacher survey respondents' level of agreement that adaptations to teaching and support practice informed by USS have improved the following outcomes for children and young people in their school/college/trust**



Source: Survey data

Changes in patterns of attendance and attainment take time to emerge and can be influenced by a number of factors in addition to a young person's experience at school. Case study interviewees and diarists provided few examples of how adaptations informed by USS had impacted these outcomes. In a case study of a college that had engaged with the ETF College SEND Provider Review, interviewees described how this informed a review of their transition process for students identified as having complex needs. The college subsequently revised its approach. Students are now able to visit the college several times before they start their course, and internal staff training is provided for the curriculum support team, regarding students' support requirement. As a result of the changes, fewer students with SEND have withdrawn from their chosen course, and their achievement is also perceived to have improved.

More students stay on their programme and achieve. Our high-needs students have stronger attendance and a higher achievement rate than those who are not high-needs. The changes made to our transition approach has improved our achievement rate, and our retention rate, so that's really positive. *Case study interviewee – SLT, Sixth Form/FE College setting*

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

USS comprises a suite of CPD activities and resources for the school and FE workforce, predominantly in mainstream settings. Developed by nasen, ETF and AET, the offer ranges in focus and intensity; it is designed to complement a broader SEND CPD offer, which includes mandatory qualifications for SENCos. USS aims to improve the quality of mainstream support for children and young people with SEND by enhancing staff's knowledge, skills, and confidence to identify and respond to a broad range of SEND earlier and more effectively. The programme is also intended to support settings in developing inclusive, whole-school approaches. Since its launch, USS has evolved in response to changes in policy and workforce needs.

A [theory of change](#) provided the framework for the process and impact evaluation of USS, which explored the programme's reach and effectiveness – along with perceived impacts on the quality of teaching and support practice, and outcomes for young people. The findings presented in this report draw on MI and primary quantitative and qualitative data to address the key research questions set out below. Although based on the views and experiences of a relatively small proportion<sup>47</sup> of the delegates who engaged with USS, the evaluation provides useful insight into how USS has supported the professional development of the education workforce, and shaped policy and practice in a range of settings.

Based on the evidence, it is possible to conclude that USS has contributed to improvements in the quality of mainstream provision of support for children and young people with SEND, in settings that have engaged with the programme. Enhanced support provision, along with wider changes inspired by learning and insight from USS, are helping to foster more inclusive cultures. These changes have the potential to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in the long term; but evidence of this is, to date, more limited.

### How did the mainstream school and college workforce engage with USS?

Engagement in USS was high, with almost three-quarters of schools and colleges having some type of engagement with the programme annually. Importantly, for 70% of survey respondents, USS was the only source of CPD they had engaged in since the programme launched in 2022. This suggests that the programme addressed gaps in SEND CPD through its unique offer of diverse, flexible and bite-sized provision.

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<sup>47</sup> Leaders, SENCos and support staff are over-represented and teaching staff are under-represented in the sample of respondents who completed the survey, when compared with the characteristics of delegates captured in the MI.

Engagement was highest from those in teaching and support roles, who had typically engaged in 1 activity. This indicates that most delegates engage with USS to address specific needs. Fewer senior leaders, including SENCOs, engaged with the programme compared with other staff roles, and they typically participated in fewer interventions. However, when this group did engage, they often took part in more intensive interventions designed to drive strategic change. It is important to recognise that leaders were most likely to have engaged in wider SEND training and CPD, including mandatory qualifications (NASENCO and NPQs) and training and support in specific SEND (e.g., PINS), in addition to USS. Therefore, USS is one of a number of factors that contribute to changes in outcomes at a setting level.

## **Is USS well-designed, targeted and delivered?**

Although delegates did not widely recognise the USS 'brand', the quality of its content and the diversity of provision were regarded as key strengths. Facilitators were perceived to be knowledgeable and engaging, and the credibility of the resources was enhanced by the underpinning evidence base. The content could often be tailored or applied to address the needs of individuals and/or their settings.

The flexibility and accessibility of the offer were further strengths. Delegates valued the opportunity to engage with the resources at a time and in a way that worked for them. Online delivery and self-paced provision were particularly valued by SENCOs and leaders, who could integrate the training into their busy schedules. Live, interactive activities such as the peer reviews and action research were valued by senior leaders in sixth form/FE college settings, because they offered opportunities to network and share best practice. For those who had engaged in other training on SEND, the depth and breadth of most USS provision was perceived to be comparable to these other training offers.

USS successfully engaged participants across all phases, which suggests that the CPD and training was appropriately differentiated. Engagement was highest among primary settings, followed by secondary, early years, and sixth form/FE colleges. Staff from specialist and other settings also engaged in USS, although they were not the primary target audience for the programme.

## **Does USS work to improve teaching practice?**

USS had a positive impact on teaching and support practice across all roles and settings. It was particularly impactful in developing individuals' knowledge, skills and confidence, especially when participants engaged in a higher number of activities. This enabled individuals to identify SEND needs among the children and young people they support, and to develop strategies for adapting their teaching practice in response.

The training was particularly impactful for those in teaching and support roles. Furthermore, these staff have shared the learning and insight with their peers, thus enhancing the capability of others in similar roles to respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND. There is some evidence that changes in policy, processes and practices informed by USS have enabled the needs of children and young people with SEND to be identified earlier. In some cases, staff have increased their confidence in liaising with parents/carers and other professionals, in order to enable earlier identification of need, as well as to help shape support provision.

USS has impacted on the practice of leaders and SENCos to a lesser extent. However, those in senior positions have drawn on USS to develop and strengthen internal CPD provision, so that learning and insight is cascaded to their wider workforce. Most leaders and SENCos have also shared their learning with other senior leaders. Evidence of impact at a whole-school level has emerged primarily in those schools where senior leaders first engaged with the programme soon after it launched. Changes at the setting level driven by USS primarily focus on teaching and support practice. There is some evidence of wider adaptations to the physical environment; however, changes in SEND policies and processes to take more time to embed and were less common.

The nature and depth of the impact of changes varies according to existing challenges, structures and priorities across different settings. Primary settings have made the greatest adaptations to teaching practice and pastoral support. While secondary settings have started to implement changes, this has often been at a slower pace. Sixth form and FE colleges have made strategic and structural changes, including in one case appointing a dedicated SEND leadership role. A key aim of USS is to enhance transitions for children and young people with SEND; there is evidence of notable improvements in transition processes and support for those moving from Year 6 to 7 and from Year 11 to post-16 opportunities, informed by the programme.

## **Are more children and young people with SEND having their needs met, and have their outcomes improved since USS was rolled out?**

A longer-term ambition of USS, set out in the [theory of change](#), was to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The evidence regarding these distal outcomes is currently limited, although there are indications that USS has contributed to progress towards these goals. Many settings were still in the early stages of embedding learning and implementing changes; nevertheless, an improved sense of belonging and enjoyment of school were attributed to more inclusive teaching practices and classroom environments, particularly in secondary settings. Adjustments to communication strategies, especially for pupils with autism, had increased motivation and engagement in learning. Enhanced staff understanding of pupils' needs, and the provision of emotionally

safe environments, have contributed to stronger teacher–student relationships and trust. Staff have also applied their learning from USS to better understand student behaviour; this has led to calmer and more focused classroom environments, which enable all students to engage, and support attainment. Where individual sixth form/FE colleges have implemented insight from more intensive USS activities to enhance the transition from Year 11, attendance is reported to have increased, fewer students have withdrawn from their courses, and achievement has improved as a result.

## Areas for consideration

Based on insight from this evaluation, USS's impact on the mainstream support and outcomes for children and young people with SEND could be maximised by:

- greater engagement by strategic leaders with the power to implement change at the whole-setting level
- clearer branding and improved signposting to introductory, intermediate and advanced content, to ensure training is matched to individuals' existing level of knowledge and skills, the requirements of their role, and/or current challenges within their setting
- enhancing the content of the training to include more practical, context-specific examples and interactive elements
- supporting individuals to draw on the range of training and resources available through USS, in order to develop a coherent programme of CPD which sustains their engagement, in line with the DfE standards for teachers' professional development
- collecting and sharing examples of effective whole-school change and evidence of impact on pupil outcomes

# Appendix 1: Evaluation methodology

## Approach

The evaluation of the USS programme adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both secondary and primary research. USS providers (nasen, AET and ETF) collected secondary data, in the form of MI, and supplied it to CFE. The primary research included a survey of USS programme delegates, as well as case study interviews and diaries. Each of these methods is explored in more detail below.

The evaluation employed a theory-based approach, consistent with guidance from the UK Government's Magenta Book.<sup>48</sup> This approach is well suited to the USS programme, which operates within a complex policy landscape, while outcomes change over time and cannot be predicted at the outset. This approach is also suitable given the absence of a formal comparator or control group. A theory of change (ToC) underpinned the evaluation, to test fulfilment of the programme's objectives. The ToC outlined the key inputs and activities central to the USS programme, and mapped the intended outcomes and impacts for delegates, education settings and pupils (see Appendix 2). The research methods were designed to test the ToC and gather evidence regarding the programme's contribution to achieving its short-term outcomes and overall impact.

An indicator bank was developed to specify the metrics used to assess the programme's impact. Both the ToC and the indicator bank were instrumental in shaping the research tools used throughout the evaluation.

## Management information

The core providers of USS (including nasen, AET and ETF) collected the MI for the period spanning the 2021/2022 and 2024/2025 academic years. The focus of the MI was to understand the programme reach, including levels of engagement. The providers supplied the MI to CFE in March and April 2025 as 3 separate datasets, which were then merged. The MI recorded the number of engagements in the training. Each provider inserted a pseudonymised identifier, to enable the number of unique individual delegates who participated in USS activity to be calculated for each provider. However, the pseudonymised identifiers were not transferable across the datasets, which meant it was not possible to link them at the individual level; as such, there were likely to be duplicates between the 3 MI datasets.

While there were similar variables in each of the 3 datasets (including fields regarding delegates' role, setting, geographical location, and the type of training they had engaged

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<sup>48</sup> More detail can be found in the Magenta Book: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>

in), the AET MI data was recorded using 2 different formats, forming two separate datasets:

- aggregate counts of delegates at each training session. These counts included data fields for session date and region
- individual delegate data collected via feedback forms, including fields for delegate setting and role. Individual delegate data represented around 50% of the aggregate counts

Both AET datasets have been used in this report. The aggregate counts informed the programme's reach, while the individual delegate data contributed to understanding delegates' characteristics.

Further data cleaning and processing was undertaken by CFE to ensure consistency across all MI datasets, as well as comparability with the survey data. This primarily involved delegates' role and setting, with assumptions made when deriving the classification system and coding of educational settings and roles.

The USS activities within in the MI were coded to reflect those utilised within the survey.<sup>49</sup> Appendix 3 provides more details of how the USS activities within the MI reflect those included in the survey of programme delegates.

It was originally intended to use the MI to create the survey sampling frame, and to link survey responses at the individual level. However, at the outset of the programme, due to data sharing restrictions, it was not possible to share data at the individual level. This meant that the MI and survey data were analysed separately. The report's main analysis of the MI considered the number of individual delegates who engaged in the training, number of engagements by academic year (2021/2022, 2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025), regional coverage, as well as delegates' role and setting.

## Survey of programme delegates

A survey of programme delegates was designed to supplement the MI, this included questions relating to:

- delegates' characteristics (e.g., role, setting, length in role, SEND responsibilities)
- USS activities engaged in, and their usefulness
- delegates' views and experiences of USS
- perceived impacts of USS on individual practice

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<sup>49</sup> The MI does not include any data relating to the following activities included in the survey: Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders (nasen), Downloadable Resources (nasen), Action Research (University of Derby), Lesson Study (University of Derby), and Big Idea for SEND (Sea View Trust).

- perceived impacts of USS on educational settings' approaches to supporting children and young people with SEND
- perceived impacts of USS on pupil outcomes

The survey was disseminated on 3 separate occasions, to maximise coverage across the duration of the programme. These were:

- **On-programme and impact survey** (January 2024 to March 2024): Disseminated to delegates who first participated in the programme between April 2022 and March 2024. Those who had engaged between April 2022 and July 2023 were asked all questions, including questions relating to perceived impacts (n=519). For those who engaged first in the 2023/2024 academic year, the survey asked about their experiences of USS only (n=154).
- **On-programme survey only** (September 2024 to October 2024): Disseminated to capture perceptions from additional delegates who had engaged in the programme since January 2024 (n=256). The survey did not ask delegates about their perceived impacts of the programme.
- **On-programme and impact survey** (February 2025 to April 2025): Disseminated to all delegates who had engaged in the programme since April 2022, to capture insight from additional delegates who had participated in the training, and perceptions about impact (n=731), since October 2024.

In total, there were 1,660 usable responses to the survey. Table 10 presents a breakdown of survey responses by each fieldwork period.

**Table 10: Breakdown of survey responses by fieldwork period**

Fieldwork period	Number of usable responses	Proportion of usable responses
January 2024 – March 2024	673	41%
September 2024 – October 2024	256	15%
February 2025 – April 2025	731	44%
<b>Total</b>	1,660	100%

Survey links were disseminated directly to delegates via nasen and ETF. Nasen also delivered survey links to delegates who had engaged with the training from the University of Derby and Sea View Trust. To reflect the AET's delivery model, unique survey links were sent to delegates via each local authority. AET developed a central registration

portal prior to the final fieldwork period, which enabled the AET survey links to be disseminated directly to delegates.

The characteristics of survey respondents did not fully reflect those in the MI. Analysis was conducted to explore the representativeness of the samples. Several significant differences were found between the MI and survey data:

- more individuals in the MI were from primary (57%) and early years (9%) settings than in the survey (41%; 6%)
- more survey respondents were from secondary (20%) and sixth form/FE colleges (19%) settings than in the MI (16%; 4%)
- more survey respondents were from leadership (23%) or SENCo (28%) roles than in the MI (4%; 7%)
- more individuals in the MI were from teaching (42%) and support (36%) roles than in the survey (15%; 27%)

As the survey was snowballed to delegates via the training providers and there were no unique individual links, it is possible that there were duplicated responses to the survey. Survey data from all 3 fieldwork periods were merged and top-line analysis was conducted, followed by column proportion z-tests, to explore the any associations between different respondent and setting characteristics.

## **Qualitative research**

Two qualitative methods were used to further supplement the survey findings to understand how USS has helped the education workforce in the following ways:

- how individuals acquire knowledge, skills and confidence to effectively identify and respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND
- how settings have used the learning and insight from USS to drive change in attitudes and approaches to SEND at the whole-school/college/trust level, thereby fostering more inclusive cultures
- how adaptations to teaching and support practice have resulted in perceived improvement in the outcomes of children and young people

## **Case study interviews**

Seven case studies, comprising a total of 17 interviews were undertaken with programme delegates and wider staff across all settings, in order to gain insight and learning about how USS has been shared to drive change at a whole-setting level. A recall question was included in the survey. Case studies were selected from those who consented to recontact. The sample took into account setting and role, and the volume of USS activities and resources that delegates had engaged with.

Of the 17 delegates and wider staff interviewed, 3 were from primary settings, 1 was from a secondary setting, and 3 were from sixth form/FE college settings. Case studies were undertaken after each survey fieldwork period.

A further 5 interviews were carried out with delegates from secondary settings between June and July 2025, to ensure equivalent coverage across all educational settings.

### **Diary entries**

Programme delegates completed reflective diaries over a period of 6 weeks, documenting up to 3 weekly examples of how they applied USS learning in their roles. Diarists were also asked to reflect on any enablers or barriers they faced while implementing their training, as well as any perceived outcomes for themselves, their wider setting, or children and young people. Similar to interviewees, diarists were recruited via a survey recontact question, and selected based on setting and role, after all phases of the survey dissemination.

In total, 34 individual delegates completed their diary entries, split by the following settings: 2 early years settings, 14 primary settings, 10 secondary schools, 7 sixth form/FE college settings, and 1 all-through school.

All interviews and diary entries were coded thematically, guided by the ToC and associated indicator bank.

## Appendix 2: Theory of change step-by-step

There follows a theory of change diagram for Universal SEND that charts how inputs feed into activities, which feed into outputs, outcomes (short to medium term) and impacts (medium to long term).

A distinction is made between short- to medium-term outcomes that are in scope for being measured in the evaluation, and longer-term outcomes/impacts which are out of scope from being measured as likely occurring outside the evaluation time frame.

### **Inputs include:**

1. £11.76 million funding.
2. A delivery contract (between nasen, ETF, AET and DfE).
3. Infrastructure, systems and processes, including facilitators, centres of excellence, peer mentors, community networks, professional development.
4. Resources including training materials and personnel and capacity.
5. Comms and marketing.

### **These would feed into in the following activities:**

1. Online CPD units.
2. Online networking sessions and webinars.
3. Autism CPD and resources.
4. SEND handbook and resources.
5. Professional development groups.
6. Peer reviews.
7. Peer mentoring.
8. Action research and lesson study.
9. Big Ideas for SEND project.
10. Community networks.

### **These activities would result in the following measurable outputs:**

1. Number of staff engaging in CPD to support children and young people with SEND.
2. Characteristics of staff trained in CPD to support children and young people with SEND.
3. Geographical reach of CPD to support children and young people with SEND.
4. Educational settings of the staff trained in CPD to support children and young people with SEND.

### **These outputs would result in the following measurable short-term outcomes:**

1. An increase in SEND knowledge among staff.
2. An increase in skills among staff to respond to SEND.
3. Staff better able to adapt teaching practice to respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND.

4. An increase in staff confidence in their ability to identify SEND among children and young people. This would, in turn, lead to earlier identification of SEND among children and young people.
5. Staff are more confident to liaise with parents, carers and other professionals about children's and young people's SEND. This would, in turn, result in improved job satisfaction.

**Medium-term measurable outcomes would include:**

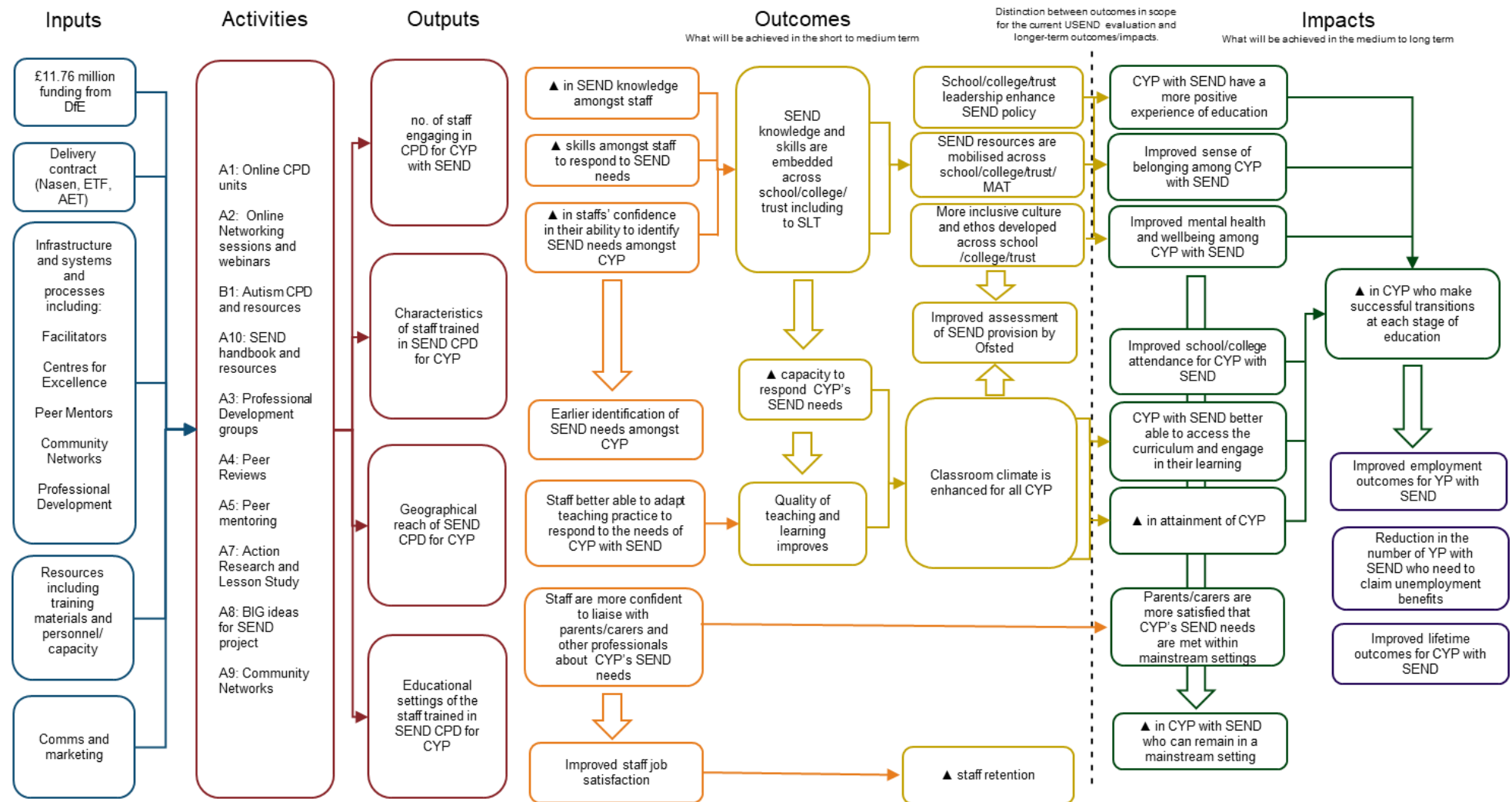
1. Increased SEND knowledge, skills and confidence, resulting in SEND knowledge and skills being embedded across schools, colleges and trusts, including to SLT. This, in turn, results in increased capacity to respond to the needs of children and young people with SEND.
2. This, and staff ability to adapt their teaching practice, results in improved quality of teaching and learning.
3. Embedded knowledge and skills across the setting results in:
  - a. schools, colleges and trusts enhancing SEND policy
  - b. SEND resources being mobilised across the school, college, trust or MAT
  - c. A more inclusive culture and ethos having been developed across the school, college or trust
4. Improved capacity to respond to SEND needs and improved quality of teaching and learning result in an enhanced classroom climate for all children and young people.
5. Improved job satisfaction results in increased staff retention.

**These short- and medium-term outcomes would result in the following long-term outcomes (not in scope for this evaluation, as they fell outside the timeframe of the research):**

1. An enhanced SEND policy, mobilisation of resources and inclusive culture and ethos mean children and young people with SEND have:
  - a. a more positive experience of education
  - b. an improved sense of belonging
  - c. improved mental health and wellbeing
2. This, in turn, along with an enhanced classroom climate for all children and young people, results in:
  - a. improved attendance for children and young people with SEND
  - b. a better ability for them to access the curriculum and engage with their learning
  - c. an increase in children's and young people's attainment
3. This, in turn, along with improved staff confidence at liaising with parents and carers and with other professionals, results in parents and carers who are more satisfied that the needs of children and young people with SEND are being met within mainstream settings.
4. This, in turn, results in an increase in children and young people with SEND who can remain in a mainstream setting.

5. More positive experiences, an improved sense of belonging and mental health, improved school or college attendance, better ability to access the curriculum and engage in learning, and increased attainment among children and young people with SEND result in an increase in children and young people with SEND who make successful transitions at each stage of education.
6. This, in turn, would result in:
  - a. improved employment outcomes for young people with SEND
  - b. a reduction in the number of young people with SEND who need to claim unemployment benefits
  - c. improved lifetime outcomes for children and young people with SEND

## Appendix 2: Theory of change diagram



## Appendix 3: Activities offered

**Table 11: Correspondence of activity type categories between MI and survey data**

MI activity type category	Corresponding survey category
AET activity	Autism Training – AET
ETF College SEND Review	College SEND Provider Review – ETF
ETF Communities of Practice	Community of Practice – ETF
ETF SEND Events	Webinar or Live Sessions – ETF
nasen Online Units	Online CPD Units – WSS/nasen
nasen Live Discussions	Live Discussion Session – WSS/nasen
nasen Live Discussions	Specialist Spotlight: Live Sessions – WSS/nasen
nasen Responsive Webinars	Live Webinars – WSS/nasen
nasen PD Groups	Professional Development Groups – WSS/nasen
nasen Preparation for Adulthood	Preparation for Adulthood from the Earliest Years Self Review Training – WSS/nasen
N/A	Peer Mentoring Support for School Leaders – WSS/nasen
N/A	Downloadable resources – e.g., Teacher Handbook; SEND – WSS/nasen
N/A	Big Idea for SEND – Sea View Trust
N/A	Action Research – University of Derby
N/A	Lesson Study – University of Derby

## Appendix 4: Data tables

**Table 12: Survey respondents' educational setting**

Setting	Individuals	%
Early years	100	6%
Primary school	642	39%
Secondary school	334	20%
All-through school	137	8%
Sixth form / FE college	311	19%
Other	128	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,652</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey data

**Table 13: Survey respondents' role**

Role	Individuals	%
Leadership	378	23%
Teaching	252	15%
SENCo	465	28%
Support	442	27%
Other	123	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,660</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey data

**Table 14: Survey respondents' academic year of engagement in USS**

Year	Individuals	%
2021/2022	438	26%
2022/2023	550	33%
2023/2024	439	26%
2024/2025	233	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,660</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey data

**Table 15: Survey respondents' number of years in role**

Years	Individuals	%
0–2	489	31%
3–5	442	28%
6–10	323	20%
11+	322	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,576</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey data

**Table 16: Whether survey respondents have additional responsibilities**

Additional responsibilities	Individuals	%
Yes	432	26%
No	515	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>947</b>	<b>57%</b>

Source: Survey data

**Table 17: Survey respondents' number of activities engaged in**

<b>Number of activities engaged in</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1</b>	627	38%
<b>2</b>	379	23%
<b>3</b>	320	19%
<b>4</b>	181	11%
<b>5</b>	84	5%
<b>6</b>	31	2%
<b>7</b>	15	1%
<b>8</b>	13	1%
<b>9</b>	3	0.2%
<b>11</b>	1	0.1%
<b>Total</b>	1,654	100%

Source: Survey data



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