

Written evidence from the Association of Educational Psychologists

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) is the professional association and trade union for the 3,200 Educational Psychologists across the UK. The AEP seeks to promote the overall wellbeing of children and young people as well as to ensure that their specific special educational and mental health needs are met.
- 1.2 The educational psychology (EP) profession is a highly skilled and essential element of the nation's workforce, expert in responding to the SEND and mental health issues of children and young people (CYP) and supporting their emotional well-being.
- 1.3 Educational psychologists (EPs) work across education, health and social care services, including advising mainstream schools, special schools, alternative provision (AP) settings, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), colleges, nurseries and others about the developmental needs of all children and young people (CYP). This includes:
 - 1.3.1 Working at the level of the individual child, groups of children, the whole class, and the year-group;
 - 1.3.2 Whole school-based interventions;
 - 1.3.3 Advice to senior staff in education settings at pre-school, school and college;
 - 1.3.4 Direct work (training and/or consultation) with parents and carers in their responses to their children;
 - 1.3.5 Supporting other childcare professionals through training, advice and consultation.
- 1.4 AEP members do not believe that the reforms to the SEND system have been successful in their goal of providing simpler, improved and consistent help for children and young people with SEND. Rather, AEP members report a wide variation in practice of the assessment and arrangement for provision across the country and a lack of capacity in many specialist services to deliver the help and support that CYP need.
- 1.5 Extensive cuts to local authority (LA) budgets and chronic staff shortages have limited the capacity of many services, especially EP services, to provide a full range of advice and support for CYP with special educational needs and disabilities. There are currently approximately 250 unfilled vacancies in EP services across England.

- 1.6 The SEND reforms outlined within the Children and Families Act 2014, whilst very well-intentioned, have not been able to deliver what children and families actually need. AEP members would welcome an early and robust review of the manner in which the reforms have been implemented.

2 ASSESSMENT OF AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SEND

- 2.1 Since 1981, all Children and Young People (CYP) who have Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND) and require a statutory assessment of their needs, have a statutory right to advice from and assessment by EPs as part of that process. This was further cemented within the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 2.2 In England EPs have a statutory responsibility to contribute to the Education, Health and Care Assessments of the estimated 2.8% of CYP with the most complex SEND. They have similar duties to contribute to statements of SEN in Wales and Northern Ireland and to Coordinated Support Plans in Scotland.
- 2.3 There has been a significant increase in the number of statutory assessments following the Children and Families Act 2014. In some areas this has amounted to a doubling in the requests for statutory assessments and a significant increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). According to DfE figures the number of 16-19 year olds with statements and/or EHCPs rose by 155% between 2013 and 2017.
- 2.4 The SEND Code of Practice clearly articulates a graduated approach towards meeting CYP's SEND (some local authorities refer to this as GRIP i.e. Graduated Response for Individual Pupils) which includes the involvement of specialist services, particularly from EP services, so that most CYP would benefit from SEND Support before a statutory assessment might be carried out. However, as a result of budgetary cuts many schools and LAs are not able to provide resources to help CYP at the SEND Support stage.
- 2.5 Because of the lack of help for their CYP at SEND Support there is an increase in parental appeals to SEND Tribunals to seek statutory assessment of SEND and then the production of an EHC Plan. In the absence of any contradictory advice from LA services, to whom the CYP may well be unknown, SEND Tribunals invariably find in favour of the parents and their efforts to procure support and help for their individual CYP.
- 2.6 However, the increase in the number of statutory assessments has not been matched by an increase in Educational Psychology service resources (indeed there has been a decrease in those services) and puts additional pressures on EPs to contribute to those assessments, further reducing the time available to advise schools, colleges, nurseries, parents and CYP at the SEND Support stage.

3. THE TRANSITION FROM STATEMENTS OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND LEARNING DISABILITY ASSESSMENTS TO EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS

- 3.1 AEP members have reported considerable variability in the transition from Statements of SEN to EHCPs across different local authorities.
- 3.2 Many transitions have been completed without the involvement of EPs, with only the most complex being reviewed in a number of areas. As capacity to review cases is under strain, assessment is often skipped leading to disparities across the country and injustice for CYP.
- 3.3 In a recent survey of members, only 30% of EPs believed that their local authority would meet the 3-year target for transition. Department for Education statistics show that almost 4,000 children with existing statements were still waiting for new plans after the deadline of 1 April 2018. Earlier statistics showed that on 1 March 2018 there were 14,305 children waiting for their statements to be transferred, showing a huge number of decisions made in the final month before the deadline.

4. THE LEVEL AND DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDING FOR SEND PROVISION

- 4.1 There are an estimated additional 12.6% of CYP with additional learning needs that do not fall into the scope of an EHCP (SEND Support), for whom EPs should provide a range of support. More capacity is needed to provide strategic advice and support to parents and head teachers. This requires a visible presence of EPs in all schools and educational settings working with both staff and CYP.
- 4.2 Many parents are very keen that their CYP should receive 1:1 support to meet their SEND but a number of studies have shown that this is not always the most effective way in which to help CYP to make progress. AEP members believe that a review of the effectiveness of different approaches to providing effective support should be included within the remit of any review of the SEND reforms.
- 4.3 The capacity of EPs to provide advice, training and support for SEND staff and CYP is undermined by cuts to services and a significant level of unfilled vacancies because of severe workforce shortages.
 - 4.3.1 94% of all EP services reported increasing demand for their services;
 - 4.3.2 68% of EP services have vacancies – indicating that across England there are 247 full time equivalent posts missing.
 - 4.3.3 As a result, EPs time is severely rationed.
- 4.4 In some cases, local authorities are not prioritising the retention of EPs, despite the fact that EPs can provide advice and support above the minimum statutory level.

4.5 More EPs are required across the UK (Wales is currently reviewing its workforce and Scotland has just announced the provision of £4M to train 90 more EPs) but particularly to work in England and help to support a more positive implementation of the 2014 SEND reforms. Currently there are 1,000 applications for the 160 funded Doctorate in Educational Psychology training places per year – we believe the number of funded places should rapidly increase to 200.

4.6 The Department for Education (DfE) recently acknowledged the importance of sustaining the EP workforce and the critical role of EPs, particularly through major incidents, in the following statement:

“We need to ensure that we have a steady flow of new entrants to the educational psychologist workforce, as they are critical to identifying special educational needs and their contribution is a mandatory requirement in the assessment process of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. Educational psychologists also provide wider support to schools including in relation to mental health, personal, health and social education, and major incident support for children in their communities.”

5. THE ROLES OF AND CO-OPERATION BETWEEN EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE SECTORS

5.1 A significant number of CYP with SEND are reported to have mental health issues at some point in their lives and EPs can often be the first point of call in supporting the development of good mental health and wellbeing for all CYP. Good practice indicates the benefits of EPs and CAMHS working hand in hand on all CYP mental health issues. In this way the insight of EPs and their experience of the whole child and whole school context can benefit the up to 1 in 10 school children who are reported to experience mental health issues.

5.2 Our members report that the health care sector should be more involved in casework meetings for SEND. The close collaboration of health and social care is basic to children's wellbeing - as it is to that of adolescents and young people. In some situations the provision of appropriate support to meet the health and care needs of CYP can have a dramatic impact on their educational placement. Some CYP who are moved into specialist educational settings could have remained within their own local community schools if an integrated package of support could have been designed and provided for them. The SEND reforms recognised this and spelt out very clearly the need for health and social care services to be heavily involved with EHC assessments and plans but evidence suggests that this has not significantly improved since 2014.

6. PROVISION FOR 19-25-YEAR OLDS INCLUDING SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING; TRANSITION TO ADULT SERVICES; AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION, APPRENTICESHIPS AND WORK

6.1 Working with 19-25 year olds with SEND became a new responsibility for LAs and LA services following the 2014 SEND reforms. Many EP services

have not traditionally provided advice, support and help for CYP in colleges – whilst all services are keen to engage with colleges many are struggling to employ enough EPs to carry out the work.

- 6.2 There are rising levels of awareness of SEND in young adults, along with a much greater recognition of associated mental health issues. There are also many young adults without SEND but with mental health problems who would benefit from EP services. Consequently, there is an increased need for EP services.
- 6.2 The AEP believes that an EP should be assigned to each college to help develop bespoke programmes to help young adults with SEND and mental health issues, for example programmes that link education with work, and programmes for parents on how they can support young adults with SEND.
- 6.2 The AEP welcomed the inclusion of 19 to 25 year olds in the SEND reforms. However, there are specific challenges around this age group, for example the need to bring health and care services into the same 'age line' so that services can work together. Combined with the fact that the inclusion of this age group came at a time of decreasing budgets, the AEP supports a review of provision in this area.

June 2018