



Department
for Education

Time spent on process for new Education, Health and Care Plans by local authority professionals

Research report

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Executive Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) conducted this research to better understand how much professional time is spent on the process of conducting Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments and the development and issuing of EHC plans (EHCPs). As set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Regulations 2014, and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice¹, an EHC needs assessment is an assessment of a child or young person's education, health and social care needs. It is a process carried out by the local authority to determine whether a child or young person requires an EHCP. An EHCP is a plan that specifies the child or young person's special educational needs, the outcomes sought for them, the special educational provision and any health and/or social care provision required by them. The process of the EHC needs assessment and EHCP plan development and issuing, from the point when an assessment is requested (or an local authority otherwise becomes 'responsible' for the child or young person) until any final EHCP is issued, must be done as soon as practicable and in any event take no more than 20 weeks (unless exceptions apply). The process is managed by local authority SEND teams with families and involving input from education settings, Educational Psychologists, social workers and other professionals including health professionals such as speech and language therapists.

As of January 2025, there were 638,745 children or young people with EHCPs; the number of new plans has continued to increase since their introduction in 2014. The percentage of plans issued within the statutory timeframe of 20 weeks where no statutory exceptions apply was 46.4% in 2025 a decrease from 50.3% in 2024².

The research reported on here involved gathering data from a range of different local authority professionals on the number of hours they spent on different stages of the process for the EHC needs assessment and the issuing of plans. This was then analysed to generate an estimate of the average number of hours spent by different professions on each stage and an overall estimate of the hours spent across stages and professions. These figures can be used to understand demand on the local authority workforce nationally.

¹[Children and Families Act 2014](#); [The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014](#); [Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years](#)..

² [Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2025 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

Key findings:

- Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists spent the highest number of estimated hours on average overall, both at 17.4 hours. This reflects the statutory requirement for their involvement in all EHC needs assessments.
- SEND case officers spent the next highest number of hours, at 11.3 hours on average. This was driven by their predominant role in finalising EHCPs, on which they spent 4.5 hours on average.
- SEND managers spent 9.9 hours on average, spread across all stages. This reflects their supervisory role over SEND case officer teams, and that they often take responsibility for chairing SEND panels.
- Social workers spent the lowest number of hours overall, at 4.8 hours. While social care input must be provided to local authority SEND Teams as part of the EHC needs assessment process, not all EHCPs require a social care assessment.
- In addition to the above, other professionals, including administrators, health professionals, and support staff, spent time across EHC plan stages.
- Average figures conceal often wide variation between cases, in terms of hours spent. Findings suggest that some cases require a substantial input and are likely to have a disproportionate impact on professional workload.
- Not all respondents were equally involved all stages. SEND managers were most consistently involved across all stages.
- We estimate the total number of hours spent by local authority professionals on development and issuing of new EHC plans to be between 56 and 68 hours.
- The research cannot be used to draw conclusions on the overall timeliness of the EHCP process or time spent on any EHCP. E.g., the research did not capture time spent on EHC plan reviews or tribunals, nor captures the time spent by professionals other than employed by the local authority, such as education or health professionals.

Introduction

In July and August 2025, DfE conducted a survey of local authority professions to understand how many hours they spent on the processes for EHC needs assessments and the developing and issuing of EHCPs. These processes require substantial professional input as well as information from parents and young people to ensure that the decisions made are based on robust evidence. However, there is a lack of reliable figures on the actual number of professional hours required and spent across all stages of the process and across all professionals. This has implications for understanding demand for professional time, and more broadly the required supply of the specialist workforce required to manage the demands of this process.

The combined processes for applying for and delivering an EHC needs assessment and developing and issuing an EHCP have a statutory process broken down into different stages: initial application, decision to assess, EHC needs assessment, decision to issue, and finalising plans. Local authorities must conclude that process as soon as practicable and in any event within 20 weeks unless certain exceptions apply. Each of these stages require a range of administrative, consultative, and advisory activities from a range of different professionals, who will also have wider responsibilities against which they need to balance their working time. Some professions, such as Educational Psychologists (EPs), have reported an increased amount of their time spent on statutory EHCP processes in recent years³. This increased demand for statutory assessments has put pressure on EP capacity to the point where it has affected their ability to deliver other facets of the service, such as early intervention work with schools, or working directly with children and young people.

This research aims to provide a best estimate of the amount of local authority workforce professional time spent on the statutory processes for EHC needs assessments and developing and issuing plans, to help understand the effects of the increasing number of assessments and plans on the SEND system and its workforce.

Caveats

There are several caveats to the data and analysis which should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- We present a tentative range for what the total estimated average number of hours spent across professions on an EHC plan is likely to be within. At best the numbers we present are an estimate and not a definitive number, as not all professions work on each case or each stage, and the extent of overlap between their involvement in individual cases is likely to vary but we don't have data on the

³ [Educational psychology services: workforce insights and impact - GOV.UK](#)

extent to which this occurs in practice. Different EHC needs assessments and EHCPs will require different combinations of professional input depending on the needs of the CYP. At a minimum, they will involve an SEND case officer, Educational Psychologist, and the SEND manager, but other professionals such as social workers or Speech and Language Therapists may also be involved. The specific combination of professionals involved would reduce or increase the amount of time each professional spends on a needs assessment or plan accordingly. We have aimed to account for this variability by weighting our central estimate according to the proportion of involvement for each profession at each stage.

- We captured data on just over 2,500 EHC plans, however it is not possible to assess whether the 3 recent EHC plans respondents reported on are typical of a professional's usual workload.
- The estimated average hours presented here should not be used to estimate the total timeliness of the whole EHC plan process. This research asked for the number of hours spent on specific tasks related to the stages of the EHC needs assessment and EHCP plan development and issuing process. However, it does not account for the waiting time involved in resolving tasks, for example in waiting for responses to requests for information, or confirmation of decisions or where consultation with others is under way.
- The time spent on EHC needs assessment and EHCP processes may not necessarily reflect the time required to do this work, but rather the time professionals have available. High overall caseloads of EHCPs, both for new applications and existing plans, may result in SEND case officers having less time than ideally needed on different stages of the process. The time they spent should be seen in context of their wider workload. For example, as well as processing new EHC needs assessment applications, SEND case officers and managers may concurrently be responsible for annual reviews and phase transfers of existing EHCPs or assisting with tribunals. The research did not ask about hours spent on reviews and re-assessment, nor any time spent on mediation or tribunals in relation to EHC plans. This means not all hours local authority professionals work on EHC plans overall are included.
- Reported averages for individuals may be affected by how the EHC needs assessment and EHC plan development and issuing process is organised in the local authority they represent. Different local authorities organise their SEND teams differently, possibly due to the size of the local authority itself or size of caseload. This means not all SEND case officers are involved in every stage of the process behind the EHC needs assessment or developing or issuing EHCPs.

Some may focus on one or two stages, such as finalising plans, with others focusing on other stages⁴.

- The reported hours do not reflect the total hours spent on the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process by all professionals who may be involved. Non-local authority-employed professionals, including SENCOs (based in schools), and Allied Health Professionals such as Speech and Language Therapists or Occupational Therapists (based in the local health service) often have substantial involvement in the EHC needs assessment process or in developing or issuing plans. However, we did not collect data from these workforces.

⁴ See for example: [Laverick and Baron \(2024\)](#).

Background

The EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process

The EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process have a combined statutory timeline of no more than 20 weeks, unless exceptions apply. An application can be made to the local authority⁵ for them to conduct a needs assessment to determine whether it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with a plan. There is a 6-week period for the local authority to gather initial evidence to inform a decision on whether an assessment should take place. If it is agreed an assessment should take place, there is a further 10-week period for the EHC needs assessment, formally managed by a local authority SEND team with advice from an Educational Psychologist along with other professions where necessary, to determine if a plan should be issued. Decisions to assess and decisions to issue are made by the local authority, often informed by a multi-agency SEND panel⁶ as soon as practicable, typically at weeks 6 and 16, respectively. If the decision to issue a plan is made, the SEND team will then draft the plan, consult with the family on their preferred placement, and with the education setting identified, before the finalised plan is issued by week 20⁷.

Local authority professionals involved in the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process

SEND case officers and managers

The process is managed by the SEND team, made up of case officers and managers⁸. They consult with families, specialists and any education setting to gather evidence to inform the decisions to assess, collate the evidence for the EHC needs assessment, and on the decision to issue. They are also responsible for drafting final plans, consulting with parents or young people on preference for a specific placement, and consulting with any settings that it may need to name on the final plan.

The work of the **SEND case officer** is organised differently across different local authorities⁹. In some, case officers may be responsible for the entire end-to-end

⁵ Anybody can make a request for an EHC needs assessment; often it is done by the school or parents, or sometimes by the young person themselves if they are over 16.

⁶ This panel is known by different names in different local authorities.

⁷ The statutory timescales for the EHC needs assessment and plan development are described in the SEND code of practice, p154: [SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](#)

⁸ The specific role titles and allocation of work may vary between local authorities.

⁹ Laverick, T and Baron, R. (2024): Understanding Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Assessment and Review Team experiences to improve and inform special educational needs and disabilities systems in

processes for the EHC needs assessment and the development and issuing of plans, while in others they only focus on certain stages. The current findings confirm that not all respondents from this profession were involved in all stages of the process.

SEND case officers are also responsible for ensuring EHCPs are maintained and kept up to date through the annual review process. They must also review and amend plans ahead of a phase transfer in education to ensure that plans accurately reflect the child or young person's needs for the next stage, as well as including any named setting to deliver the provision set out in the plan. Case officers may also support the local authority in preparing for mediation and tribunals in the event where an EHCP decision is appealed. While the current research focuses on the EHC needs assessment and EHCP plan development and issuing processes only, this wider workload, as well as the number of (new) EHC applications allocated to that case officer, will likely impact on the time available to work on any individual EHCP.

SEND managers support case officers in their work, dealing with complex cases, and may sit on or chair multi-agency SEND panels. They also liaise with other parts of the local authority (including Educational Psychology team, and children's social care), deal with complaints and requests for mediation and tribunal. Their supervisory role means they don't necessarily have their own caseload but will be regularly consulted on different stages of the EHC needs assessments and plan development and issuing process.

Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists

EPs must by law provide advice in relation to every EHC needs assessment. They observe and consult with the child or young person, family, and any setting to recommend what support the child or young person will need. Beyond their role in the statutory process, EPs support individual children and young people, consult with schools, offer staff training, undertake early intervention, and develop and implement systemic approaches such as developing policies and practices at the school or local authority level¹⁰.

They may also work with wider services including children's social care services, early help, youth offending teams, and health services (e.g. GPs, CAMHS, Speech and Language Therapists, paediatric and mental health services), Portage and hearing impairment teams.

Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) are senior EPs who manage the EP service for the local authority and may be involved in statutory work and wider services as well.

England. *British Journal of Special Education*, 51, 479-490. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12555>

¹⁰ [Educational psychology services: workforce insights and impact - GOV.UK](#)

Children’s Social Workers and Principal Social Workers

Social workers are one of a range of professions who will provide input to the EHC needs assessment and plan development and issuing process where appropriate, depending on the specific needs of the child or young person¹¹. Free text responses from the survey indicate that some social workers also provide evidence to support initial applications or sit on the panel for the decision to assess or decision to issue. As they are based in the local authority they have been included in this research.

Other local authority staff involved in EHCPs

Local authorities employ a wide range of staff to assist with the EHCP approval process, beyond case officers, case managers, EPs, and social workers. The job roles and combinations of roles vary across local authorities and may depend on the size of the local authority, the specific way the SEND team has been organised, and the needs and kinds of provision available in that locality. For our survey we gave respondents the option to select ‘Other’ and specify their role. Responses indicated roles including trainee Educational Psychologists, Designated Social Care Officers, Access Advisors, Admin support to the SEND team, Family Help practitioners, and others. We have included this category in the analysis, but the average of hours reported should be treated with caution as it doesn’t represent a single professional role.

Non-local authority professions

Outside of the local authority, the EHCP may receive input from teachers and SENCOs, Allied Health Professions such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, and others. We did not gather data on the number of hours these professionals spent on EHCPs.

¹¹ The survey asked about children’s social workers and principal social workers specifically and not about adult social care. Some adult social care hours will have been captured in the “other professions” response category.

Methodology

To recruit respondents, email invitations were sent to all Directors of Children's Services (DCS) in England, using the contact list available publicly on the Association for Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) website. DCSs were asked to distribute the survey link to their Head of SEND (responsible for the SEND case officer teams), the Principal Educational Psychologist, and the Principal Children's Social Worker, and ask them to share further with their respective teams.

The survey asked questions on the respondents' job role, region, stage of the EHC needs assessment or plan development and issuing process they were involved in, and the number of hours they spent on the last 3 EHCPs they were involved in for the different stages of the EHCP process:

- Initial Application,
- Decision to Assess,
- EHC Needs Assessment,
- Decision to Issue, and
- Finalising Plans.

In cases where the respondent did not spend any hours on a particular stage, they were asked to leave the question blank.

The decision to ask about the last 3 EHCPs was partly to gather a larger sample from which to build the final estimate, but also to ensure responses were grounded in real examples (rather than a notional 'typical' figure) and capture some of the variation between plans. It is not possible however to assess whether these 3 EHCPs were typical of the usual workload.

The survey was open between 22nd July and 22nd August 2025 and received responses from 859 professionals across 100 local authorities. They provided data on the number of hours spent on 2,577 EHCPs where time was spent on at least one stage of the EHCP process, and this data was used to calculate our estimates of professional hours spent.

The survey also included a free text box in which respondents were invited to add anything else they felt to be of interest in relation to the topics. This yielded responses on a range of topics, information from which has been included in the report to provide context for the quantitative findings.

Analysis

An estimate of average hours was calculated for each professional group and stage, and totalled across professionals and stages. The median was used as the measure of

central tendency of hours spent (rather than the arithmetic mean) to limit the effect of outliers on the estimate.

There were a significant number of nil values¹², indicating that the respondent did not spend any time on a particular stage. To account for this and the variation in responses, the median for each stage was calculated excluding nil values, a weighting was applied based on the proportion of responses per profession that indicated involvement in the particular stage to calculate the total weighted average number of hours spent by professional per stage.

For example:

- Median number of hours (excluding nil values) for a profession for the initial appointment = 5
- Proportion of professionals indicating time spent on this phase = 40.5%
- $5 \times 40.5\% = 2.0$ weighted average median hours

There were also some large outliers for some respondents, who reported more than 20 hours spent on a single stage of the EHCP approval process. While most of these were included in the analysis to reflect variability in time spent, in one case where these were from a single respondent, they were excluded as likely reflecting an atypical caseload. One other outlier datapoint was replaced by the relevant median for that stage/profession.

¹² Both those who were left blank or '0' hours were recorded as nil responses.

Findings

The following findings cover the weighted average estimated reported hours for different professions across the whole EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process. In addition, estimates are provided for individual stages (initial application, decision to assess, EHC needs assessment, decision to issue, and finalising plans). Across all stages there was substantial reported variation including some high outliers, which show how some EHCPs require more input than others. Histograms describing this variation have been included in Annex 1.

Estimate of hours spent overall

Consistency of involvement

Respondents only provided hours where they spent any time on a particular stage. A nil response was recorded where no time was spent by the professional on a stage. This allowed us to calculate the propensity of involvement for each profession across the different stages. These proportions are included in Table 1 below and were used to calculate the weighted averages for each profession.

Table 1 Proportion of responses indicating involvement in each stage, by profession

	Initial Application	Decision to Assess	EHCNA	Decision to Issue	Finalising Plans
Educational Psychologists	40.4%	43.2%	91.2%	23.7%	21.0%
Principal Educational Psychologists	44.2%	86.3%	89.6%	66.7%	40.4%
SEND case officers	60.9%	69.2%	85.6%	78.2%	90.5%
SEND managers	85.5%	88.7%	75.9%	87.2%	79.8%
Social Workers¹³	58.6%	55.9%	72.1%	36.0%	39.6%
Other	70.3%	63.5%	78.7%	57.8%	53.7%

SEND managers reported the highest involvement across all stages apart from finalising plans where the highest level of involvement was for SEND case officers (90.5%), and EHC needs assessment where input from others, including Educational Psychologists (91.2%), Principal Educational Psychologists (89.6%) and case officers (85.6%) was higher. This is likely to reflect that SEND managers oversee a wider team who manage this process and so could be called upon in each stage to support with complex cases, sit on or chair panels and quality assure work on EHCPs.

By contrast, Educational Psychologists reported relatively lower levels of involvement than PEPs in other stages, reflecting that not all EPs will be involved in every stage for every case. The EHC needs assessment stage is the exception, with 91.2% of EP responses reporting time spent on this stage¹⁴. This reflects their statutory responsibility for providing information and advice for the assessment. Involvement of Principal

¹³ This included both children’s social workers and principal social workers.

¹⁴ The fact that this is not 100% reflects the wording of the survey question, which asked respondents about the last 3 EHC needs assessments or plans they worked on. In this case, while all EHC needs assessments must have the input of an EP, some of the respondents to the survey may have worked at a different stage on at least one of their last 3 EHCPs, with another EP inputting professionally on those EHCPs in the needs assessment stage

Educational Psychologists in this stage was similarly high at 89.6%. PEPs had higher levels of involvement than EPs in the decision to assess and decision to issue stages.

Estimates of professional hours spent on entire EHCP process

Table 2 outlines the estimated average professional hours spent on the EHCP process by different professions and across all stages.

Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists reported the highest number of hours across all stages of the process at 17.4 hours each. This is largely due to the high number of hours they report in delivering the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), in which their involvement is statutory.

The findings suggest PEPs are taking on some cases and delivering EHCNAs alongside their EP teams. It is unlikely they would both be conducting separate needs assessments on the same case. Free text responses from EPs from a few different local authorities indicate that they often have a set allocation of hours for EPs to spend on this phase (usually 12 hours) although may allow for flexibility as well in cases where the child or young person needs take more time to be assessed.

Table 2: Weighted estimated average professional hours spent on the EHCP process, by professional and stage

	Initial Application	Decision to Assess	EHCNA	Decision to Issue	Finalising Plans	Total
Educational Psychologists	2.4	1.7	12.8	0.2	0.2	17.4
Principal Educational Psychologists	2.7	1.1	12.5	0.7	0.4	17.4
SEND case officers	1.2	1.4	2.6	1.6	4.5	11.3
SEND managers	1.7	1.8	2.3	1.7	2.4	9.9
Social Workers	1.2	1.1	1.4	0.7	0.4	4.8
Other	1.4	1.3	2.4	0.6	1.6	7.2

SEND case officers reported the next highest number of total hours spent, 11.3 on average. This workforce is responsible for administering the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process, although their exact role and involvement in the different stages will vary between local authorities.

They spent the most hours on finalising plans (4.5 hours), the most for any profession involved in this stage. This stage includes drafting EHCPs based on the information provided in the EHCNA and decisions at panel. Free text responses from case officers indicate that this stage can take longer when there is a lack of suitable specialist provision locally, or if families disagree with the provision proposed in the draft plan.

SEND managers, reporting the next highest number of hours spent (9.9), had hours spread more evenly across the different stages.

Social workers reported the lowest number of total hours spent on the EHCP process. This is likely because, while social care must be consulted in an EHC needs assessment, the demands on social workers' time may be small if there is no indication that the child or young person requires a social care needs assessment or is not known to the service. As professionals from outside the SEND team, they are not directly involved in

administering the EHCP process, beyond providing advice and supporting join-up with other plans that a child or young person may have if they are known to services. Social workers' input is highest for the EHC needs assessment, although still less than any of the other professions. Free text responses to the survey suggest that social workers sometimes support families with their initial application.

Estimation of overall hours

The above figures suggest the total average time spent on an EHCP combined over local authority professions is up to 68 hours. As we did ask returns for the last three EHCPs professional spent time on, we cannot be certain where hours were reported that others from the same local authority were or were not similarly involved in inputting in this EHC plan. Therefore, we cannot ascertain whether there is some potential double counting in the above figures for SEND case officers and SEND managers, and for Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists¹⁵. As for the latter, some of the open-ended feedback suggests both might work on the same case at different times. We therefore estimate the total number of hours to fall somewhere between 56 and 68 hours, assuming a 30% overlap in SEND case officer and managers involvement, and 50% overlap in EP and PEP involvement in any one EHC plan. See Table 8 in Annex 2 for estimates with different overlap assumptions.

Variation and Outliers

The averages reported for each stage conceal sometimes substantial variation in the time taken on individual cases. This variation is a feature of local authority professions' work on the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process. For example, Educational Psychologists' reported hours spent on the EHC needs assessment stage covered a wide range with most reported hours clustering around the median (14) but with 1 in 20 spending 20 hours per EHCNA or more (see Figure 11 in Annex 1, which provides the variation of reported hours at all stages and for all professions).

Variation, with high outliers, was common in the responses from all professions and across all stages of the process, indicating that it is a consistent feature of EHC needs assessments and EHCP development and issuing process that should be borne in mind when interpreting the estimated averages for each profession. Professionals emphasised in the free text responses that the reason for this variation in time spent is the complex nature of some cases:

Time can vary wildly and it depends on what prior work has been completed by other practitioner psychologists, or the robustness and

¹⁵ Do note we combined figures for children's social workers and principal social workers in the reporting due to a lower number of respondents in these professions.

validity of previously gathered evidence and assessment – *Principal Educational Psychologist, Southwest*

As administration you are placing the referrals onto the system and liaising with SENCO/parent to maintain correct information from the application. [The amount of time spent for] each young person depends on how much evidence is then needed to be uploaded to the system. This could be one document up to 100 and the time varies with each application – *Admin Support ('Other' category), Northwest*

Time taken writing drafts depends on the quality of the reports and advice. Time is often taken chasing up additional/missing info. Consulting with schools is a large part of the job. Also I am new to role. – *SEND case officer, Northwest*

Estimate of professional hours spent by stage

The following tables for each of the stages of the EHC needs assessment and EHCP plan development and issuing process include an indication of variation through the inclusion of the maximum reported value. More detailed descriptions of variation across profession and stage can be found in Annex 1.

Initial Application

The initial application stage follows on from the submission of an application for an EHC need assessment from, e.g., a school, family, or young person. It can involve local authority staff checking whether there is sufficient evidence in the application for it to be considered by the decision-making panel, and consulting with an education setting, family, and any other relevant professionals to ensure further evidence is included if necessary. Table 3 outlines the findings on the average hours professions spent on this stage.

Table 3: Estimated average time spent on the Initial Application, by profession

	Number of EHCPs	Maximum reported hours	Unweighted Median	Weighted Median
Educational Psychologists	876	25	6	2.4
Principal Educational Psychologists	240	24	6	2.7
SEND Case officers	660	30	2	1.2
SEND managers	282	52	2	1.7
Social Workers	111	35	2	1.2
Other	408	48	2	1.4

EPs and PEPs reported the highest weighted average number of hours spent, at 2.4 and 2.7 hours, respectively. With 59.6% of EPs and 55.8% of PEPs indicating they do *not* work on this stage, the average for these professions that do is even higher, at 6 hours (unweighted mean). This suggests that although many EPs and PEPs do not regularly work on this stage (and there is no statutory requirement for them to do so), those who do can spend substantial time on it.

We know from previous research that as well as their statutory requirements to deliver EHC needs assessments, EPs also work directly with schools, providing guidance on early intervention and working directly with young people. This may account for EP involvement at this stage¹⁶.

SEND managers reported the next highest weighted average number of hours spent on the initial application, at 1.7 hours per request. Managers have oversight over a wider team of case officers, administrative and other staff and it is likely they will be involved in complex cases that need to be escalated, across all stages of the process. This profession was also the mostly likely to be involved this stage, with a percentage level of involvement of 85.5%.

SEND case officers reported the lowest number of weighted average hours on this stage (1.2). 60.9% of this profession reported spending some time on this stage. This relatively

¹⁶ [Educational psychology services: workforce insights and impact - GOV.UK](#)

low level of hours and involvement was likely due to the variation in the case officer roles across local authorities, with some officers in some local authorities only responsible for certain stages of the approval process. In cases where case officers are not involved, it may be that the initial application is managed by other job roles, such as administrative staff.

Decision to Assess

Activities related to this stage include providing professional advice, attending a multi-agency panel to reach a decision, consulting with education settings and/or parents to check on evidence, or administrative work both preparing for and summarising the findings of the panel. Table 4 summarises the survey findings for this stage.

Table 4: Estimated average time spent on the Decision to Assess, by profession

	Number of EHCPs	Maximum reported hours	Unweighted Median	Weighted Median
Educational Psychologists	876	35	4	1.7
Principal Educational Psychologists	240	35	1	1.1
SEND Case officers	660	60	2	1.4
SEND managers	282	19	2	1.8
Social Workers	111	10	2	1.1
Other	408	36	2	1.3

SEND managers reported the highest weighted average number of hours spent on this stage, at 1.8 hours. These professionals often chair the multi-agency panel that advises the local authority on the decision to assess and therefore have a consistent role in this stage, reflected also by the high percentage level of involvement (88.7%) compared to other professions.

Educational Psychologists report the next highest weighted average number of hours for this stage (1.7). If we only look at those who reported time spent on this stage, this average is higher at 4 hours. In common with the initial application stage, this also suggests that while not all EPs reported hours spent on this stage during the last 3

EHCPs they worked on, those who did had substantial involvement. Free text responses confirmed that some EPs did sit on multi-agency panels to help inform the decision to assess, either every week, or on a rota with other EPs in their service. Preparation for these panels may have added to the time spent on this stage.

SEND case officers reported an average of 1.4 hours for decision to assess. 69.2% of case officers were involved at this stage, again reflecting how this role varies across local authorities. They do not sit on the panel themselves but would typically summarise evidence to support the case being decided on, and report outcomes of the panel to parents and schools. In instances where case officers are not responsible for administering this stage it may be that other job roles such as administrative staff are doing this work.

Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA)

The EHCNA is the process by which local authorities determine whether the special educational needs of a child or young person require specialist support through an EHCP. It is typically led by the local authority and receives significant input from an Educational Psychologist. Health and Social care advice is also sought at this stage, although input from these professions may not be needed depending on the specific needs of the child or young person. It also involves further elicitation of the views of the child or young person and their parents or carers. Table 5 summarises the survey findings for this stage.

Table 5: Estimated average time spent on the EHC needs assessment, by profession

	Number of EHCPs	Maximum reported hours	Unweighted Median	Weighted Median
Educational Psychologists	876	38	14	12.8
Principal Educational Psychologists	240	24	14	12.5
SEND Case officers	660	25	3	2.6
SEND managers	282	30	3	2.3
Social Workers	111	6	2	1.4
Other	408	36	3	2.4

EPs and PEPs reported the highest weighted average number of hours for this stage, at 12.8 and 12.5, respectively. This is in line with their statutory involvement in the EHCNA. Almost all¹⁷ EPs (91.2%) and PEPs (89.6%) spent time on this stage. Free text responses confirmed that EP teams often have allocated time to deliver this stage of around 12 hours, although some reported complex cases taking longer than this.

SEND case officers reported the next highest number of hours on the EHC needs assessment, at 2.6 hours. One respondent described the typical tasks of a case officer in support of this stage:

If the panel agrees to assess, the case is allocated to a case officer. The case officer must read the request, the panel recommendation, and any existing advice, then call the parent to explain the process. This conversation can take over an hour. The officer then raises a task for business support to request statutory advice [from an Educational Psychologist and other Specialists]. Once all advice is received, the case officer must read through all reports, draft the Summary of Assessment,

¹⁷ This is not 100% likely due to the fact that this is based on the last 3 EHCPs respondents were involved in. It may be that responding EPs worked on other EHCPs at different stages. This cannot be taken as evidence that some EHC needs assessments did not have EP involvement.

hold a co-production meeting with the family and school, and prepare for the decision-making panel - *SEND case officer, Southwest*

Case officers sometimes reported delays in accessing specialist advice due to the high volume in requests, and shortages of key specialists. Following up requests for advice may have added to time spent on this stage.

Social workers reported their highest number of hours spent on any stage for the EHC needs assessment (1.4 hours). Their input at this stage can sometimes involve a consultation with families to inform their report, which they submit to the local authority.

Decision to Issue

Like the decision to assess, this stage typically involves a multi-agency panel chaired by a SEND manager, which considers the outcome of the EHCNA to help the local authority decide whether to issue an EHCP. The decision is then shared with the family or young person applying. Table 6 summarises the survey findings for this stage.

Table 6: Estimated average time spent on the Decision to Issue, by profession

	Number of EHCPs	Maximum reported hours	Unweighted Median	Weighted Median
Educational Psychologists	876	8	1	0.2
Principal Educational Psychologists	240	20	1	0.7
SEND Case officers	660	20	2	1.6
SEND managers	282	30	2	1.7
Social Workers	111	5	2	0.7
Other	408	30	1	0.6

SEND managers reported the highest weighted average number of hours for this stage, at 1.7 hours. Almost 9 in 10 responses (87.2%) from this profession included some time spent on this stage. This is likely to reflect that they are usually responsible for chairing

panel meetings. Similarly, SEND case officers report 1.6 hours spent on this stage, reflecting their administrative role in summarising evidence to prepare for the panel and liaising with families on the outcome.

By contrast, EPs reported the lowest number of average hours for this stage, at 0.2 hours. The percentage of EPs who did work on this stage was relatively low, at 23.7%. This may be partly because, as described in relation to the decision to assess, some EPs may sit on panels as part of a rota and therefore potentially not do this work as frequently as other tasks. Open text responses indicate that some EPs won't sit on a panel for a case for which they conducted the EHC needs assessment, to avoid bias. By contrast, a larger percentage of PEPs worked on this stage (66.7%), suggesting they would sit on this panel more frequently.

Finalising Plans

Once the decision has been made to issue an EHCP, the local authority needs to decide on the contents of the final plan. This includes drafting the plan, consulting with parents on their preferred provision (e.g. a particular named school or college), and consulting with any setting(s) it may need to name in the EHC plan. Much of this work would be done by the SEND case officer team, although other professions may provide advice. A summary of findings for this stage can be found in Table 7.

Table 7: Estimated average time spent on finalising plans, by profession

	Number of EHCPs	Maximum reported hours	Unweighted Median	Weighted Median
Educational Psychologists	876	9	1	0.2
Principal Educational Psychologists	240	5	1	0.4
SEND Case officers	660	50	5	4.5
SEND managers	282	50	3	2.4
Social Workers	111	5	1	0.4
Other	408	40	3	1.6

SEND case officers reported the highest weighted average number of hours of all professions for this stage, at 4.5 hours. This is in line with what is known about their central role in drafting EHCPs and liaising with families and specialists on their contents. Case officers had a level of involvement in this stage of 90.5% – the highest for this stage – indicating that this profession consistently worked on this activity. Time spent writing up plans varies, with some cases taking longer than others. Free text responses suggest plan writing could take longer, for example, when families and local authorities disagreed on the setting included in the draft plan, or when there was a lack of suitable provision locally. Time spent on plan writing also depends on the level of detail provided in the professional advice, with case officers indicating having to ask the relevant specialists for additional information in some cases.

SEND managers reported the next highest number of hours for this stage (2.4), with 79.8% of managers having spent some time on this stage. Free text responses indicated that quality assurance of draft plans was often one of the main activities conducted by managers at this stage. This can also vary in terms of length, for example they indicated this was the case when new staff write plans which need additional feedback, or due to variations in the style, format, and level of clarity provided in professional reports.

EPs' involvement in this stage was much lower, both in terms of average hours (0.2) and percentage level of involvement (21.0%). This is likely due to their advisory role; once they have completed their advice and information for the EHC needs assessment less input (if any) is needed at this final stage.

Summary and Implications

This research set out to estimate the average number of hours spent by different local authority professions on the different stages of the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process. EPs and PEPs reported the highest average number of hours spent across all stages, at 17.4 hours each. This is likely due to their statutory role in delivering the EHC needs assessment. Some EPs reported they are allocated, usually, 12 hours for this stage. The average of 12.8 hours for this stage found across all EP respondents is in line with this. PEPs reported similar hours for the EHC needs assessment (12.5). The similarity in distribution of hours suggest that some PEPs take on additional cases themselves alongside their supervisory and quality assurance work managing the EP service.

SEND case officers reported the next highest average number of hours (11.3). This was driven by their involvement in finalising plans, on which they spent 4.5 hours on average. This stage includes drafting EHCPs, which require collating advice and information from specialists, parents, and education settings, and can take longer if there is incomplete information. Disagreements over the draft final plan, or challenges in securing local provision can also make this stage take longer.

For other stages, the average number of hours reported by case officers is lower (under 3 hours). However, they tend to have busy caseloads of new and established EHCPs to manage, so may not have time to spend more than a few hours at a time to complete the necessary tasks.

SEND managers reported slightly fewer average hours than officers overall (9.9), which were more evenly spread across all stages. Their supervisory role over teams of case officers and administrative staff, and the responsibility they had for chairing multi-agency panels, likely means that they had oversight of, and therefore involvement in, all stages of the process.

Social workers (children's social workers or principal social workers) reported the fewest average number of hours across all stages (4.8). Not all EHCPs require substantive social care input, although the statutory duty over providing relevant advice and information must always be met. In cases where social workers' substantive input was required, they provide such information and advice to the EHC needs assessment and may attend decision making panels. They may also support families with their application and may support effective join-up with any other plans that a child or young person may have if they are known to services.

Beyond these average figures, all professions report substantial variation in the length of time spent on cases across different stages of the EHCP process. High outliers, often 20 hours or more, suggest that complex cases may be having a disproportionate impact on workloads of at least some professionals.

This work allowed us to calculate an estimate of average hours spent on EHC needs assessments and development and issuing of EHCPs for an estimated range that the total average number of local authority professional hours is likely to fall within, based on illustrative assumptions on the extent of overlapping involvement of various professionals. The total estimated hours ranged from 56 to 68. The data collected, however, did not allow us to precisely estimate the total average hours spent on, or overall time needed for, an EHC needs assessment and development of an EHCP from end-to-end. This is due to the range of combinations of professions that are involved across different EHCPs. Social workers do not provide detailed input on all EHCPs, while SEND case officers may work only on some stages of the approval process. On other stages there is possible double counting due to different professionals with a similar background picking up the same work on different EHC plans. Moreover, we have not included time spent on maintaining and reviewing EHCPs or tribunal cases, which is a substantial part of the case officer role, nor were we able to match responses from different professionals to see if they were involved in the same case. The figures presented here also do not account for the length of the entire process which will include periods where others outside the local authority are consulted, for example.

Future research that tracks real individual cases through the EHC needs assessment and EHCP development and issuing process, and that quantifies hours from different professions, including administrative, health and school staff could provide an accurate picture of the totality of professional input for establishing a single EHC plan, although this would likely vary between cases. In addition, a focus on the time use of individual professions (e.g. SEND case officers and managers) across all their responsibilities could provide information on time spent on existing EHCPs, i.e. in relation to annual reviews and re-assessments, alongside new cases to inform understanding of overall workload pressures and how these are shared across the workforce.

Annex 1: Variation of reported hours, by profession

There was often substantial variation in reported responses. The following figures describe this variation. Largely speaking they follow a similar pattern: clustering of responses towards the lower end of the scale, with a long tail of higher-than-average responses, including some very high outliers. The exception to this is the reported hours spent on the EHC needs assessment by EPs and PEPs. In this case responses cluster around a central range of hours spent (between 12 and 15), with responses of lower or higher reported hours spread out at either end of the scale (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

Some respondents included fractions of an hour as their reported hours e.g. 0.2, 4.5 hours etc. Therefore, each of the bars on the histograms covers the ranges up to the number displayed on the axis: 0.1 to 1 = 1, 1.1 to 2 = 2, 2.1 to 3 = 3, and so on.

Initial application:

Figure 1: Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the initial application

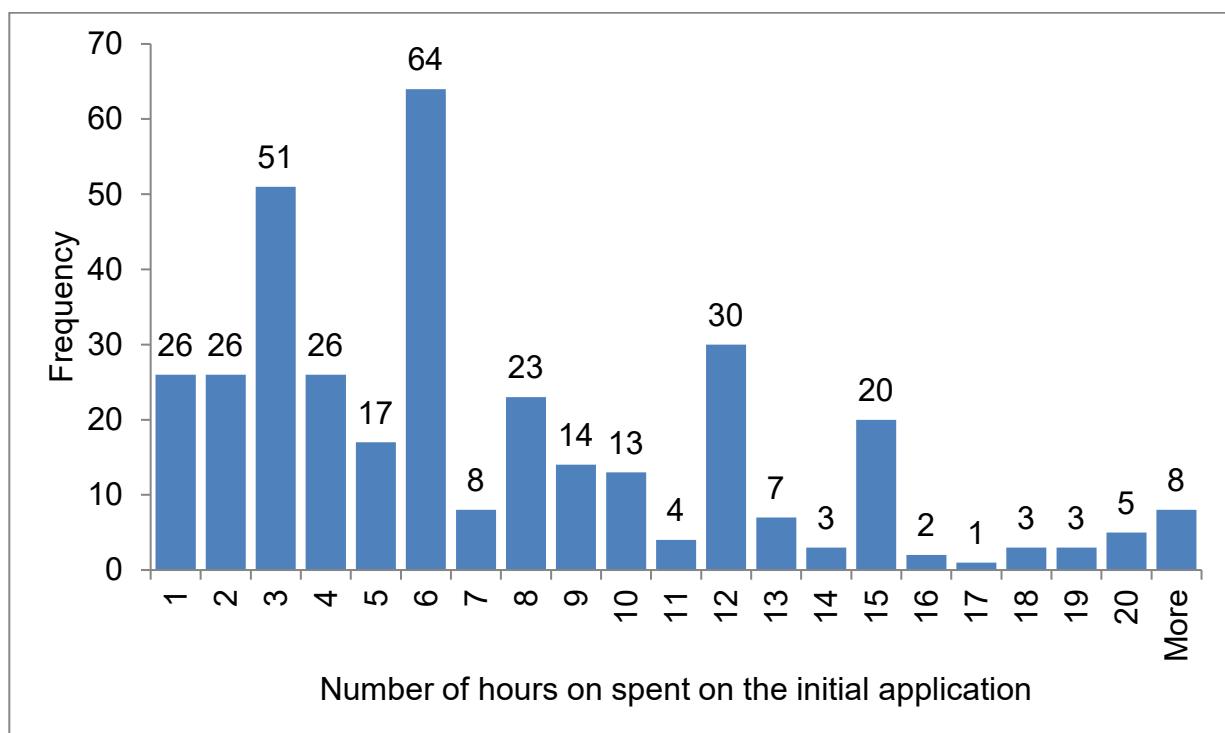


Figure 2: Principal Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the initial application

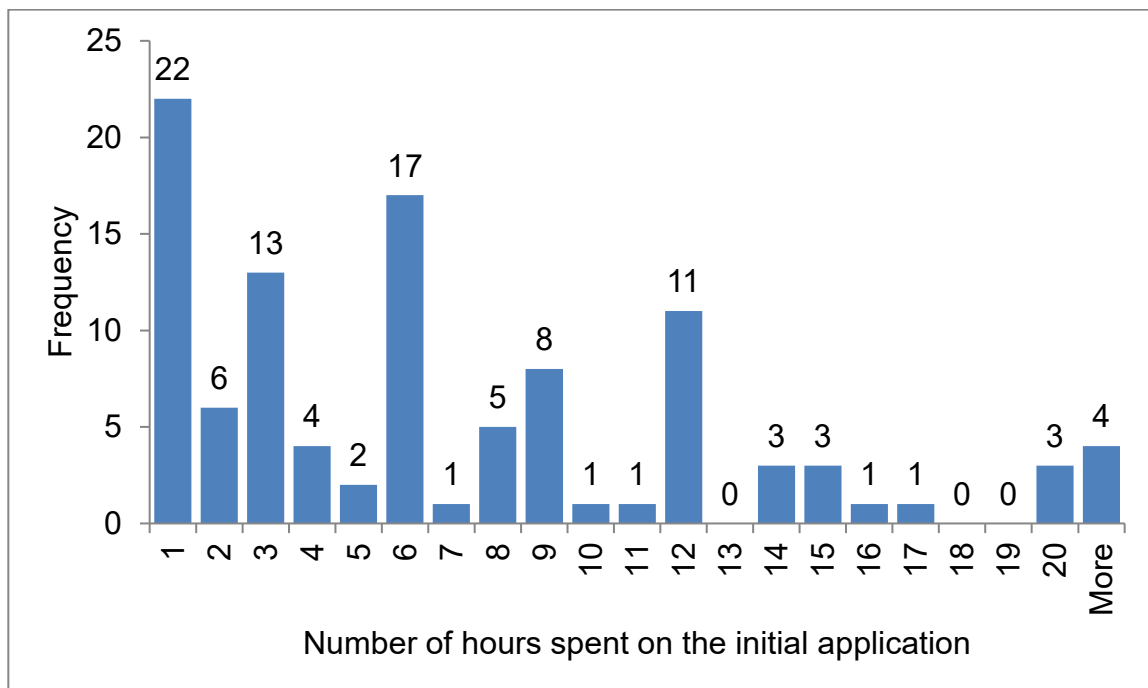


Figure 3: SEND case officers: distribution of number of hours spent on the initial application

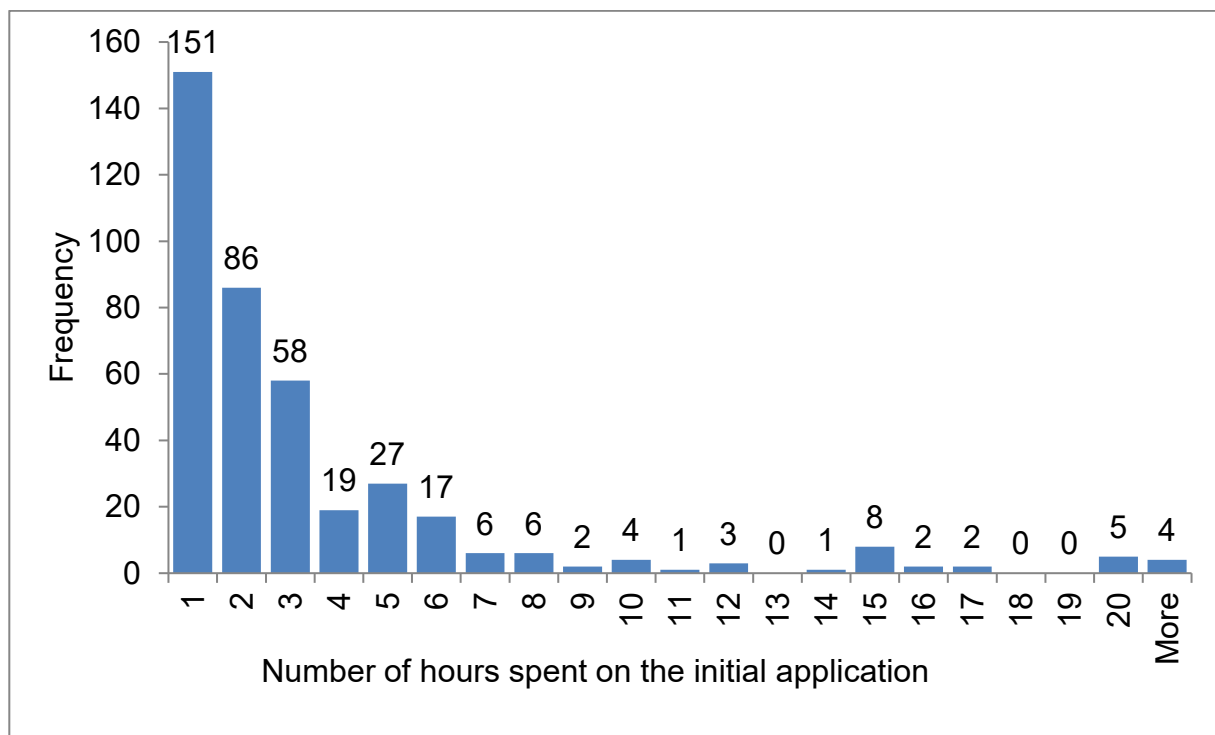


Figure 4: SEND managers: distribution of number of hours spent on the initial application

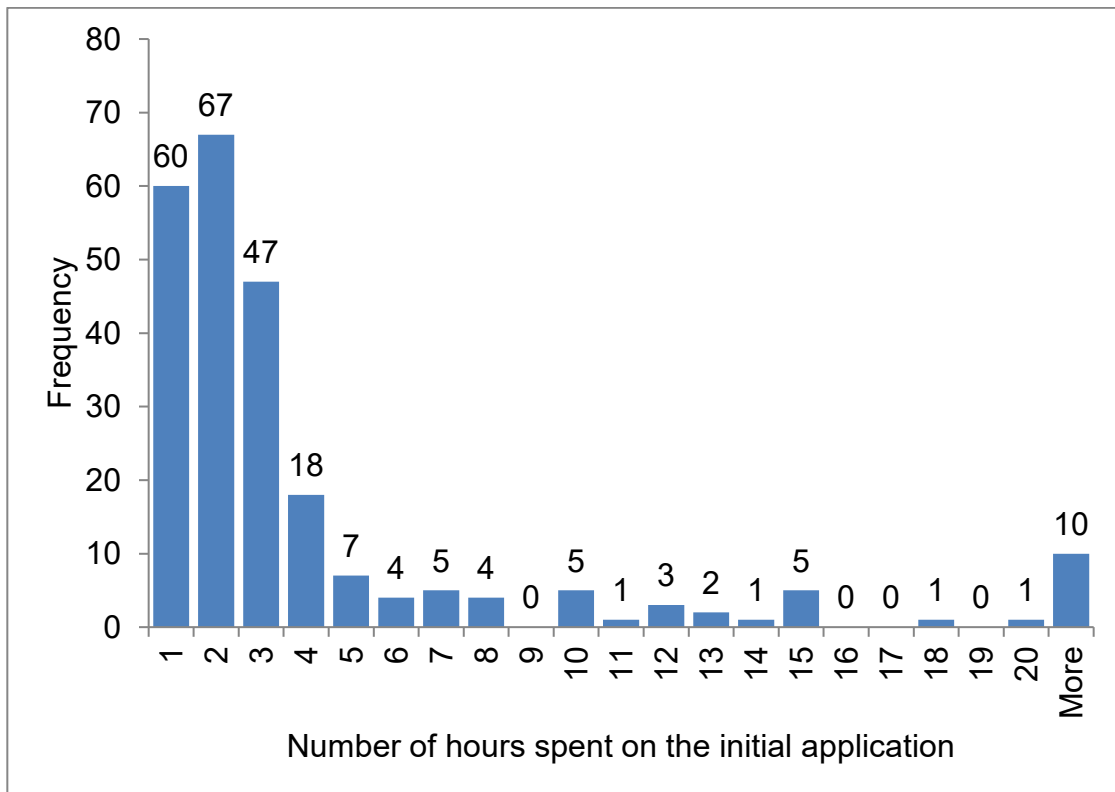
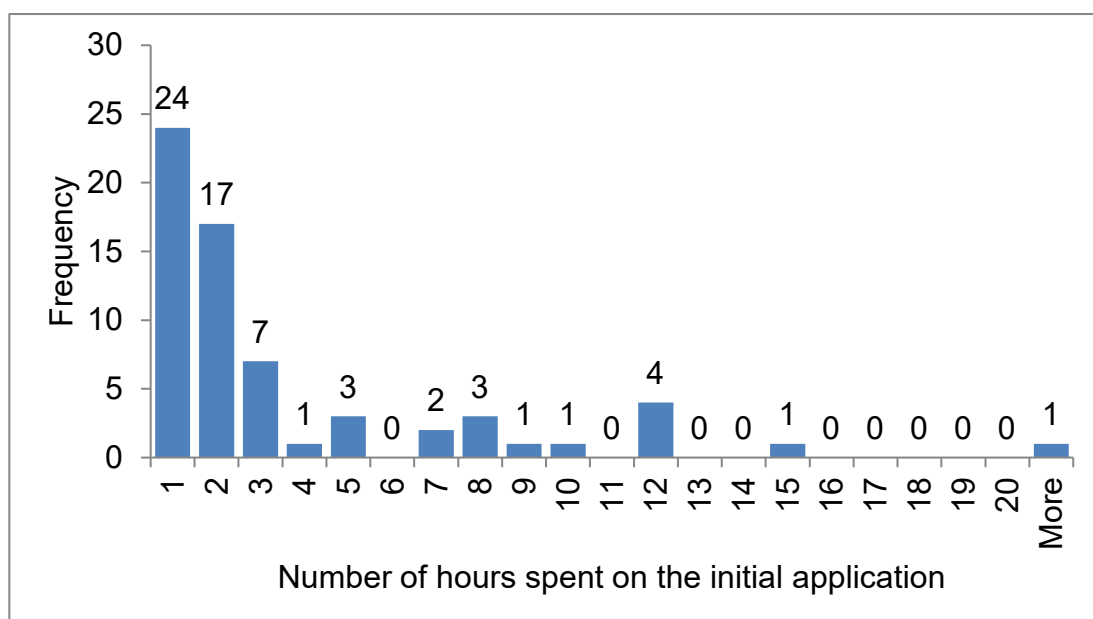


Figure 5: Social workers: distribution of number of hours spent on the initial application



Decision to assess

Figure 6: Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to assess

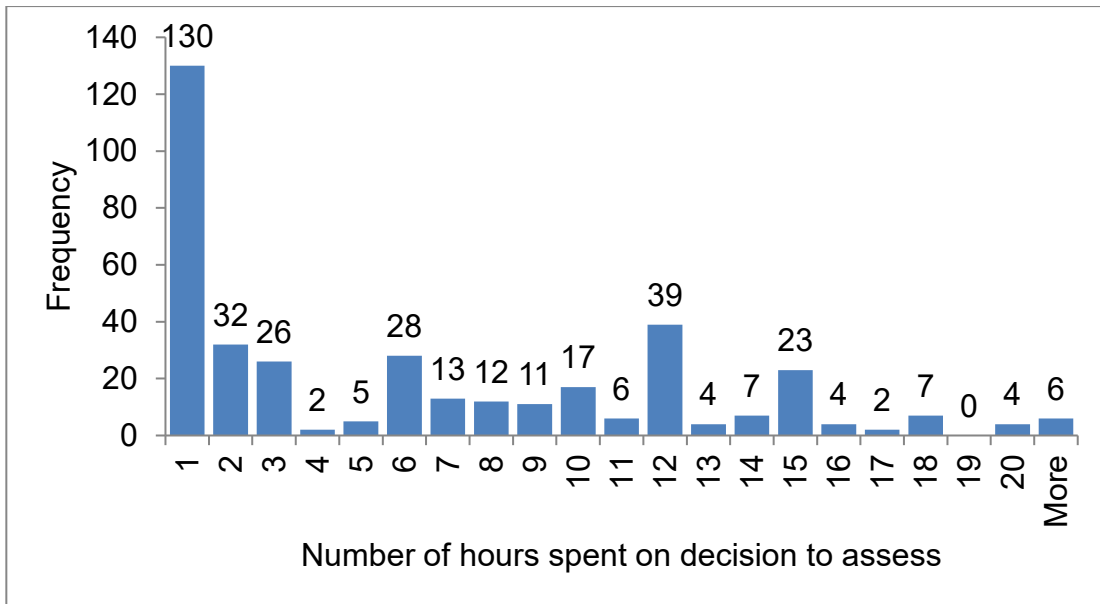


Figure 7: Principal Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to assess

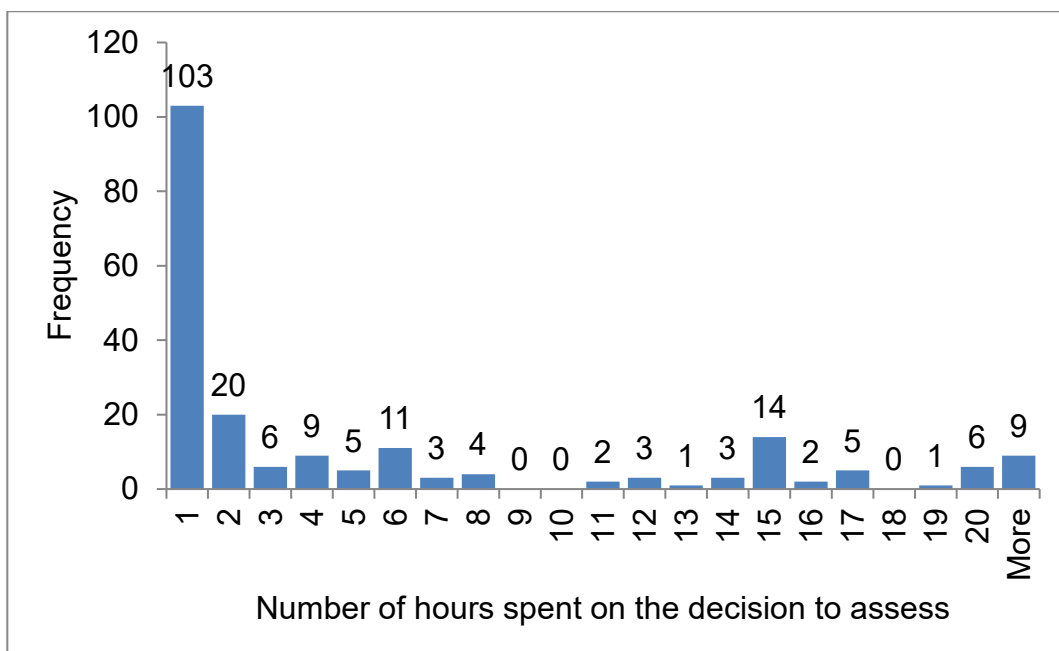


Figure 8: SEND case officers: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to assess

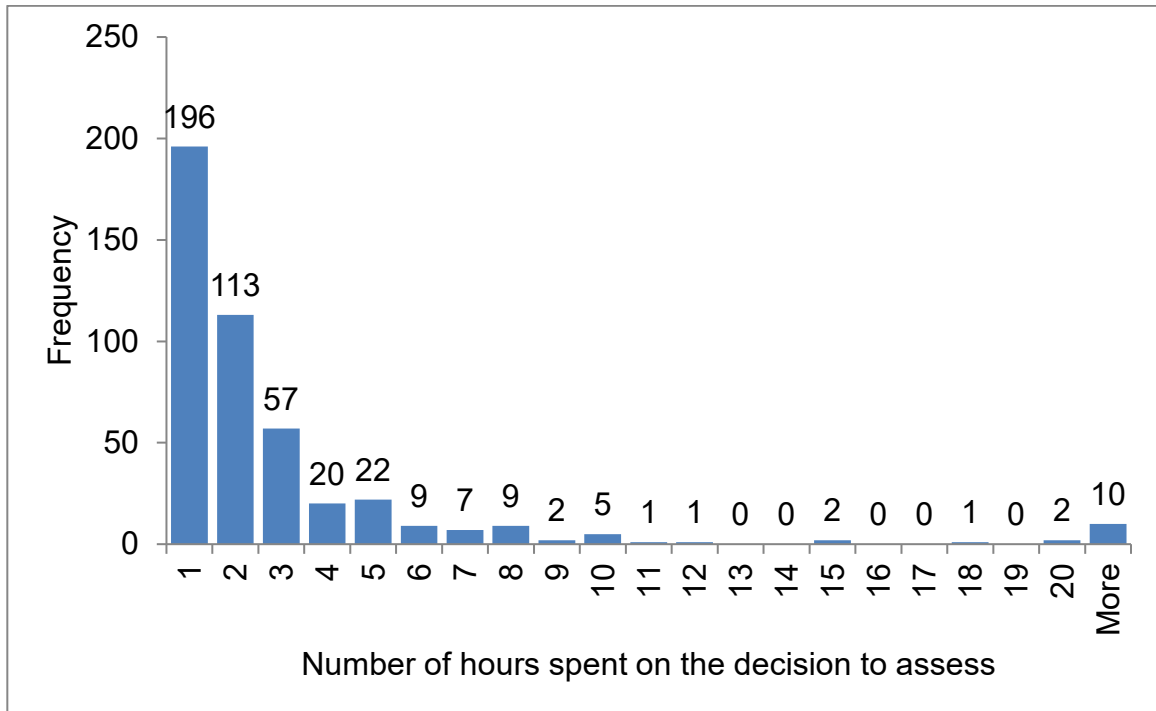


Figure 9: SEND managers: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to assess

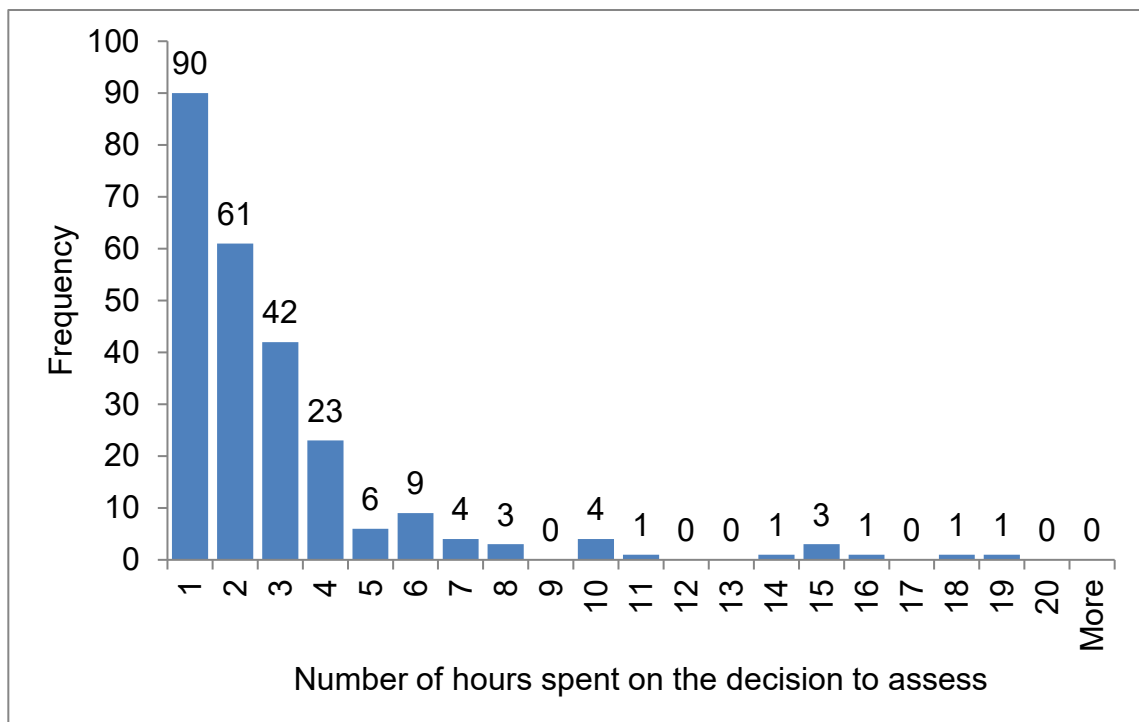
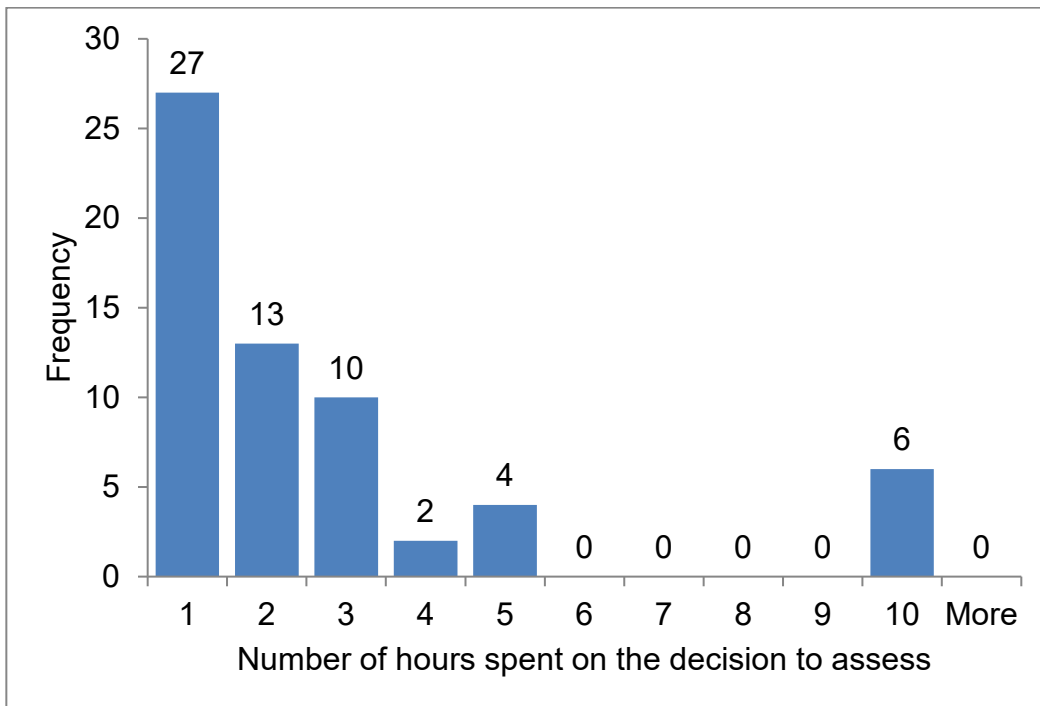


Figure 10: Social Workers: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to assess



Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

Figure 11: Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the EHC needs assessment

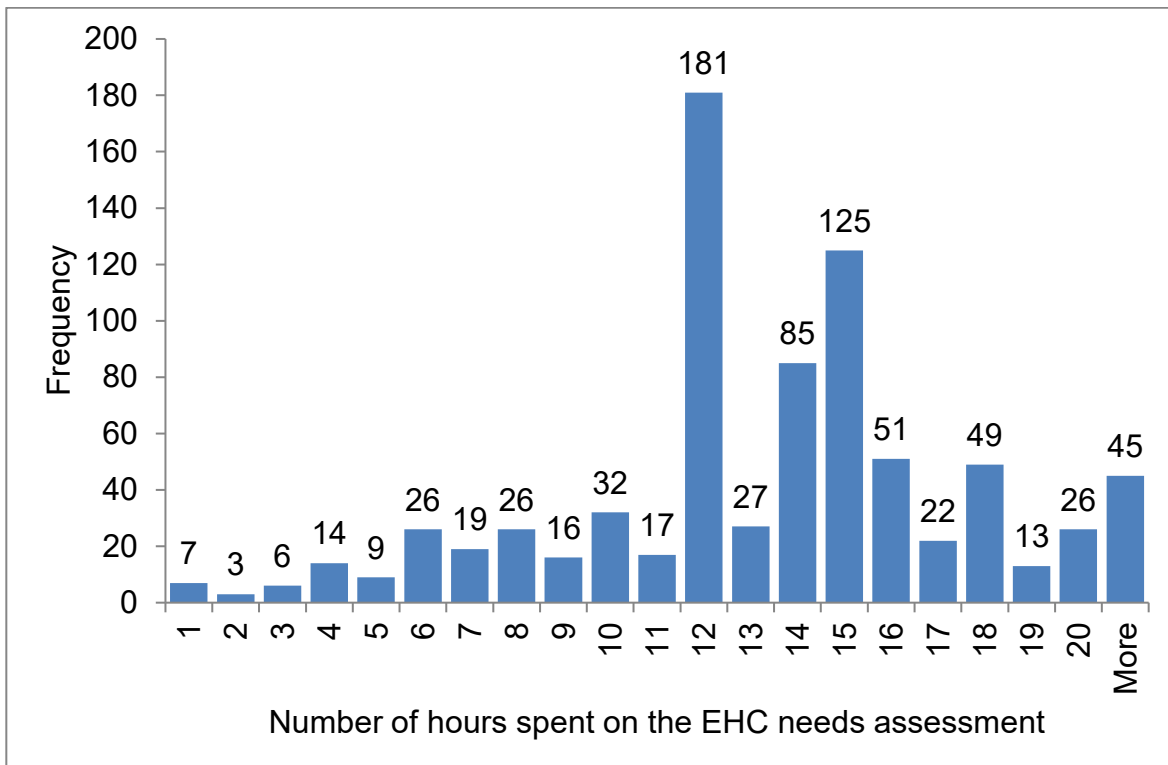


Figure 12: Principal Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on EHC needs assessment

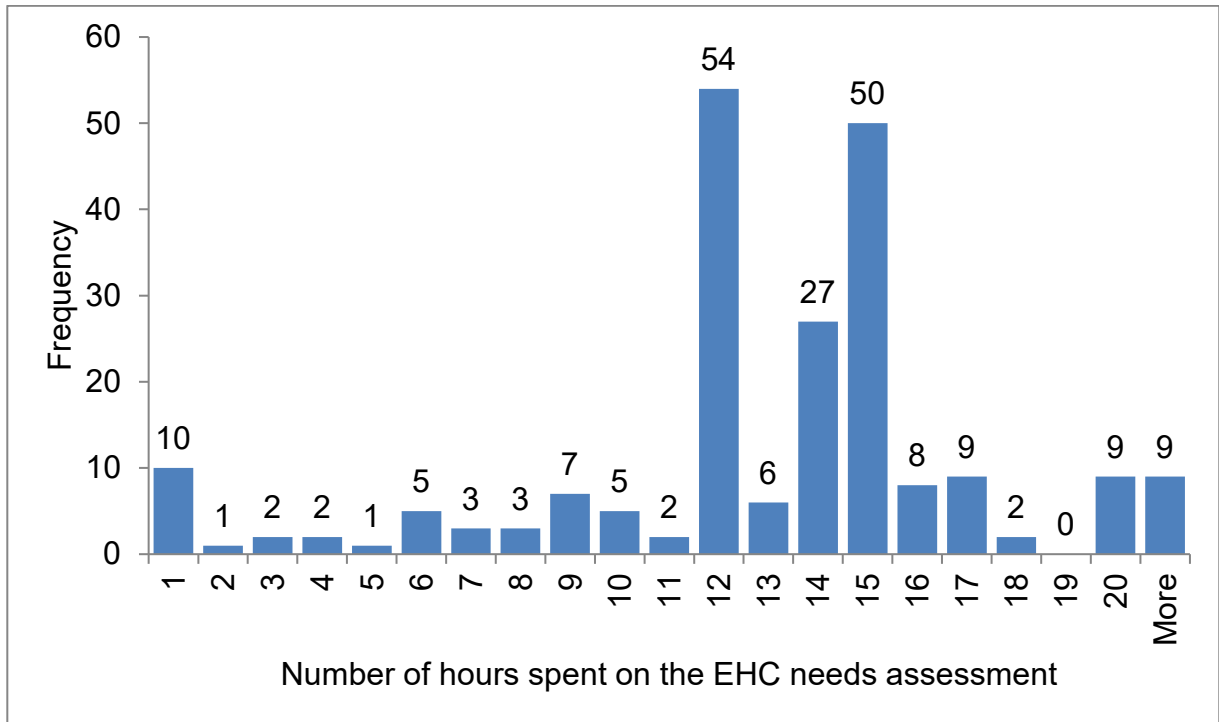


Figure 13: SEND case officers: distribution of number of hours spent on the EHC needs assessment

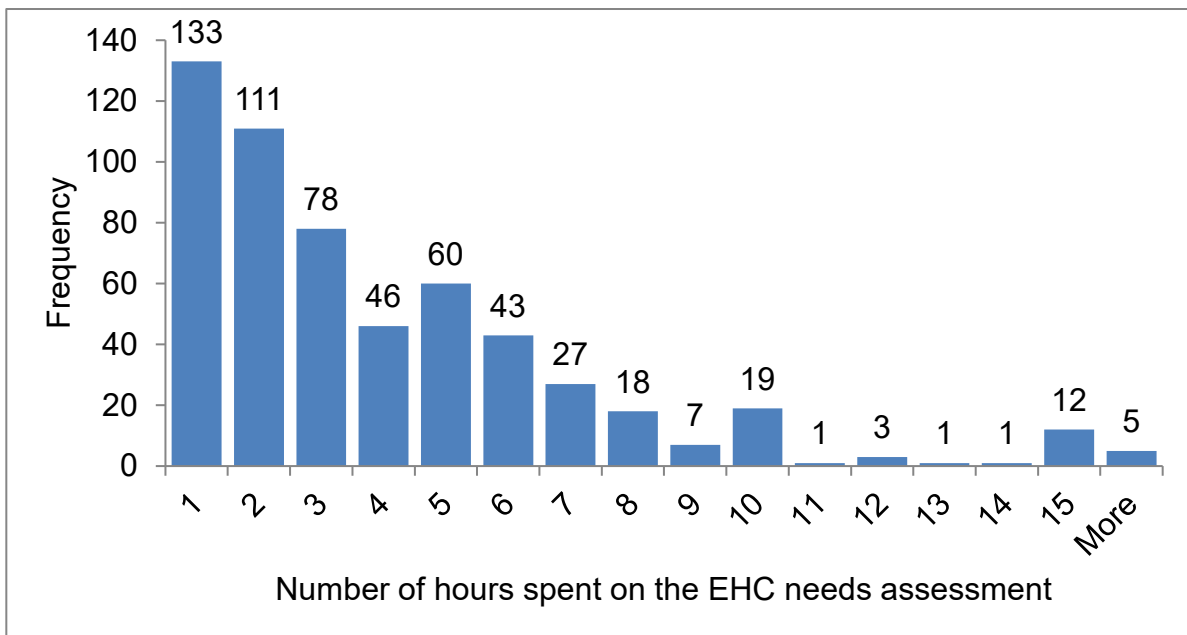


Figure 14: SEND managers: distribution of number of hours spent on the EHC needs assessment

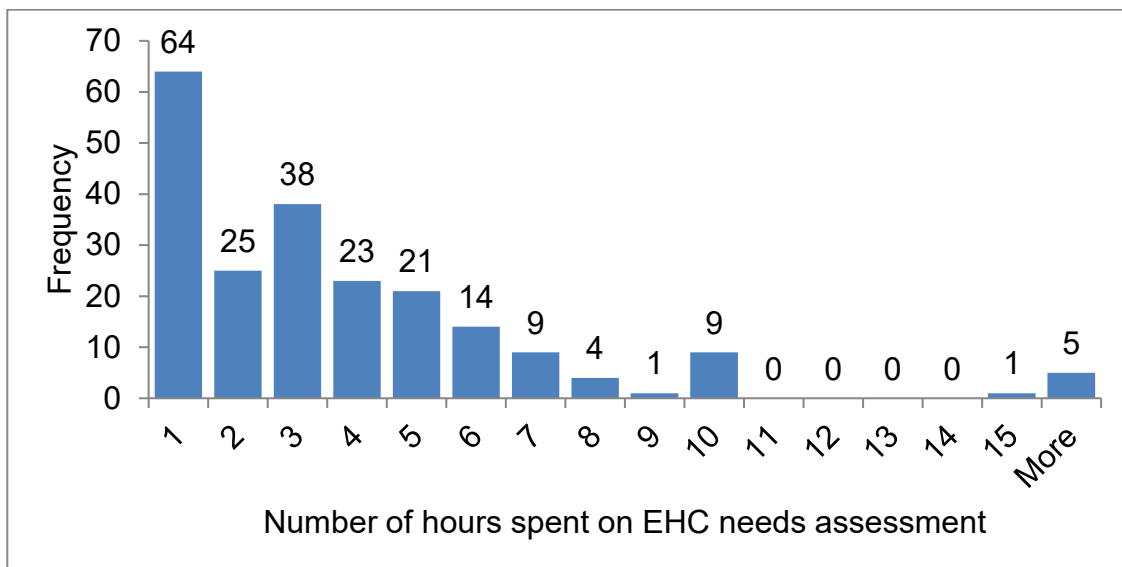
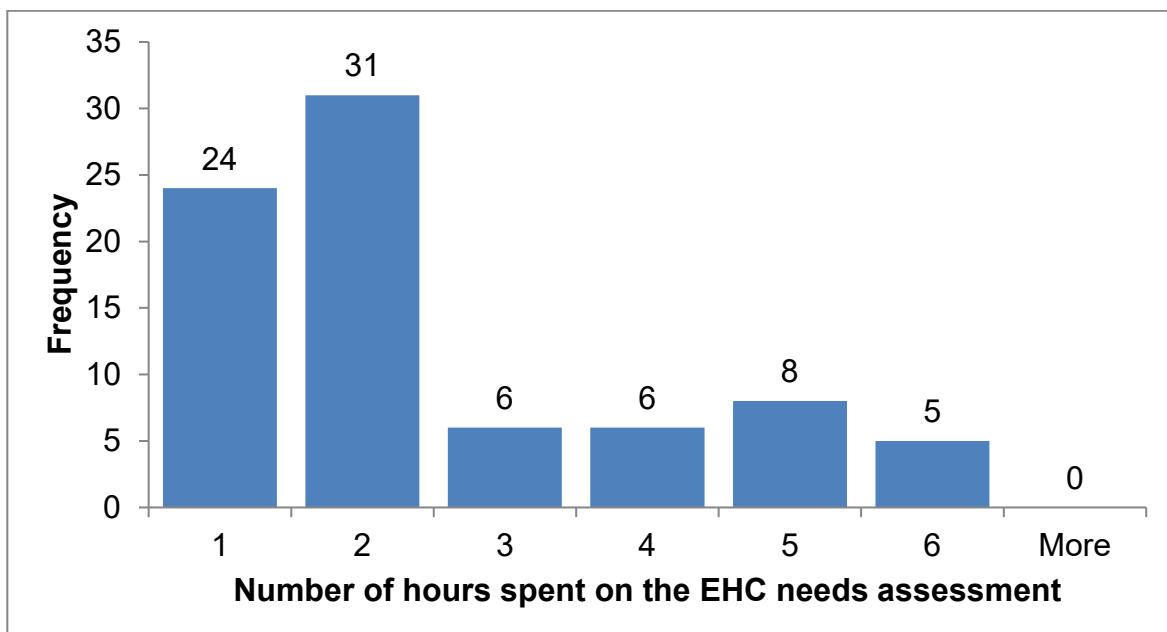


Figure 15: Social Workers: distribution of number of hours spent on EHC needs assessment



Decision to issue

Figure 16: Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on decision to issue

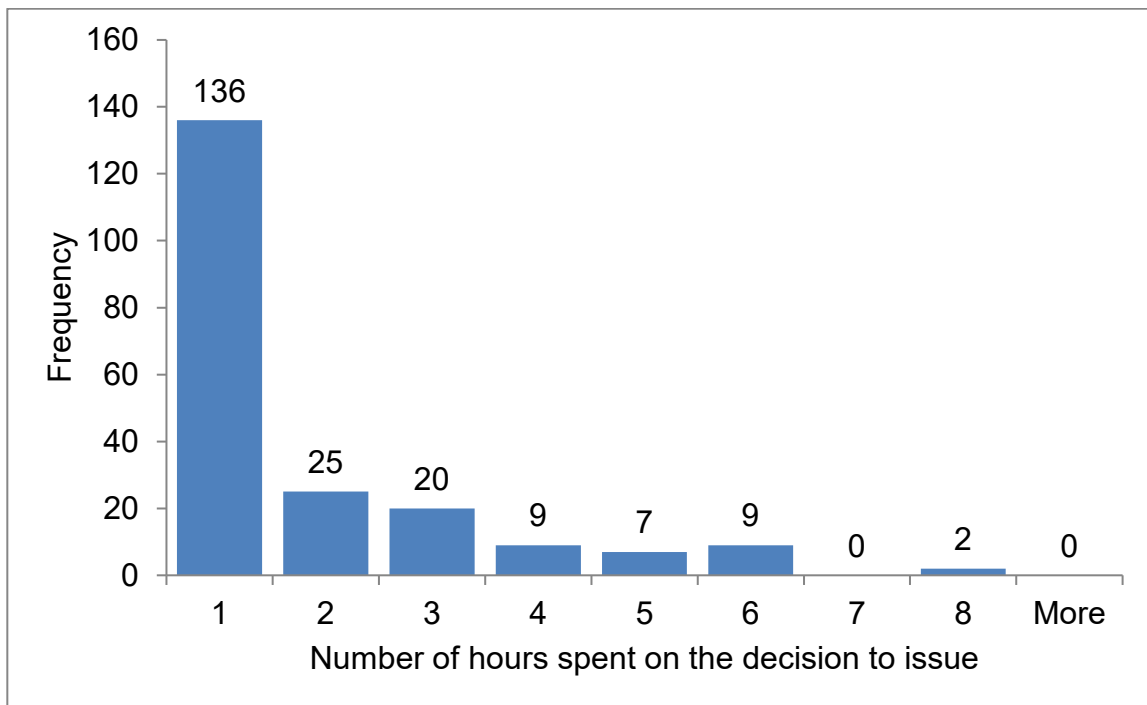


Figure 17: Principal Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to issue

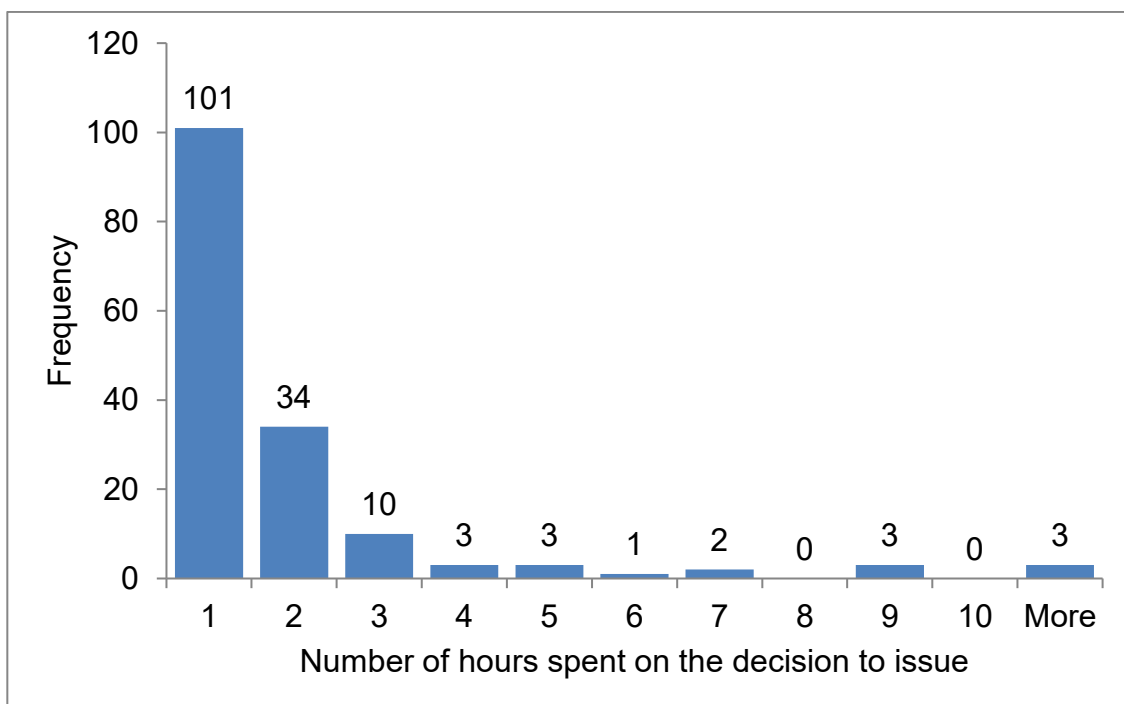


Figure 18: SEND case officers: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to issue

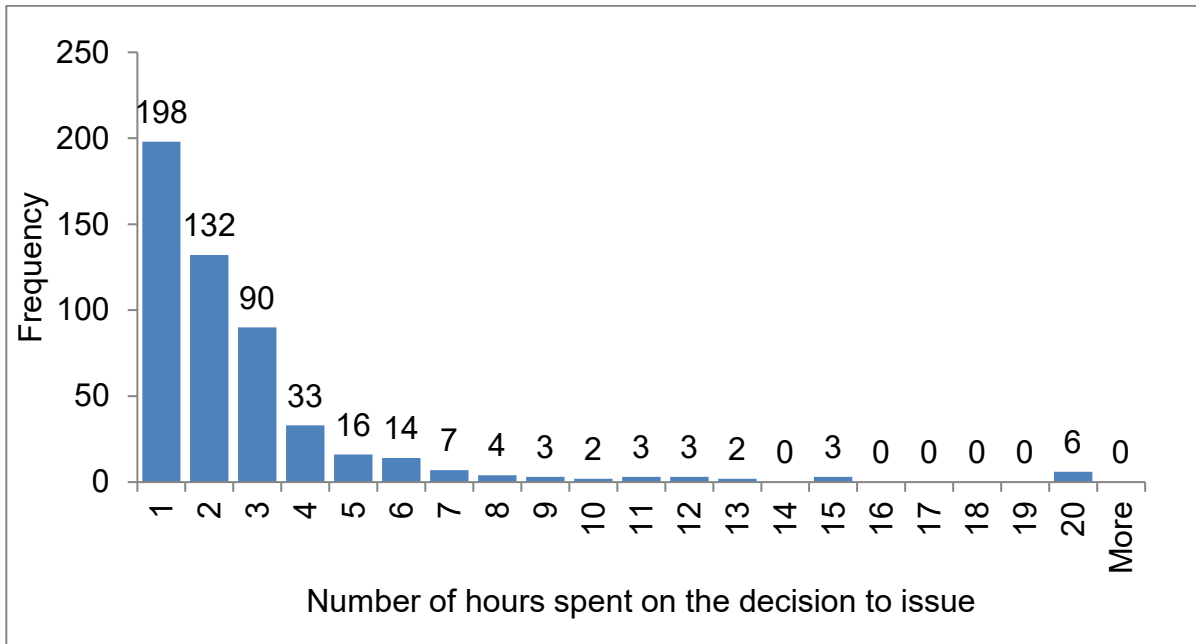


Figure 19: SEND managers: distribution of number of hours spent on the decision to issue

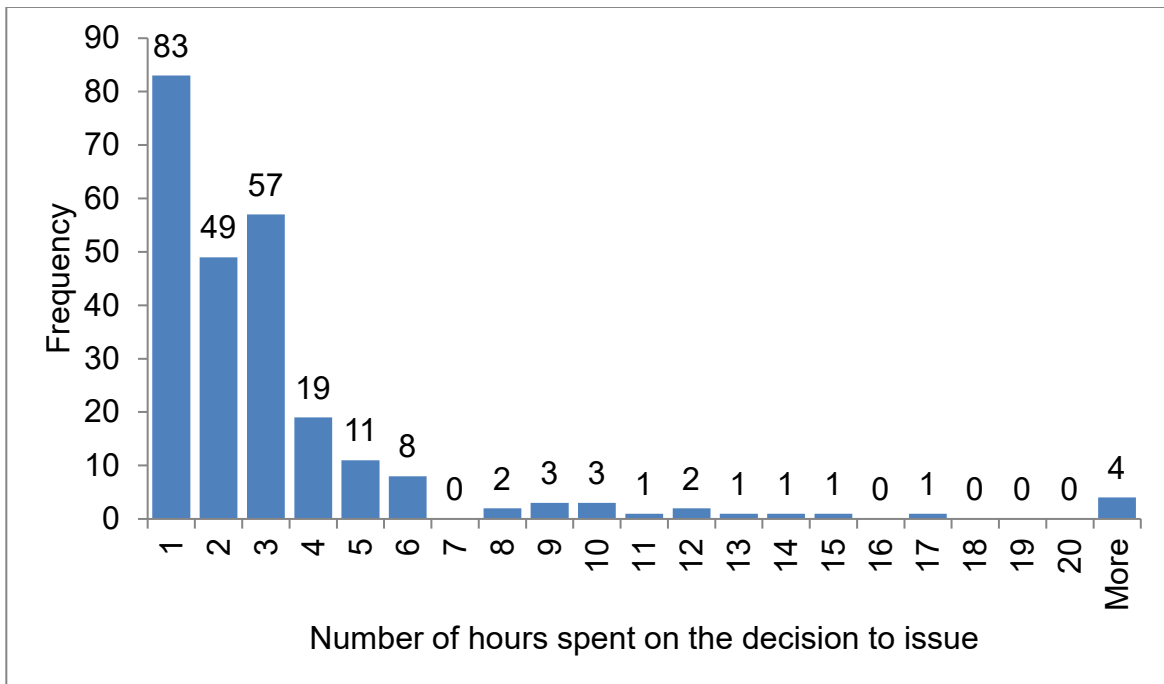
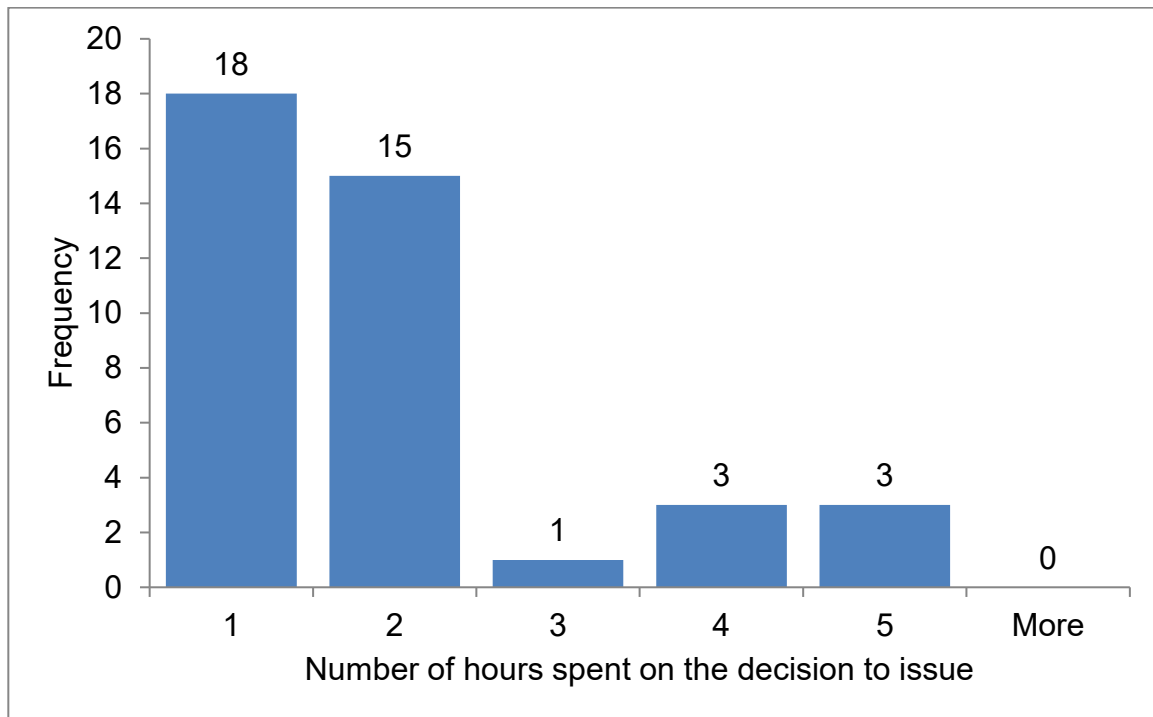


Figure 20: Social Workers: distribution of number of hours spent on decision to issue



Finalising plans

Figure 21: Educational Psychologists: distribution of number of hours spent on finalising plans

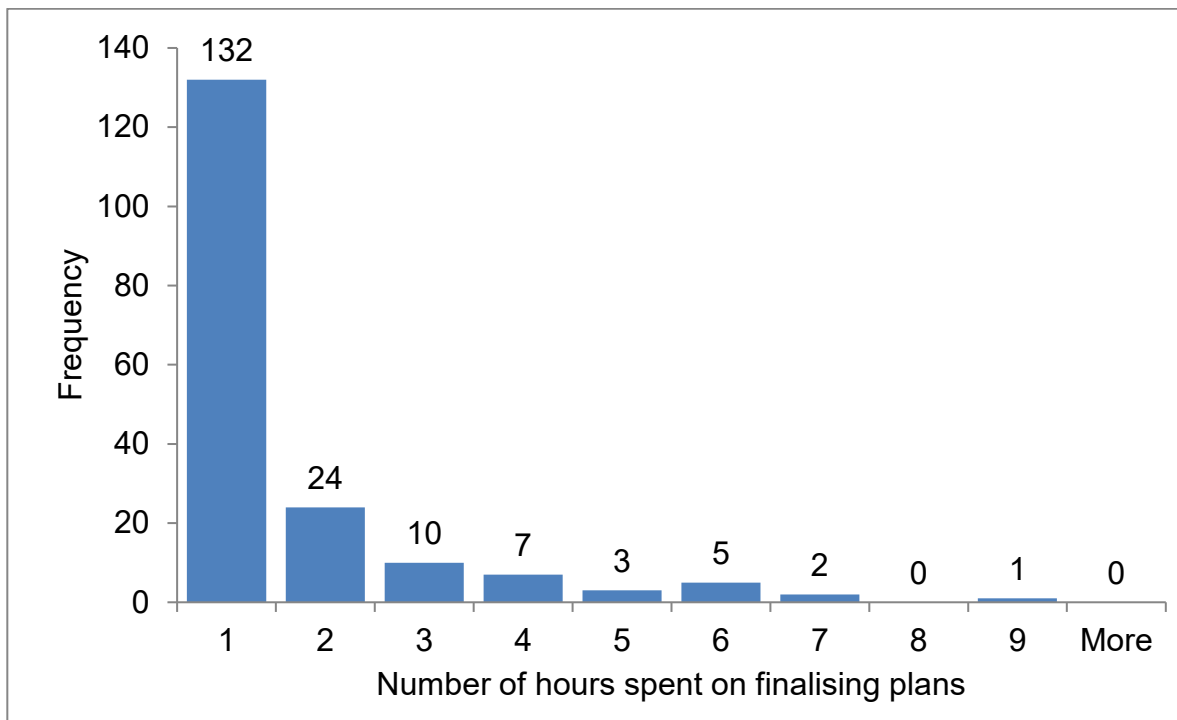


Figure 22: Principal Educational Psychologists: Distribution of number of hours spent on finalising plans

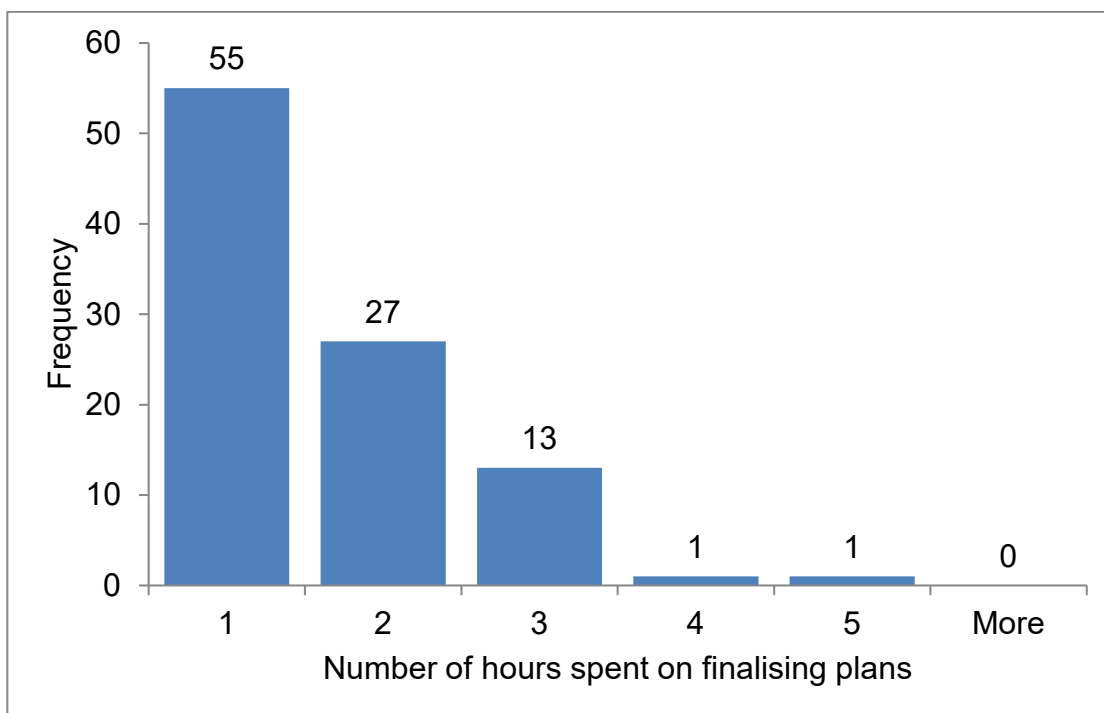


Figure 23: SEND case officers: distribution of number of hours spent on finalising plans

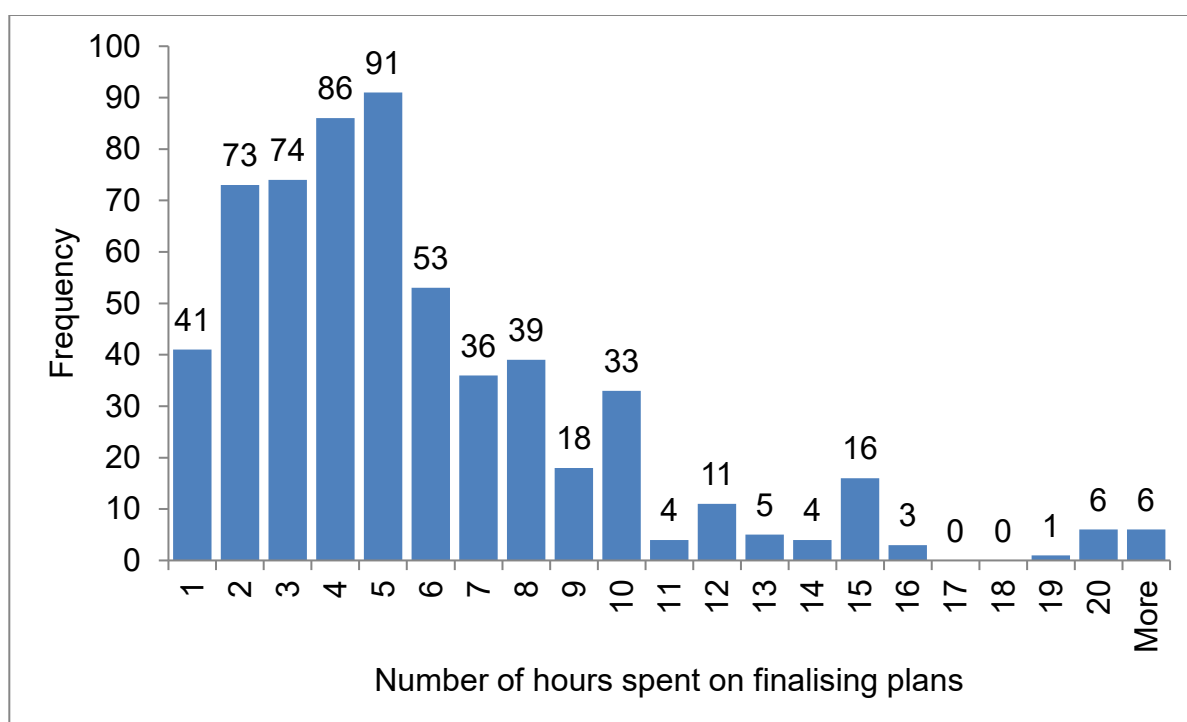


Figure 24: SEND managers: distribution of number of hours spent on finalising plans

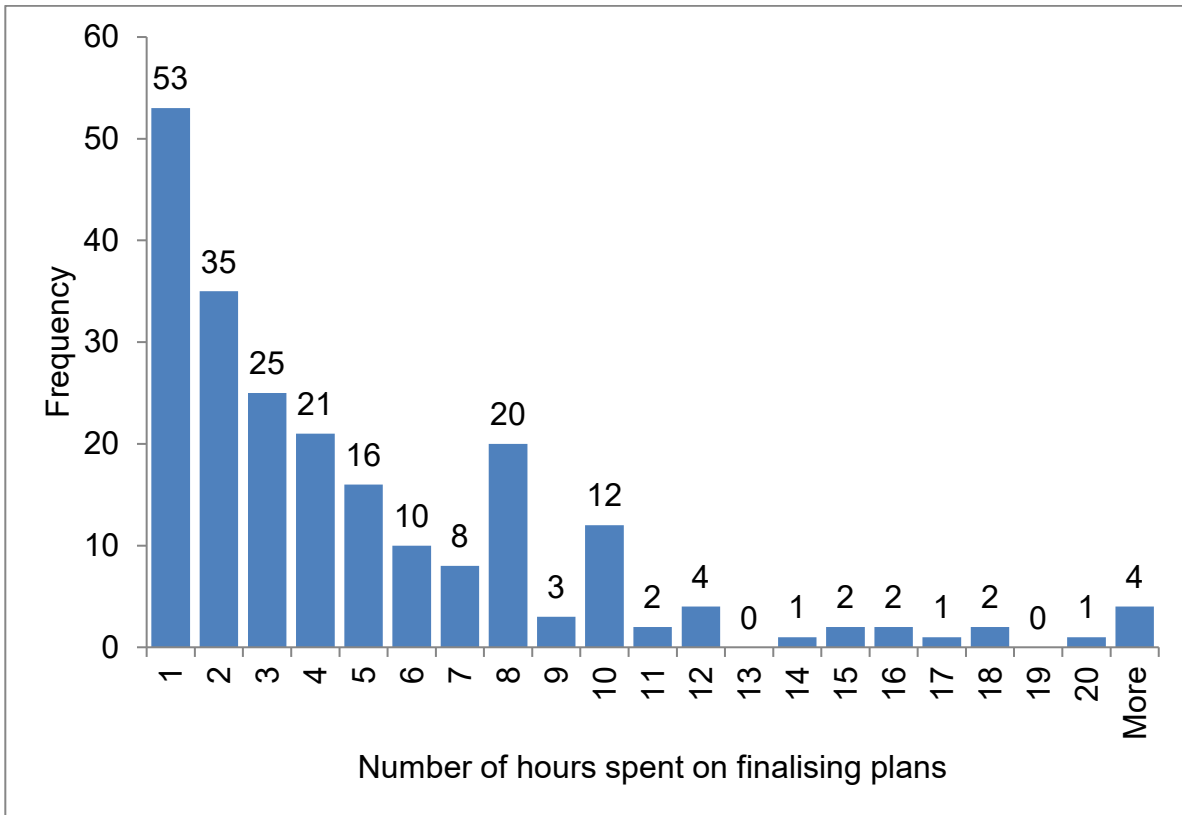
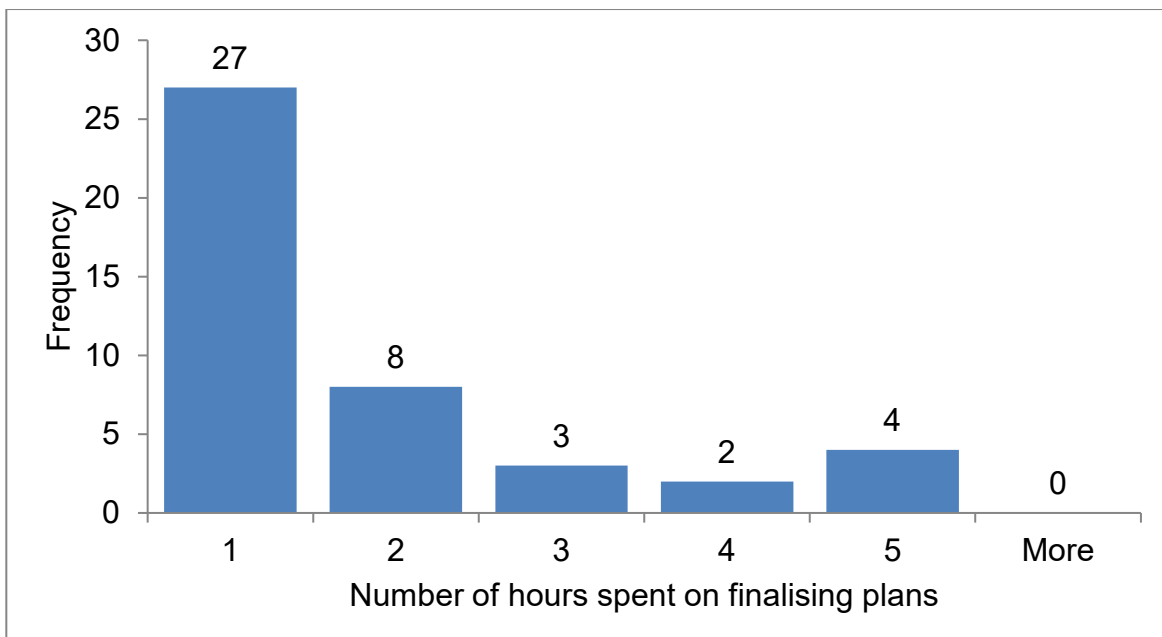


Figure 25: Social Workers: Distribution of number of hours spent on finalising plans



Annex 2: Estimates of total local authority professional hours input in an EHCP

The maximum amount of weighted estimated average hours spent on the EHC process across all professions and all stages was 68. The below table provides the minimum of the range using different illustrative assumptions on the amount of overlap between SEND case officers and SEND managers and between Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists.

Table 8: Range of estimated hours across all professions and all EHC process stages by level of presumed overlap, rounded down

	Minimum estimated hours	Maximum estimated hours
Low overlap (20% SEND caseworkers and managers; 40% Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists)	58	68
Medium overlap (30% SEND caseworkers and managers; 50% Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists)	56	68
High overlap (50% SEND caseworkers and managers; 70% Educational Psychologists and Principal Educational Psychologists)	50	68



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