Extending the Research Schools Network into Opportunity Areas

The Research Schools project is a partnership between the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Institute for Effective Education (IEE) to fund a network of schools that will support the use of evidence to improve teaching practice. An initial 5 schools started work in September 2016, and we recently sought applications for up to 6 more schools to become Research Schools from September 2017. In January this year, the EEF and the DfE announced additional funding to grow the network of Research Schools in the Social Mobility Opportunity Areas. We are now looking for an additional 12 schools to support the 12 Opportunity Areas from September 2017.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

The 12 Opportunity Areas are: Blackpool, Bradford, Derby, Doncaster, Fenlands and East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich, Norwich, Oldham, Scarborough, Stoke and West Somerset. Research Schools will provide widespread regional support to other schools by disseminating research findings, developing evidence-based practice, and developing innovations.

SCHOOL-LED DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

The EEF and the IEE produce a range of useful evidence-based resources and information for schools, including, amongst others, the Teaching and Learning Toolkit, project evaluation reports, guidance reports, the Families of Schools database, Best Evidence in Brief, and Evidence4Impact.

Disseminating these resources to schools within the Opportunity Areas is an important priority for both organisations, yet such ‘passive’ dissemination of research alone is unlikely to impact significantly on pupil outcomes. Research use is increasingly recognised as a social process, and thus, active support for implementation - such as dialogue, coaching and training - is vital in producing substantive changes in teachers’ practice. Research Schools in Opportunity Areas will be pivotal in helping schools get the most out of the research and tools available.

A sustainable impact is best achieved by working with, and through, the profession as partners in mobilising knowledge. There is a clear rationale for such an approach:

- Schools listen to other schools (a clear finding from the EEF baseline surveys on teachers’ use of research)
- Schools are already involved in the production of evidence from EEF trials (e.g., by running projects or participating in trials), so extending their role into mobilising research evidence is a natural extension of the work.
- The evidence on ‘what works’ on implementation suggests that encouraging practitioners to ‘own’ the evidence results in wider and deeper understanding and use.
- The expertise on how to apply evidence precisely in schools and classrooms lies within the schools themselves.
- There is a political drive from all parties towards decentralisation and a ‘school-led self-improving system’.
THE ROLE OF RESEARCH SCHOOLS

The Research Schools will become a focal-point for supporting schools in each Opportunity Area, building affiliations with large numbers of schools and supporting the use of evidence at scale. Research Schools will engage with local schools in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of intensity.

The Research Schools project will focus on three key strands of activity over the three years. However, it may be that the innovation strand develops over time, whereas the capacity and ability to undertake the communication and training and modelling strands will be a priority from the beginning:

1. COMMUNICATION (~50% of total activity). This might include:
   - Running conferences and events on specific research findings (e.g. EEF project evaluations or guidance reports), or the broader subject of using evidence in practice.
   - Speaking at external events.
   - Signposting schools to appropriate researchers, programme developers and other schools.
   - Delivering digestible and relevant summaries of research findings to teachers and schools (e.g. blogs, social media, newsletters, and videos).
   - Connecting with wider school networks (e.g. local and national associations and alliances) to encourage them to disseminate research findings, acting as ambassadors to push the messages further.

2. TRAINING AND MODELLING (~25% of total activity). This would include:
   - Delivering training on practical school improvement themes (e.g. 'Making Best Use of Teaching Assistants', feedback, social emotional learning).
   - Training on the leadership of evidence-based practice
   - Guidance and support for within-school evaluation.
   - Training on research methodology.

3. INNOVATION (~25% of total activity):
   - Developing innovative practices and interventions, based on the latest research
   - Identifying promising strategies and innovations from schools across the region, in particular those that fill gaps in the evidence base and address key challenges for schools.
   - Supporting schools to submit applications for the fund to support pilot evaluations of innovations (administered by the IEE)

We anticipate that schools will have additional ideas on how the network can operate and we encourage you to set these out in the plan. The intention is for the network to be designed and led by the schools themselves.

Schools should not apply for funding to support existing, established activities. However, these can be mentioned in your application if they provide evidence of your existing commitment to evidence-based practice, or if they form a scaffold (e.g. by creating a network of contacts) on which Research School work can be built.
Figure 1 is a simple diagram of how the Research School might engage other schools in the three strands of work.

**Funding**

Each Research School will receive approximately £200,000 spread over three years (Year 1 - £80,000, Year 2 - £60,000, Year 3 - £60,000). This level of funding will allow the schools to recruit a senior member of staff to lead the work. Each year’s funding will be contingent on a review of progress to date.

The DfE is providing up to £1.5million funding towards the expansion of the Research Schools Network into Opportunity Areas. This means some of the funding will be provided to this group of Research Schools directly by the DfE; however, the monitoring and reporting will be through the EEF and IEE team.

There will be a separate fund (administered by the IEE) for schools in the network to develop and conduct pilot evaluations of innovations.

**Administration and governance**

Research Schools will:
- Be part of, and be expected to contribute to, the overall Research Schools Network through sharing knowledge and resources and attending network meetings and training sessions.
- Provide appropriate reporting against targets and goals, including financial and other information with respect to the project.

Day-to-day coordination and management of the Research Schools project is led by Alicia Shaw and Jonathan Haslam at the IEE and James Richardson at the EEF. They will provide ongoing support (either directly or through others) in identifying and using evidence and the development of programmes of activities as well as organisational support for some of the activities.

The Research Schools project is overseen by an Advisory Board chaired by Baroness Estelle Morris.
APPLICATION

To be a Research School, you will need to have the capacity and reach to deliver the strands of activity to potentially all of the schools within one of the 12 Opportunity Areas. We expect you to have experience of supporting other schools and teachers through the delivery of training that is underpinned by high-quality external evidence.

To apply to become a Research School, you should address the questions below on the EEF website’s Grants Application portal – this can be accessed via the link on the web page or at:

https://grants.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/

Unsuccessful applications to the previous round from schools in or near Opportunity Areas will be carried forward to this one, unless these schools wish to submit updated applications.

Please note: applicants should be aware that there is no automatic word limit for each question. However, there is a word limit of 1,500 words for the whole application document.

Questions to address:

Capacity
• Briefly outline areas of work that you are currently involved with in the realm of evidence-based practice that align with the aims of the Research Schools.
• Outline how you will provide the necessary staffing and resources to lead the work as a Research School.

Delivery
• Describe what new activity you would like to undertake as a Research School. Structure your answer around the three strands of activity (Communication, Training and Modelling, and Innovation).
• We would expect each application to outline several proposed activities in the Communication strand and perhaps two or three for each of the other strands. Be specific about the activity you are suggesting. You may want to look at existing research and resources from the IEE and the EEF and propose activities based around those. For the innovation strand we are more interested in how you would go about this process than what the specific innovation might be.

Reach
• Outline the main ways in which you will promote your various activities to reach the number of schools specified in each circle in Figure 1, particularly to communicate and engage with all of the schools within your chosen Opportunity Area.
• Describe how you will use your existing contacts and networks to enhance the reach of the Research School activities. Be specific about the number of schools you anticipate engaging with.

Characteristics of Research Schools

This is an open application process. However, we are looking for school leaders with the particular skills, expertise and capacity to support a large number of schools within an Opportunity Area. Therefore, schools applying should consider the following:

• We welcome applications from a range of different school types (eg, primary, secondary, academy, faith). Unfortunately we are not able to support Special Schools to be a Research School at present.
• A Research School would almost certainly be rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted.
• We are looking for Research Schools to support schools in the 12 Opportunity Areas who can demonstrate that they will use being a Research School to drive social mobility through addressing local needs and build local schools’ capacity to use evidence in decision-making. Preference will be given to schools within these areas, however, we welcome applications from schools in areas neighbouring with Opportunity Areas who can demonstrate they can provide equivalent support to schools within these areas, building on their existing strong links.
• A Research School should have the capacity to deliver its programme of activities. This would normally include staff with appropriate experience, capacity for dissemination (eg, newsletters, blogs, social media), and other supporting resources (eg, administration, technology).

• For this round, a Research School should have existing connections with many schools within an Opportunity Area, including those outside of their own alliances/MATs, and an infrastructure that allows these connections to be strengthened and expanded.

• A Research School should have experience of using research in practice. This would typically involve a determination by senior staff to use research evidence to inform changes to classroom practice. We understand that a number of action research projects may be taking place in school and individual staff studying for advanced degrees. Research School activity will go beyond these by making use of systematic external evidence. Research School leads will understand how to translate that evidence into practice and ideally have experience of training others in the process.

### Timeline for Application Process

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applications open</td>
<td>2 March 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applications close</td>
<td>31 March 2017 (5pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shortlisted schools notified</td>
<td>W/b 24 April 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews with shortlisted schools</td>
<td>May 2017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successful schools notified of outcome</td>
<td>31 May 2017</td>
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Successful schools would be expected to send two members of staff involved in running the Research School to a launch event on 6 and 7 July.

Note: The [Education Endowment Foundation](https://www.eef.org.uk/) (EEF) is an independent charity set up in 2011 by the Sutton Trust as lead foundation in partnership with Impetus Trust (now part of Impetus–The Private Equity Foundation), with a £125m founding grant from the Department for Education. The EEF is dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement. Since its launch the EEF has awarded more than £80 million to 133 high-potential projects working with some 860,000 children and young people in 8,300 schools, nurseries and colleges across England. The EEF and Sutton Trust are, together, the government-designated What Works Centre for Education.

The Institute for Effective Education (IEE) is an independent charity working closely with schools, school leaders, academy chains, other third sector organisations, and policy-makers to promote the use of research evidence to inform and improve education outcomes for all children, especially the most disadvantaged.