



The Research Schools Network: Supporting Schools to Develop Evidence-Informed Practice

Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

The project

The Research Schools Network (RSN) initiative represents the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) endeavour to broaden and deepen evidence-informed practices and cultures in schools and through this, scale up their best available evidence for impact on practice. Launched in September 2016, a national network of Research Schools (RSs) have been funded to share what they know about putting research into practice, and lead and support schools in their regions (and beyond) to make better use of evidence to improve teaching practices (<https://researchschool.org.uk>). They do this through three key activities:

- i) *Communication* – encouraging schools to make use of evidence-informed programmes and practices through regular communications (e.g. RS newsletters) and dissemination events (e.g. conferences, twilight sessions);
- ii) *CPD and training* – providing training and professional development for senior leaders and teachers on how to improve classroom practice based on the best available evidence; and
- iii) *Innovation* – supporting schools to develop innovative ways of improving teaching and learning and providing them with the expertise to evaluate their impact¹.

This report presents the results of an EEF-funded, independent evaluation designed to investigate the extent to which, and how, this sector-led approach via the RSN is a viable way of supporting schools to develop evidence-informed practices at scale. Using a mixed methods research design, the evaluation examined the lived experiences of the first cohort of five RSs over their initial three years (2016-2019):

- Aspirer RS – based at Ash Grove Academy, Macclesfield
- Huntington RS – based at Huntington School, York
- Kingsbridge RS – based at Kingsbridge Community College, Devon
- Kyra RS – led by Kyra Teaching School Alliance (TSA), based at Mount Street Academy, Lincoln
- Shireland RS – based at Shireland Collegiate Academy, Sandwell

Since its inception, the governance, strategic formulation and management structures of this national initiative have experienced profound changes. Further changes are likely as the initiative unfolds to embed in a dynamic school system in which new initiatives, innovations and programmes for improving practice in schools are already prevalent. We frame the process of this formative evaluation as *learning*, formed through research dialogues between the evaluation team, the funder and the RSs. The findings and conclusions are, therefore, reflections from this journey of learning – which informed the EEF's decision to enhance the capacity to support regional school improvement priorities and add to the continuous building of evidence on the effective and sustainable implementation of educational innovation and change. The governance and funding of the RSN initiative changed accordingly from September 2019 but this evaluation was not involved in examining the scalability of the new programme design.

Key conclusions

1. Evidence of promise 1: The view that the RSs were playing a vital role in a systemic shift towards evidence use was widely shared by survey and interview participants. The RS activity was seen as a platform for the further advancement of staff professional development and capacity building, and an important source of support for increased understanding, awareness and use of emerging research and evidence-informed practice in schools.
2. Evidence of promise 2: The three strands of RS activity (i.e. communication, CPD and training, and innovation) attracted schools with different profiles. The RSN newsletters provided a gateway to useful resources and 'outstanding' schools (as judged by Ofsted) and higher achieving secondary schools were over-represented amongst the subscribers. Disadvantaged schools and lower-achieving primary schools were relatively over-represented in the CPD and training strand. 'Good' and better schools and higher performing primary and secondary schools were markedly over-represented in the innovation strand of activity.
3. Feasibility 1: RSs' high-quality CPD provision *alone* is unlikely to bring about the intended change in practice in schools. The quality and support of senior leadership in schools that have received CPD training is equally important and is a necessary

¹ The first four Innovation Evaluation Grants were awarded in February 2017. Funded by the Institute for Effective Education (IEE), these grants supported pilot evaluations of innovations of teaching and learning approaches based on the RSN's goal of improving the attainment of pupils by increasing the use of evidence-based practices. This is very much a "bottom-up" exercise, allowing schools to get some indicative evidence behind real-world initiatives. (<https://the-iee.org.uk/what-we-do/innovation-evaluation-grants/>)

	condition for change in schools. Our survey results suggested the absence of senior leadership buy-in and support was likely to result in little or no change in behaviour or culture in participating schools.
4.	Feasibility 2: The place-based hub model that drew upon collective resources, capacity and expertise in ready-made networks and partnerships was perceived as a positive move to support local school improvement priorities. This approach also enabled the RSs to address the challenge of reaching and engaging schools in need rather than 'good' schools that were more likely to be attracted to the RSN initiative.
5.	Scalability 1: The central funding income from EEF alone was not sufficient to cover all costs but had enabled RSs to concentrate their energy and efforts on quality provision, capacity building and infrastructure enhancement, and importantly, to make strategic plans for future work. Linking up with other externally funded school improvement initiatives, such as the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) projects, provided some RSs with additional financial stability, enabling them to tap into local school improvement partnerships (e.g. local authorities, TSAs) and through them, to reach vulnerable schools.
6.	Scalability 2: The overall evidence from this evaluation suggests that promoting and translating EEF's evidence into practice across a range of schools at scale has been achieved only to a limited extent (e.g. as in Evidence of Promise 2), and is unlikely to be achieved and sustained by RSs on their own. The EEF's additional brokering, resources and capacity support were perceived by both RSs and EEF as necessary in creating the right conditions for RSs to broaden and deepen their support for evidence-informed practice within their regions, and beyond.

What are the findings?

Evidence of promise (*Is there evidence of intended impact?*)

As of summer 2019, 6,216 individuals from 2,048 schools had signed up to the five RSs' newsletters, representing an increase of almost 50% from the first year of 2016-17. All five RSs tended to attract more schools from their local regions, and together, their mailing lists of newsletters reached schools across all nine regions of England. Such national reach was successfully achieved in the first year of 2017 and continued to grow over the last three years.

The three strands of RS activity (communication, CPD and training, and innovation) attracted schools with different profiles. There was wide variation across the different RSs based on which phase of education the engaging schools covered, and in most cases, this was linked to the education phase of the RSs. 'Outstanding' schools (as judged by Ofsted) and higher achieving secondary schools were over-represented amongst newsletter subscribers (i.e. *communication* strand). The over-representation of higher performing secondary schools was particularly striking for the two primary RSs. With regard to *CPD and training*, disadvantaged schools and lower-achieving primary schools were relatively over-represented. The profiles of participating schools in the *innovation* strand was broadly in line with the national distribution by level of disadvantage, but 'good' and better schools and higher performing primary and secondary schools were markedly over-represented.

There is evidence that as the EEF's evidence and knowledge broker, the RSs have played a vital role in a systemic shift towards evidence use. Results from both surveys and interviews suggest that participation in RSs' activities and CPD and training programmes have contributed to the take-up of evidence-based practices in many schools.

Participation in RS led training programmes was found to have had a tangible impact on many participants' understanding of the value of evidence-based practice, and how to access and use it to inform most decisions about their professional practice. There is variation in the perceived impacts across different school contexts. Evidence from the RSN survey suggests that respondents from 'outstanding' schools particularly were more positive about the impacts related to leadership support and collaboration between colleagues, in contrast to those from disadvantaged schools who were less positive about the impacts on these two areas and the capacity and skills in their schools to use evidence-based practice. Additionally, senior leaders and those who reported to have engaged more 'deeply' with the RS activities were more likely to indicate positive impacts.

When the RS provision was perceived to be aligned with schools' improvement priorities, then effective and sustained take-up was more likely. Leadership support and quality inputs from RSs were perceived to be both crucial and significant. Results from the CPD and training follow-up surveys suggest that the perceived high-quality CPD provision *alone* is unlikely to bring about the intended change in practice in schools. The absence of senior leadership buy-in and support was likely to result in little or no change in behaviour or culture in participating schools.

Feasibility (*Has the campaign happened as intended?*)

The RS badge would not '*naturally*' enable the RSs to become '*big players*' in the system. Rather, they are only likely to have an influence if they are strategic about forming complementary partnerships and relationships with existing key players in the landscape of school improvement, within and beyond their locality.

Using personal contacts and senior leaders' local reputation to attract and engage schools was emphasised by all RSs as a key strategy to broaden their network reach – especially in the first year when much effort was required to convince schools how their practice and decisions could be informed and improved by using research and evidence in context.

Communications

All five RSs used conferences, newsletters and social media (e.g. Twitter, Blogging – some more established than others) to disseminate evidence from the EEF and IEE (and the wider research literature). The mostly low open rates of the newsletters raise the question about the extent to which individuals and schools were actually 'engaged' with the evidence, and related to this, whether the reach has the potential to make a difference to the practice and culture in schools.

Although immensely time consuming, early investment in building trust and relationships through face-to-face meetings and personalised email communications was perceived to be necessary in enabling all RSs to be engaged with a broader range of school improvement partnerships in the second and third years, developing and capitalising on project-oriented networks within and beyond their regions.

Training

Using the RSs' work as professional development opportunities to identify talent and grow research champions or evidence-leaders in education within the RS and its associated multi-academy trusts (MATs), teaching school alliances (TSAs), and other school partnerships emerged as a popular cascade model of capacity building.

The place-based hub model drew upon collective resources and expertise in ready-made networks and partnerships to broaden and share capacity within a locality. This model centred upon creating and strengthening local/regional school improvement partnerships that provided the RSs with the mechanisms, relationships and knowledge to support local school improvement priorities. This approach also enabled them to address the challenges of reaching and engaging schools in need, rather than 'good' schools that were more likely to be attracted to the RSN initiative.

Interactions between three strands

There is limited evidence of interactions between the three strands. As the catalyst for culture and practice change in classrooms and schools, the provision of quality CPD and training programmes has been the centre of the RSs' attention and effort.

Increasingly the communication strand has been centrally managed by the IEE and then the EEF. The RSs' role in relation to the innovation strand had been minimal, in that they mainly provided advice and guidance to schools at the application stage.

Scalability (*Is the approach affordable, sustainable and scalable?*)

Transforming evidence into effective practice in classrooms through the RSN initiative turned out to be a more complex and comprehensive project than the EEF and IEE had originally envisaged. The EEF's additional and sustained brokering, expertise and capacity support has been necessary in enabling all RSs to fulfil their roles in the system. Reflecting on their learning from the first three years of implementation, from September 2019 the EEF increased their central and regional capacity significantly, in recognition that RSs cannot become self-sustaining from either a financial perspective or the ongoing brokering and expertise support required. They have taken the execution of the RSN initiative further down the path of targeted, place-based (regional) support for school improvement.

There remain concerns about the long-term financial affordability of the RS model. This is because, at least in part, the school system is already populated with competing CPD and school improvement offers. Connecting their RS activity with existing regional school-to-school support work and projects has been pivotal in securing capacity and efficacy, and addressing real concerns over the long-term sustainability of the RS model.

The need for sustained central funding income was emphasised consistently across the case study interviews. The central funding alone has not been sufficient to cover all the costs, especially the leadership time required to develop and expand the remit of the RS work. However, this income has given RSs a necessary sense of security and continuity

that enabled them to focus their energy and effort on quality provision, capacity building, infrastructure enhancement and strategic future planning to expand support offers and attract additional projects.

It is important to emphasise that the RSs' entrepreneurial effort has been driven by a clear vision to use strategically selected, targeted funding initiatives to continue to strengthen the capacity and capabilities of their staff, and through this, broaden and deepen their collaborative capital for sustained improvement with other schools.

However, the survey responses from participants of RSs' activities raise questions about the sector's sustained enthusiasm for deeper engagement with the RSs (i.e. participation in more than one strand of RS activity). Although the majority of the respondents to RSN surveys expressed their intention to continue to participate in RS activities (95% in 2017 and 85% in 2019), only approximately one in four (27%) planned to deepen their engagement with the RS activity in the 2019 survey. The evidence from the interviews with engagers within the RSN suggests that the relevance, responsiveness and feasibility of the provision of support should remain the priority in future planning of the RSN initiative.

What have we learned?

The RSN national initiative has been through major changes in terms of how RSs are governed, what they offer to schools, and how they reach out to engage schools in different contexts and with different pupil intakes and performance profiles. These changes resulted from a steep learning curve that the EEF and the five RSs had experienced in the first three years. As a senior leader put it, '*RSs are building the plane while flying it.*'

This journey of learning has been in part *conceptual* – to address the early confusion of the roles of RSs as EEF's knowledge broker for improvement in practice in schools – and in part *operational and strategic* as the EEF and RSs became aware of the necessary resources, processes and systems required to implement this initiative across the country effectively, responsively and sustainably.

The combined evidence strongly suggests that RSs cannot translate the EEF's evidence into practice and scale it up in different classrooms to enact deep change in practice or culture on their own. The EEF's continuing brokering, structural and specialist support, and credibility and reputation have been essential in creating the right conditions for RSs to establish their 'brand' and broaden and deepen their reach and impact in the school system. RSs need help from the EEF in brokering the engagement of schools. In addition, participating schools need in-house senior leader champion(s) to drive the culture change and promote sustained evidence-based practice.

The implication of the evidence is that scaling up effort needs to consider the variation of school contexts (e.g. pupil intake, performance profiles, education phase) and how the political, cultural, professional and leadership capabilities of the school shapes the process and outcomes of the evidence use.

Transforming the practice, culture and outcomes of disadvantaged and vulnerable schools especially – which tend to struggle with weak and ineffective school leadership (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Day et al., 2011) – should be a priority, but the RSs' input, support and interventions can only form *part of* the systemic and policy solution for improvement.

How was the evaluation conducted?

This evaluation focused on the first five RSs which means that many ways their experiences of development were different from the other RSs. To gain a nuanced understanding of their experiences, a mixed method evaluation design was used to collect multi-perspective data over time:

- analysis of the profiles of schools recorded in the RSN database;
- baseline and follow-up surveys to explore participants' motivation to be involved in RS activities and their perceived impact on change in practice and culture;
- two rounds of telephone interviews with a subsample of the baseline and follow-up surveys to collect more detailed evidence on effective take-up, implementation and perceptions of impact;
- three case study visits and interviews with a range of key stakeholders to provide in-depth narrative accounts of what RSs do to scale up evidence-based practices and cultures in schools;
- a standardised three-stage pro forma to assess the extent to which, and how, the CPD and training activity had made a difference to participants' knowledge, skills and practice over time.

We would have liked to collect more interview data from individuals and schools who chose not to be engaged with the RS activity to identify reasons for 'non-engagement' and their implications for the take-up of this scale-up model. This would also help to reduce the positive bias in the data.

Introduction

The Research Schools Network (RSN) is jointly funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Institute for Effective Education (IEE) (2016-19) to provide sector-led support for the use of evidence to improve teaching practice in schools. This report presents the results of an EEF-funded, independent evaluation (2016-2020) which was designed to investigate the extent to which, and how, this sector-led approach via the RSN is a viable way of supporting schools to develop evidence-informed practices at scale. Using a mixed methods research design, this evaluation aimed to provide a detailed account of the developments of the initial cohort of five Research Schools (RSs) in the first three years since their inception in September 2016:

- Aspirer RS – based at Ash Grove Academy, Macclesfield
- Huntington RS – based at Huntington School, York
- Kingsbridge RS – based at Kingsbridge Community College, Devon
- Kyra RS – led by Kyra Teaching School Alliance, based at Mount Street Academy, Lincoln
- Shireland RS – based at Shireland Collegiate Academy, Sandwell

Through triangulating the results of the analysis of different strands of qualitative and quantitative data, this formative evaluation examined the promise, feasibility and potential scalability of this *sector-led* but *centrally governed* (by the EEF) approach to scaling up evidence for improvement in teaching and learning in schools. It also explored the social validity of this approach (i.e. the extent to which the RS initiative is regarded as socially important and valued by designated target groups; Winnett, Moore and Anderson, 1991; Foster and Mash, 1999) – especially in terms of the extent to which it was successful in encouraging the take-up and use of evidence-informed practice in schools serving socioeconomically highly disadvantaged communities and/or schools that were in need of support and improvement.

Since its inception, the governance, strategic formulation and management structures of this national initiative have experienced profound changes, and are likely to continue to change as it unfolds in a diverse and dynamic education system that is rarely short of new initiatives with the intent to improve practice in schools. We frame the process of this formative evaluation as *learning* in the form of a research dialogue between the evaluation team, the funder and the RSs. The findings and conclusions are therefore reflections from this journey of learning – which informed the EEF's decision to expand its regional delivery capacity, and add to the continuously building evidence on the effective and sustainable implementation of educational innovation and change.

The Research School Network

Background

The RSN is a collaboration between EEF and IEE to fund a national network of schools which are expected to share what they know about putting research into practice and lead and support schools in their region (and beyond) to make better use of evidence to improve teaching practice (<https://researchschool.org.uk>). Launched in September 2016, this initiative is part of EEF's endeavour to broaden and deepen evidence-informed practices and cultures in schools and through this, scale up their best available evidence for impact on practice. From September 2019, the funding, governance and support to RSN have been primarily provided by the EEF. This evaluation examined the experiences of the first five RSs in their initial three years (July 2016 to September 2019).

Rationale

Since its launch in 2011, the EEF has awarded more than £100 million of funding to evaluate promising intervention projects that aim to improve attainment and related outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people between the age of three and 18. Whilst the EEF have identified a range of interventions that showed promising evidence of impact on pupil outcomes and produced a number of evidence-based resources, guidance and implementation reports to help schools to make informed decisions about their practice, they have learned that the 'passive' dissemination of evidence alone is unlikely to have a significant impact on intended pupil outcomes². Their rationale for creating a national network of RSs has been that research use is a *social* process and that sustainable impact is best achieved by working with, and through, the profession as partners in mobilising knowledge:

- Schools listen to other schools.

² <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/the-literacy-octopus-communicating-and-engaging-with-research/>

- 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.
(EEF Document: Expanding the RSN 2019)

Thus, in essence, RSs act as a ‘bridge’ between EEF’s evidence and practice in schools and are expected to play a knowledge broker’s role by disseminating research findings and supporting the translation and application of evidence into practice through the provision of training and school-to-school support in their local and regional areas.

Main activities

Despite having ‘Research’ in their names, the primary purpose of RSs is not to conduct primary research in classrooms or schools. Rather, they are expected to support other schools in their local and regional areas to access, understand, critique, and apply external evidence in their own contexts and through this, improve the quality of teaching and learning. Building affiliations and networks with large numbers of schools, Teaching School Alliances, Multi-Academy Trusts, local authorities and other education institutions/organisations within and beyond their areas has been RSs’ key strategy to expand their reach and engagement.

Key RS activities include:

- i) *Communication* - encouraging schools to make use of evidence-informed programmes and practices through regular communications (e.g. RS newsletters) and dissemination events (e.g. conferences, twilight sessions);
- ii) *CPD and training* - providing training and professional development for senior leaders and teachers on how to improve classroom practice based on the best available evidence; and
- iii) *Innovation* - supporting schools to develop innovative ways of improving teaching and learning and providing them with the expertise to evaluate their impact³.

(<https://researchschool.org.uk/about/our-aims/>)

Growth of the network The first cohort of five RSs was designated to commence in September 2016, followed by a second cohort of six RS in December 2016. In January 2017, EEF and the Department for Education (DfE) invested additional funding to appoint 11 RSs supporting Social Mobility Opportunity Areas in England. As of January 2020, there are 39 schools in the RSN including 32 RSs and seven Associate Research Schools (ARSs) who work closely with established RSs through communication and face-to-face activity to expand the reach and engagement of the RSN across the country⁴. Each RS receives three years of core funding comprising £60,000 in Year 1 and £40,000 in Years 2 and 3 respectively. As we presented later in this report, RSs used the majority of the core funding to support additional leadership and administrative capacity to deliver RS activities.

When the RSN initiative was launched in 2016, day-to-day coordination and administration of the five RSs were jointly led by the EEF and IEE. The IEE provided additional support in identifying and using evidence for the innovation strand. However, over the course of the initial three years the EEF had taken on greater leadership, management and governance role in this initiative. From September 2019, all RSs and ARSs are only accountable to the EEF.

EEF’s new phase of scale-up campaign

September 2019 marked a new phase of EEF’s scale-up work. A significant and major shift in their new approach is to enhance the commitment and capacity to support regional school improvement priorities and expand a substantial investment of funds to improve low performing schools in the most disadvantaged circumstances over three years. According to EEF (2019), these are defined as ‘schools whose disadvantaged pupils have below average performance on a three-year average trend, and whose percentage of FSM-eligible pupils (FSMever6) are above the national average.’ Around 2,500 priority schools were identified equating to approximately 10% of all schools in England.

³ The first four IEE Innovation Evaluation Grants were awarded in February 2017. Funded by the IEE, these grants supported pilot evaluations of innovations of teaching and learning approaches based on the RSN’s goal of improving the attainment of pupils by increasing the use of evidence-based practices. This is very much a “bottom-up” exercise, allowing schools to get some indicative evidence behind real-world initiatives. (<https://the-ieee.org.uk/what-we-do/innovation-evaluation-grants/>)

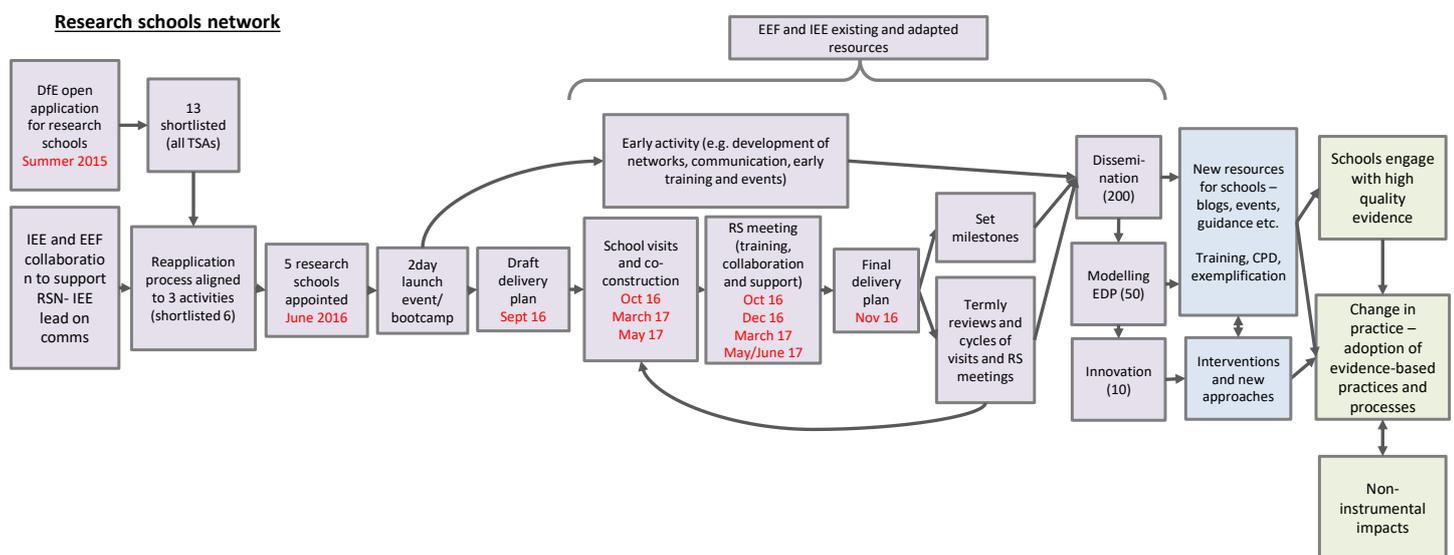
⁴ ARS are likely to have existing staff with a good understanding of the role of evidence in school improvement and potentially have links to existing RS, although this is not a requirement. ARS differ from a full RS in their capacity and infrastructure to deliver the full range of expectations that comes with full RS funding. (EEF Application Round: Expanding the Research School Network 2019)

Enhancing the capacity of key intermediaries in the regions (e.g. through EEF’s newly appointed Regional Delivery Officers and Leads, and the expansion of the RSN) is at the heart of this new approach. Its core purpose is to ensure that EEF’s evidence and resources can reach schools, especially serving those schools that are most in need. The EEF’s Dissemination and Impact team has expanded in size and capacity considerably as a result.

The beginning of the EEF’s new scale-up campaign also marks the end of the fieldwork of our research period. Thus, the evidence presented in this report focuses on the learning gained from the implementation of the RSN initiative over the first three years – which, through regular research dialogues with the EEF and interim reports, informed the EEF’s decision to expand their regional delivery work in the new phase.

Figure 1 below presents the logic model of the RSN project that was jointly created with the EEF at the outset of the project in 2016. Different from the evidence-informed theory of change model in the Conclusions of this report, this logic model has a particular focus on operational procedures and presents the original design and setup process of the RSN.

Figure 1: Logic model of the RSN (prior to September 2019)



Background Evidence

Scaling up research and evidence use in schools

The last decade has seen an increased awareness and appetite in schools in England and many other countries to use research and evidence to improve practices of teaching and the outcomes of student learning (e.g. Penuel et al., 2017; Sutton Trust, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019). Evidence from education research points to wide support from schools of the idea that ‘*policy and practice should be grounded in the best available empirical evidence*’ (Cooper and Levin, 2013: 11). Advocates argue that experimental and quasi-experimental studies and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) assessing the efficacy of educational policy, curriculum and pedagogy-oriented interventions have produced promising evidence of impact on teacher quality (e.g. Gore, Lloyd, Smith, Bowe, Ellis and Lubans, 2017) and pupil learning and outcomes (e.g. Hattie, Biggs and Purdie, 1996; Barab, Gresalfi and Ingram-Goble, 2010; Snilstveit et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2015; Llosa et al., 2016; Connolly, Keenan and Urbanska, 2018). Such studies focus on ‘*what works*’ and offer a positive and robust evidence base for schools to make decisions about their policy and practice scientifically and efficiently.

Critiques, however, caution that although clinical efficacy trials may tell us whether some fixed packages of intervention strategies can work, because of their rigidly narrow, standardised focus, they often fail to address ‘*how students and teachers change and adapt interventions in interactions with each other in relation to their dynamic local contexts*’ (Gutiérrez and Penuel, 2014: 19). Conclusions from our recent evaluation of EEF’s excellence fund to ‘bring to life’ their promising, evidence-based programmes in classrooms and schools in Suffolk (Gu et al., 2019) support Joyce and Cartwright’s observation (in press) that ‘*Currently, research in evidence-based education policy and practice focuses on randomized controlled trials. These can support causal ascriptions (“It worked”) but provide little basis for local effectiveness predictions (“It will work here”), which are what matter for practice*’ (p. 1). Bryk’s (2015) review of the evidence-based practice movement over the last decade reminds us that:

'At base here is *the difference between knowledge that something can work and knowledge of how to actually make it work reliably over diverse contexts and populations*. ... How to make various work processes, tools, role relationships, and norms interact more productively under a variety of conditions is the improvement community's core learning goal. The resultant knowledge and associated empirical warrants are *practice-based evidence*.'

(2015: 469, 473, italics in original)

It is perhaps, then, no surprise that robust research evidence regarding the awareness, access and use of evidence-informed practice in schools is far more prevalent than that indicating *the extent to which and how* such use has made a real difference to the practice of teaching and learning across different school and classroom contexts. For example, Langer, Tripp and Gough (2016) found more research focused on increasing the use of evidence but limited evidence on either the effectiveness or impact of any increased use. They claimed that approaches directed at improving decision-makers' skills in accessing and making sense of evidence can be effective *provided* that the intervention also seeks to address both capability and motivation to use research evidence. Similarly, Coldwell et al.'s (2017) review of the effective use of evidence in teaching also concludes that we know little about which interventions and approaches to evidence-informed decision-making are effective. The strongest evidence was found to be in the context of medicine and health-related decision-making rather than directly in education.

Research evidence from implementation science, improvement science and other scaling up studies points to three important factors that influence profoundly the processes and outcomes of scaling-up effort to implement evidence-based interventions across various educational settings. The first concerns the *relevance, suitability and applicability* of the intervention to the *local* contexts, or in other words, the context of use. Joyce and Cartwright (in press) argue that to bridge the persistent gap between research and practice, what educators need to know is whether and how 'the intervention *will work here, in their setting*' (p. 28; italics in original). They defended the claim that RCTs can provide evidence showing that an intervention worked with a particular population in a study setting, but added that decision and judgement on the suitability of the intervention for their own educational setting require deep local knowledge and expertise (see also Bryk, 2015). They stressed that if the assessment of the feasibility of implementation did not attempt to predict local effectiveness, the educators could end up choosing an intervention that can be implemented in their setting but cannot work in that setting (especially in terms of bringing about desired outcomes).

Related to the first is the second factor of *implementation capacity* which encompasses educators' knowledge of the local contexts and population characteristics, and as importantly, knowledge of the interventions and their underpinning theories and the skills and capabilities that are required to adapt and monitor interventions in ways that promote improvement within their settings. We concur with Joyce and Cartwright (in press) that 'perfect fidelity is not possible': '*Given the significant differences across students and contexts, even if the target closely resembles the study along visible dimensions, producing positive effects in new settings will very likely require adjustments*' (p. 27). Reflecting on their attempt to design a scalable instructional coaching model, Russell et al. (in press) highlighted the need to build educator capacity for systematic and '*principled adaptation that maintains the integrity of an intervention*' (p.32). Taylor et al.'s (2015) efficacy trial of a curriculum-based intervention for high school science students also provided compelling evidence suggesting that teaching practice is a key mediating factor in effective implementation which matters '*over and above the inherent features of the curriculum materials for students*' (2015: 1012). Consistent with other recent studies of interventions, their research showed that improving teaching practice and teacher expertise through professional development programmes is integral to effective implementation of the intervention.

The third and final factor is the support of external knowledge brokers who act as *research-practice intermediaries* in the process of implementation. Honig, Venkateswaran and McNeil (2017) conceptualise research use as a process of learning in which practitioners are on a trajectory from learning to occasionally appropriating and applying new ideas in new situations towards consistently integrating research into their daily practice. This progress represents a journey of fundamental change in which practitioners and educators master deeper use of research in their settings progressively in order to shape improvement. Coburn and Stein's (2010) case studies show that outside knowledge-practice intermediaries can play a critical role in facilitating the exchange and enactment of knowledge in this learning process. They support knowledge engagement and transformation by translating research into tools to serve as a medium for learning, by brokering research and practice communities to make sense of research-based ideas, and/or by helping practitioners scaffold the implementation sequence to productively adapt research into their settings (Datnow and Park, 2010; Ikemoto and Honig, 2010; Honig, Venkateswaran and McNeil, 2017; Quinn and Kim, 2017). However, assistance from intermediary organisations alone is not sufficient to bring about intended change. Honig, Venkateswaran and McNeil (2017) found that although such assistance and support proved necessary in supporting research use and learning in local educational settings, its effects were limited in the absence of *intensive internal leadership*.

In summary, whilst the research evidence relating to effective pathways for scaling-up interventions is limited, the reviews do suggest that the Research Schools Network approach – of providing access to research and evidence-based interventions, professional training, and knowledge brokering activities to promote and facilitate evidence-informed practice in classrooms and schools – may address the issues of access, capability, opportunity, and motivation for

research use. In this sense, the approach may have promise. However, the reviews also suggest that because the education contexts are diverse and the learning processes are complex, system-wide school improvement campaigns need to recognise, and learn about, how tasks, organisational factors, and diverse contextual conditions combine to create the variability in outcomes (Bryk, 2009, 2015; also Engeström, 2011; Gutiérrez and Penuel, 2014). The key to success centres upon how to effectively support and cultivate school leaders and teachers to develop skills and capabilities required to refine intervention programmes in ways that interact with, rather than add to (Bryk, 2015; Gu et al., 2018, 2019), the complex systems in which they work and students learn.

Research Questions

This evaluation aimed to provide formative feedback on the development of the first cohort of five RSs over the first three years of implementation, and qualitative and quantitative evidence regarding the promise and efficacy of this sector-led model to scale up evidence-based practices in schools. The first five RSs represented pioneers of the national initiative of RSN and in many ways their journeys of forming, developing and consolidating the RSN were different from the other RSs. Additionally, learning from their lived experiences informed the EEF's plans to extend and expand the RSN over time. Therefore, this evaluation remained focussed on the first five RSs to produce evidence that is consistent and robust.

The evaluation was centred upon this primary research question:

1. Is this sector-led approach via the Research Schools Network a viable way of supporting schools to develop evidence-based practices at scale?

In addition, the evaluation will aim to address the following secondary research questions in relation to the three EEF pilot success criteria:

Feasibility (Has the campaign happened as intended?)

2. What types of schools have been reached and engaged, and how many, within and across the three strands of activity?
3. How have the schools been reached and how has their engagement been sustained (or not sustained)? What network and communication strategies are most effective initially, and over time, within and across different types of schools and across the three strands?
4. Is work with schools in depth and sustained? What characteristics of the training are perceived to be effective, and how (e.g. are they monitoring success)?
5. What types of interventions are being developed and evaluated, and how?
6. How much interaction is there between the three strands?

Scalability (Is the approach affordable, sustainable and scalable?)

7. To what extent is the funded programme perceived to be affordable (e.g. how much time RSs spend on programmes of work)?
8. How entrepreneurial are the research schools and what different funding models do they use?
9. Can the approach be self-sustaining after the withdrawal of the funding?
 - a. If so, how will it best become self-sustaining (e.g. what role should EEF/ IEE have to ensure a sustained and shared vision going forwards? How can research schools support each other? Do schools become more interested in attending low cost school-led training at the expense of commercial providers)?
 - b. If not, why not?
10. How many schools are there available that could be research schools? What is the ideal number that is needed to build and embed evidence-based practice in schools?
11. Is there a clearly defined approach including a shared understanding of what constitutes Research Schools' activities and outcomes between all stakeholders including RSs, EEF and IEE?

Evidence of promise (Is there evidence of intended impact?)

12. Is there evidence that schools are engaging with the evidence and taking up evidence-based programmes and practices?
13. Is there evidence to support the theory of change?
14. Is there any evidence of non-instrumental impacts (e.g. staff attitudes change, school culture change)?

Ethical Review

The potential for harm in this research was low. Ethical issues with regard to consent, privacy, and confidentiality of data were considered carefully in each strand of the research. We ensured that a) all participants were fully informed of the purposes, methodology and benefits of the research; b) they were under no pressure to participate in the research. They were fully informed of the purposes and process of the research and of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. Any actions or questions that may cause physical, psychological or emotional harm or discomfort to participants were avoided; and c) all the data obtained were coded anonymously, strictly confidential and non-accessible to others. Participants were not (and will not be) identified in any form of reports or publications. Ethical approval was sought, prior to the research commencing, in line with the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct (before the project was transferred to the UCL Institute of Education) and Research Ethics as well as the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics. Ethical approval was granted by the UCL Institute of Education Ethics Committee following the project transfer.

Data Protection

The evaluation made use of both primary and secondary data. These datasets were held locally on the UCL's research network drive with access provided to the evaluation team members and specific IT support personnel. Access to the network drives was tied to researchers' workstations which were situated in private locked offices. The terminals were all password-protected and authenticated through the University's centralised Information Access Management system. Remote access, where permissions allowed for it, only worked through remote desktop which had the same password and authentication requirements. The research drive partition was regularly backed-up and further stored on tape drives. The storage of all data was managed centrally by UCL Research Data Storage service. The service is a free resilient facility for the safe storage of research data that ensures compliance with both UCL's and the ESRC's policies.

To comply fully with GDPR requirements, all data were managed and stored appropriately according to GDPR regulations. Where personal data is collected for instance through interviews and surveys, we ensured that the data was:

- processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner.
- collected only for explicit and legitimate purposes for the specified research study, and not further processed for other purposes.
- processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss.

Appendix 1 presents the privacy statements used for each research activity.

Project Team

The evaluation team (the evaluators) who undertook the evaluation comprises:

Evaluation team	Responsibilities
Professor Qing Gu	Principal Investigator, leading the evaluation
Simon Rea (Isos Partnership)	Jointly leading the case study strand of the evaluation; conducting qualitative data collection and analysis
Dr Kathy Seymour	Jointly leading the quantitative strand of the evaluation; conducting quantitative data collection and analysis
Dr Lindsey Smethem	Conducting qualitative data collection and analysis
Ben Bryant (Isos Partnership)	Conducting qualitative data collection and analysis
Dr Paul Armstrong	Conducting telephone qualitative surveys, analysis and reporting
Dr Miyoung Ahn	Conducting analysis of databases and surveys
Professor Jeremy Hodgen	Supporting the design and analysis of different strands of the research work
Dr Rupert Knight	Supporting reporting of the research work
Kanchana Minson	Project administrator at the University of Nottingham
Monika Robak	Project administrator at the UCL Institute of Education
Laura Compton	Project administrator at the UCL Institute of Education

EEF team working with the RSN were:

EEF team	Responsibilities
Dr James Richardson	Head of Dissemination and Impact
Stuart Mathers	National Delivery Manager

Methods

The aim of this project was to investigate and test the promise and efficacy of this sector-led model to scale up evidence-informed practices in schools. As such, this three-year evaluation (2016-19) used a mixed methods design to explore and assess the three EEF pilot success criteria – *evidence of promise*, *feasibility*, and *scalability* – of this RSN campaign, and answer the research questions outlined in the previous section. The longitudinal design of the evaluation enabled the research team to track and capture the changes that the first cohort of five RSs had experienced and offer learning about the extent to which, and how, this RSN campaign was able to effectively disseminate EEF's evidence to schools and support them to use promising evidence-informed practice and programmes for improved teaching and pupil outcomes.

Overview of research design

The mixed-methods evaluation began with a *baseline* investigation to explore the initial conditions and contexts in which the five RSs began to build and develop their networks, activities and programmes. Focus was placed upon RSs' planned strategies to encourage and sustain schools' participation in their networks and use these to enable and support the delivery of the three key strands of activity (i.e. evidence dissemination, CPD and training, innovation development). Key evaluation activities in this phase included analysis of RSs' annual delivery plans, observation of their training and support meetings and a one-day visit to each of the five RSs.

The main phase of the evaluation focussed on collecting in-depth qualitative and quantitative evidence regarding barriers to and conditions for effective take-up⁵, feasibility and scalability of this sector-led model of scaling up evidence-based practice, and participating individuals' and schools' perceived impact on practices and cultures in their educational settings. Complementary evidence was mainly collected through two follow-up visits and a mid-point telephone interview with senior leadership of the five RSs, two RSN surveys in the first and final year of the evaluation, and two rounds of telephone interviews with a sub-sample of respondents that participated in the initial and follow-up surveys respectively. In addition, the research team also worked with the five RSs to develop a *standardised RS network database* which identifies the time of participation and levels of engagement that individuals and schools became associated with each of the five RSs. A research-informed, *standardised pro forma* was also developed and tested to baseline and track individual participants' perceived change in practice as a result of their participation in CPD programmes provided by RSs.

The final phase of the evaluation focussed on the triangulation, integration and synthesis of different strands and sources of quantitative (including cost evaluation) and qualitative data and the production of the final report. Table 1 below provides an overview of the research design.

⁵ By investigating the numbers of different groups of schools participating in RS activities and their perceived impact of participation.

Table 1: Overview of research methods

Research methods	Data collection methods	Participants/ data sources	Research questions (RQ) addressed
Quantitative Approach	Building RS network database	Individuals and schools signed up to the RSN newsletters, CPD and training programmes, innovation and other activities	RQ 2, 3, 5, 6
	Baseline and follow-up RSN surveys in Project Year 1 and Year 3	All individuals (with valid email addresses) in the RS network database	RQ 4, 6, 12, 14
	Three-stage standardised CPD pro forma on change in practice	Participants of CPD and training programmes offered by the 5 RSs	RQ 4
Qualitative Approach	Case study interviews and visits to RSs	Senior leaders of RSs and key stakeholders of their partner/network schools and organisations	RQ 8, 9, 10, 11, 14
	Two telephone qualitative (interview) surveys following the RSN surveys	All survey participants who volunteered to participate in the interviews	RQ 7, 10, 12, 14
Other Evaluation Method	Interviews with EEF and IEE personnel	Key personnel who lead and coordinate the RSN programme at EEF and IEE	RQ 11
	Observation of RSs' regional and national meetings in Project Year 1	Participants at these meetings comprising senior leaders of RSs and EEF and IEE personnel	RQ 3, 11
Quantitative & Qualitative Data Integration & Synthesis: Findings and Interpretations			RQ1, 13

Data collection

RS network database

Data about the reach and composition of each of the five RSs' networks was collected through a standardised network school database which the evaluation team developed and maintained in consultation with the RSs. The database recorded when teachers and leaders from network schools began to be involved in RSs' activities and their levels of engagement against each of the three strands of RS activity:

- *Communication* – Encouraging schools in their network to make use of evidence-based programmes and practices through regular newsletters (administered by the IEE between 2017 and 2019, and then by EEF from September 2019) and events. The last data collection for this strand was in May/June 2019.
- *CPD and Training* – Providing training and professional development for senior leaders and teachers on how to improve classroom practice based on the best available evidence.
- *Innovation* – Supporting schools to develop innovative ways of improving teaching and learning and providing them with the expertise to evaluate their impact.⁶

As the evaluation progressed, the training categories were sub-divided into three categories to provide a granular analysis of the method of participation and engagement:

- *Conferences* – designed to enable to free exchange of ideas and collaborative knowledge transfer in contrast to formal training.
- *Formal training* – more formal 'classroom style' knowledge transfer which often involves two or more sessions.

⁶ Source: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/scaling-up-evidence/research-schools/> [Accessed: 4th January 2018]

- *Twilights* – the same mode of delivery as training events, but in the evenings, and generally shorter. This was recorded separately to evaluate whether engagement could be increased by tailoring the availability and accessibility of sessions.

The purpose of standardising the database was to secure the consistency of the data across the five RSs and enhance the comparability of the data across different RSs and different types of activities. A database for each of the five RSs was created and monitored over a three-year period (2016-2019). The profiles of all schools were then matched to existing secondary databases, including 'Get Information about Schools', Ofsted judgement data, and school-level pupil attainment and progress data over the same period. This longitudinal data building approach enabled the evaluation team to *baseline* and *track* the reach and engagement of RSs activities and programmes over time and explore the extent to which, and how, schools in different contexts and with different deprivation and performance profiles became more (or less) engaged. The database is and complete and robust as it was possible to make it, but there were inevitably some issues with data quality and missing data (e.g. schools not providing full lists of training attendees, or certain fields of data being left blank such as 'role'). Appendix 2 provides a detailed account of the composition of the database, data management, and the strategies employed to secure the quality of the data.

RS network surveys

Copies of the baseline and follow-up RSN surveys were provided in Appendix 3.

Purpose The main purposes of the baseline and follow-up surveys were to explore:

- i) the conditions that may have, positively or negatively, influenced schools' motivation to participate in different strands of RS activities;
- ii) the extent to which their engagement and participation thus far have made a difference to the practices and cultures in their schools; and
- iii) their expected long-term engagement with the RS activities.

Baseline survey

The baseline survey was developed by the evaluation team in conjunction with the EEF, IEE and with inputs from the five Research Schools (RSs). The content was primarily based on the academic literature on effective teaching and professional development, school leadership and school improvement. The surveys were piloted among a small number of schools that were known to the evaluation team. The survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The initial baseline survey was conducted in the summer term of 2017 – two terms after the inception of the RSN initiative in September 2016. The decision to postpone the baseline survey was informed by the learning from our evaluation of Teaching Schools (Gu et al., 2016). As pioneers of the new policy, the majority of the first three cohorts of Teaching Schools reported that it took them more than a year to become clearer about their identity and how they should develop their alliances to support their missions effectively. It was therefore highly likely that the networks of the first five RSs had not taken shape at the outset of our evaluation (which was later supported by case study visits).

Survey participants The survey involved **all 3,360** individuals in the RS network database at that time who had valid email addresses. Each individual was sent a unique survey link in May 2017. The survey was set up online and hosted on the University's survey platform (Bristol Online Surveys). Individuals and schools who were recorded to have been involved in any of the three strands of RSN activities were invited to participate in the survey. They included:

- 1) mailing lists for the regular e-newsletters all RSs circulate (i.e. individuals who were seen as being engaged with the 'communications' strand of RS activity);
- 2) attendees at RS training and CPD events (i.e. those engaged with the 'training' strand of activity); and
- 3) head teachers of schools that had received innovation funds from the IEE (i.e. engaged in the 'innovation' strand of activity).

Three reminder emails were sent between May and December 2017, and the five RSs also promoted the survey in their newsletter and on Twitter to help raise awareness and boost responses. One RS also sent their own reminder email to subscribers towards the end of the survey completion period in November.

Response rates Irrespective of the collective effort from both the evaluation team and the RS coordinators, **214** people completed the survey. Around 24% (834 individuals) of recipients of the newsletter that was sent out closest to the point at which the survey distribution list was compiled opened the email. If we take the 834 'openers' as our potential pool of respondents, then the 214 survey respondents represents a **26%** response rate. The issue of open rates is discussed in greater detail under Key Findings 1.

In addition, the quality of the mailing lists must be considered. Individual teachers might have been signed up en masse by their schools or RSs using, for example, mailing lists from Teaching School Alliances or Multi-Academy Trusts (prior to the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018). Thus, the response rate quoted here should be considered as an underestimate.

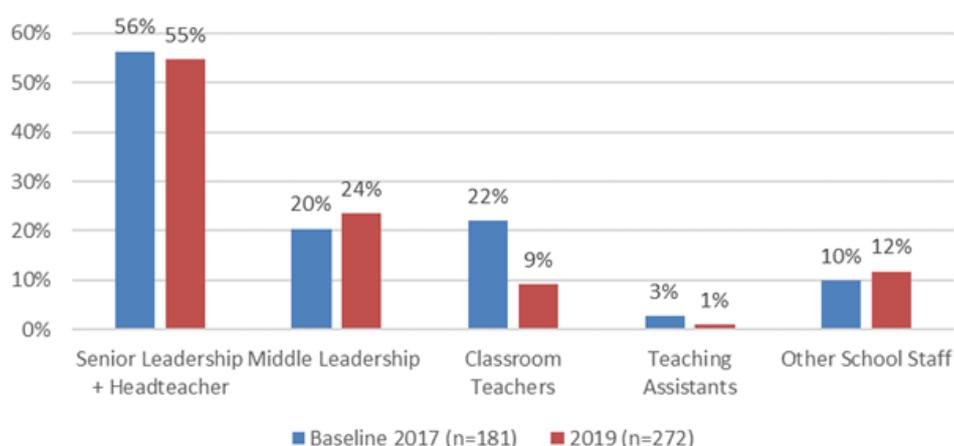
Follow-up survey

The survey was repeated in the spring term of 2019. While the overall content of the follow-up survey remained as similar as possible to the baseline survey, based on the learning from the baseline survey, some minor amendments were made to certain items. Most notably, some of the response scales that had comprised four response points in the baseline survey were expanded to six points in the follow-up survey. For example, agree strongly / agree / disagree / disagree strongly, was replaced with agree strongly / agree moderately / agree slightly / disagree slightly / disagree moderately / disagree strongly. This more granular response scale was necessitated by the high proportions of respondents giving the highly positive responses in the baseline survey which allowed for little differentiation. Such positive tendency in responses had not emerged as an issue during the piloting of the survey. The change to response scales made comparisons between the two survey points more problematic (since respondents were not answering on exactly the same response scale). However, given that it was not the same set of individuals responding to each survey, this further compromises the comparability of the two sets of data; therefore, it was felt that the changes were justified since they would give a more nuanced picture of the situation towards the end of the evaluation.

Response rates An invitation to complete the online questionnaire was sent by email to **3,030** individuals on the database in late January 2019 (reduction in the size of the database was due to the ramifications of taking actions to comply with GDPR), followed by three reminder emails. In order to boost the response rate, we randomly selected 968 people to send paper questionnaires by post in early March 2019, but only 31 completed questionnaires were returned. By the end of April 2019 when the survey was closed, 330 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of **11%**. However, the most recent newsletter sent before the survey was distributed was opened by 648 individuals (an open rate of 17%); if we take the number of openers as the potential pool of respondents (n=648), then our 330 survey respondents represents a response rate among newsletter openers of **51%**.

Profiles of survey participants As Figure 2 shows, in both surveys the vast majority of the respondents worked in schools. Of those who worked in schools, more than 70% had senior and middle leadership responsibilities. However, proportionally there was a marked decrease in the number of classroom teachers that responded to the two surveys: from 22% in the baseline survey to 9% in the follow-up survey. During the intervening period there was a shift in the emphasis of the RSN and senior and middle leaders were targeted as the main recipients of information and support from the RSs with the expectation that they would then be the vehicles for change within their schools. This reduction in engagement with the survey from classroom teachers may result from this change.

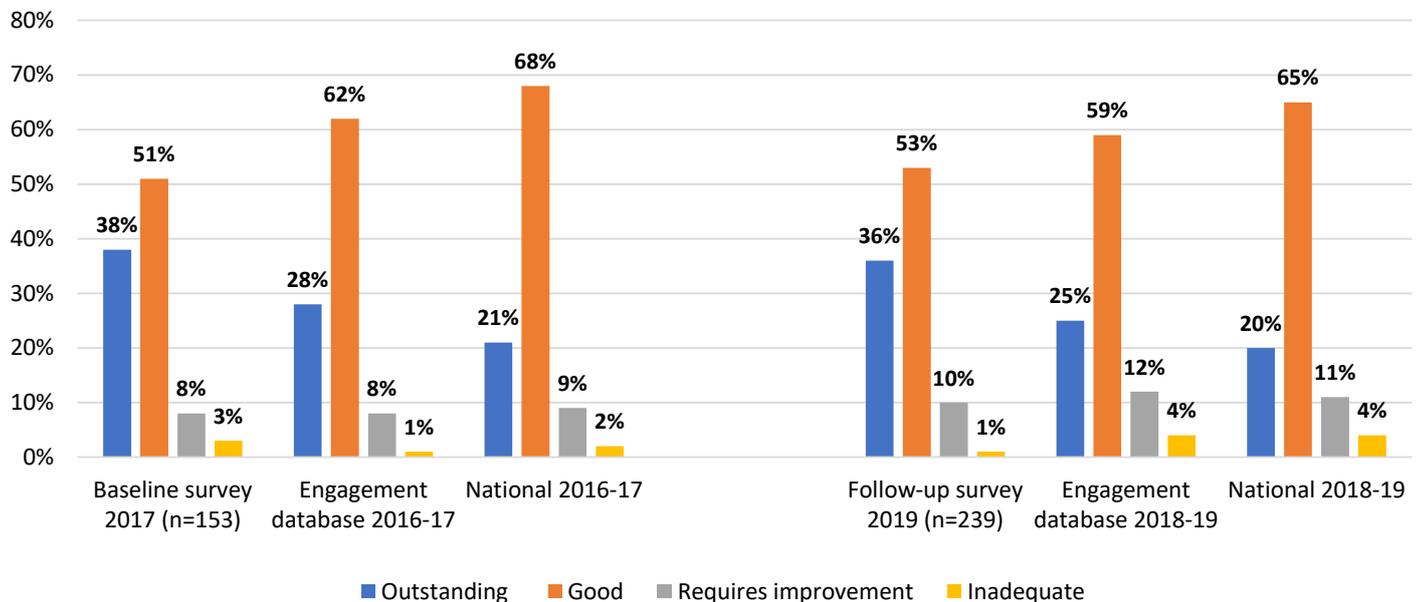
Figure 2: Respondents to baseline and follow-up surveys by roles in schools



As Figure 3 shows, when compared to the national figures, schools judged to be 'outstanding' by Ofsted were *over-represented* in both surveys: representing 38% and 36% of surveyed schools in 2017 (n=153) and 2019 (n=239) respectively as compared to 21% and 20% of all schools in England in the two respective years. In contrast, schools

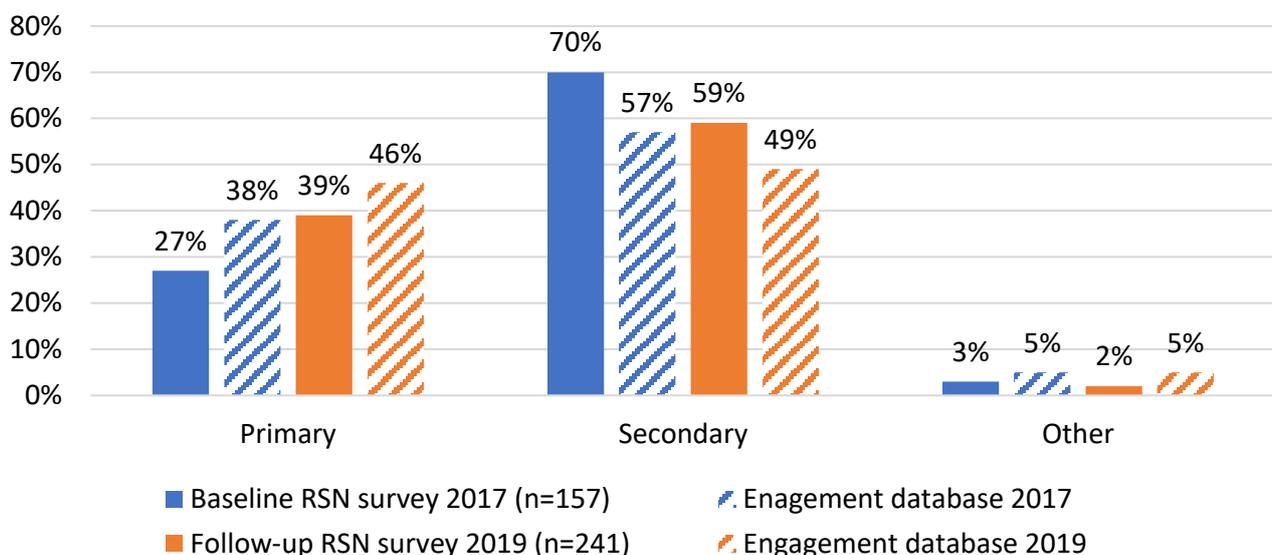
judged to be in the 'good' were comparatively under-represented: 51% in 2017 and 53% in 2019 as opposed to 68% and 65% nationally in the same two respective years. The over-representation of 'outstanding' schools somewhat reflects the makeup of the schools that were recorded in the RSN database, although the extent of over-representation is slightly greater among survey respondents' schools than among schools in the database. It is important that the interpretation of survey results considers this context.

Figure 3: Survey respondents by Ofsted overall effectiveness judgement (2017 and 2019), compared with the database and national figures



In both surveys, respondents from secondary schools were proportionally much greater than those from primary schools. This makeup of survey respondents may reflect the fact that three of the five RSs were in the secondary phase and that proportionally there were more secondary schools than primary schools in the RSN database. Figure 4 below compares the proportions of survey respondents by school phase. It shows the proportions of respondents to the two surveys (solid bars) against the population in the shaded bars (i.e. the individuals in our engagement database which represents our target population for the two surveys at the two points in time). Irrespective of the slight increase in primary schools in 2019, respondents from the primary phase remained underrepresented compared to those in the RSN database.

Figure 4: Survey respondents by phase (2017 and 2019) compared with schools in the engagement database



Three-stage standardised CPD pro forma

A standardised CPD pro forma was developed to assess the extent to which, and how, the CPD and training activity had made a difference to participants' knowledge, skills and practice over time. Attendees at a selection of CPD/training events run by the RSs were invited to complete a short survey (pro forma) *just before commencing the training* (the 'baseline' survey), *immediately on completion of the training* (the 'on completion' survey) and then again approximately *one full term after completing the training* (the 'follow-up' survey).

Design The survey content was based on the research literature on what makes effective teaching and professional learning and development (e.g. Coe et al., 2014; Timperley, 2008), and the impact of school leadership on improvement on student outcomes (Day et al., 2011; Day, Gu and Sammons, 2016). The key areas covered in the CPD pro forma were shown by robust evidence as having significant impact on student outcomes. Because the logic model of this evaluation did not intend to assess RSs' impact on pupil outcomes, the CPD pro forma was designed to explore whether and how participation in RSs' CPD and training programmes had challenged and improved individuals' beliefs and practices in areas that were likely to result in improvement in pupil outcomes. It also explored the organisational and leadership conditions and cultures that might have facilitated or hindered the impact of training on their change (or lack of change) in context of use. The key areas covered the CPD pro forma were as follows:

- subject knowledge
- quality of teaching practice
- classroom management
- professional beliefs and behaviours
- leadership support and culture (on completion survey only)
- experience of the training and changes made or planned as a result of the training (on completion and follow-up surveys only)

The CPD pro forma was used to assess programmes that spanned over two or more sessions. One-off training sessions, conferences and events were excluded from this aspect of evaluation. All five RSs were asked to provide the evaluation team with details of training programmes they were running throughout the three-year evaluation period so that, where appropriate, the CPD pro forma could be administered. We collected data from four of the five RSs as one was reluctant to engage with this aspect of the evaluation.

The surveys were piloted among a small number of schools that were known to the evaluation team. They were then set up online in the Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) platform. The data represented in this report covers surveys relating to 12 multiple-session courses offered by four RSs. Although there was some variation in response rates between different courses, there was a general trend for response rates to reduce with each stage of the survey. Overall the baseline surveys across the 12 courses achieved a response rate of 72% (n=226), but this reduces to 41% (n=128) for the on completion and 33% (n=103) for the follow-up surveys (see Appendix 4 for the three-stage surveys and detailed breakdowns). This was despite efforts from both the evaluation team and the RSs themselves to improve response rates with personalised emails and several reminders. There were only 21 respondents who were identifiable as having completed all three surveys for their training course and 53 completed both a baseline and follow-up survey (but not an on completion survey). This means that we were very limited in the extent of any comparisons over time that could be conducted on the CPD surveys.

Telephone qualitative surveys

Two telephone qualitative surveys (i.e. spoken open-ended surveys that allow respondents to provide responses in their own contexts) with a sub-sample of survey respondents in 2017 and 2019 were conducted in the autumn term of 2017 and the summer term of 2019. The purpose of the telephone interview surveys was to explore, in more detail, individuals' and schools' motivation for engaging with RSs' activities, conditions for effective take-up of evidence-based practices, and their perceived impact (if any) of their engagement with RSs on change in practice and cultures in their classrooms and/or schools. The interview questions were closely aligned with the research questions and were designed to collect 'thicker descriptions' of the key areas that the survey intended to explore. An example of the interview questions is provided in Appendix 5.

A total of **68** respondents of the baseline survey (32% of 214) and **118** respondents of the follow-up survey (36% of 330) indicated that they would participate in telephone interviews. Because the number of volunteers was smaller than expected, we decided to invite them all for the telephone qualitative surveys. Recruiting these volunteered participants was a lengthy and challenging task: some people might have changed their contact details, whilst others were no longer available for interviews. Eventually we managed to interview **29** baseline survey participants (42% out of 68) and **48** follow-up survey participants (41% out of 118). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. It is necessary to

note that we did not follow up with other potential participants who did not volunteer through the survey. Caution may be exercised in interpreting the data because of the potential bias in the interview participants who could have had particularly positive or negative experiences with RSs' activities.

Interview participants worked in schools across both primary and secondary phases, with different student intake and different performance profiles (in terms of key stage outcomes and Ofsted judgement categories). In both rounds of the telephone qualitative surveys, the vast majority of the participants were school leaders: 27 senior leaders in the first survey in 2017 and 44 senior/middle leaders (33 senior leaders and 11 middle leaders) in 2019. Taken together, the **77** telephone interviews provided a detailed, rich account – especially from the perspective of school leaders – of the roles and impact of the five RSs in promoting evidence-based practice and culture within their locality and beyond.

Case study interviews and visits

The case study visits were designed to complement the quantitative evidence from this evaluation by providing in-depth narrative accounts of *what RSs do* to scale up and influence evidence-based practices and cultures in schools. The visits also intended to generate detailed evidence of the inhibiting and facilitating factors for effective implementation of RS activities and offer further insights into changes in RSs' strategies and practices to engage schools and other key stakeholders within their locality (and beyond) for effective delivery of their plans and activities.

The qualitative case study approach involved three annual visits to the five RSs over the course of the project and a telephone interview with RS coordinators in the summer term of 2017. During the school visits, interviews were conducted with individuals with a range of roles and responsibilities including senior leaders and coordinators of the RSs, focus groups of senior leaders of selected partner schools, and other key stakeholders who had supported and/or been engaged with RSs activities (e.g. university partners, local authority personnel, teaching school alliance coordinators). These interview participants were purposefully selected by the RS leads based on the criteria provided to them by the evaluation team. As RSs expanded the reach and engagement of their activities, we were able to speak with different school leaders and key stakeholders during each visit. An example of the interview schedules and selection criteria for interview participants are provided in Appendix 6.

The first one-day visit took place in December 2016 to *baseline* the initial conditions, strategies and plans for effective delivery of the three strands of RS activity. The visit also aimed at gathering information about the characteristics of the networks that RSs intended to develop. Specific attention was drawn to the ways in which they intended to use existing partnerships and activities (e.g. Research and Development work relating to Teaching Schools) to support the development of their networks and the delivery of the RS work.

A telephone interview in May/June 2017 and two follow-up visits in the spring term of 2018 and 2019 were then carried out to explore and track the extent to which, and how, RSs' approaches and strategies had changed over time. The interviews also intended to document evidence regarding conditions for effective take-up, feasibility and scalability of this sector-led approach to scale up evidence-based practices in classrooms and schools. Such detailed, longitudinal evidence of RSs' development offered rich learning about how the regional and national contexts had enabled or hindered RSs' accomplishments in terms of reach and engagement and impact on behaviour change of individuals and schools.

Other evaluation methods

Interviews with EEF and IEE personnel In order to understand the role of EEF and IEE in facilitating the feasibility of this scale-up model, the evaluation team also carried out regular unstructured individual or focus group interviews with their personnel. These interviews explored their observations of the RSs, their actions to lead and govern the RSN initiative and the rationale behind their decisions to introduce structural and cultural changes to the initiative over time. These interviews took the form of **dynamic research dialogues** between the evaluation team and the funders in which the evaluation team provided reflections and feedback that both challenged and supported the funders' views and the feedback they were receiving from RSs and the system.

Observation of RS meetings in Year 1 Attending and observing RSs' get-together meetings in Year 1 of the evaluation played at least two important roles. First, it enabled the evaluation team to observe first-hand how the first five RSs intended to work together to develop, implement and transform their actions, systems and networks to support the delivery of their activities over time. Second, it enabled the evaluation team to establish the necessary rapport with the RSs and consult them in the process of setting up evaluation activities.

Data analysis

RS network database

The database for each of the five RSs were analysed separately first before combing them for comparison. Analysis considered individual schools' time, duration and levels of engagement within and across the three strands of activity. Where possible, the analysis explored clusters of schools that had played differentiated roles and made differing contributions to the delivery of each of the three strands of activity.

A key focus of this strand of evaluation work was to identify whether (and, if so, how) the RSs engaged schools with different contextual and performance profiles. To achieve this, schools' profiles in each database were matched to existing secondary databases (including 'Get Information About Schools', school performance data) to explore the main characteristics of schools in each RS network. This analysis also examined the underlying proportion of disadvantaged pupils for each RS over time, as well as which schools deviated from the average proportion and by how much. Specific questions about programme reach and participation were asked at the interviews with RS senior leaders during the three visits and the mid-point telephone interview. Their perceptions were then triangulated with the participating schools' profiles to assess the effectiveness of their strategies in terms of engaging disadvantaged, low performing schools.

RSs' network surveys

The survey included both closed and open questions to capture the necessary information. The analysis was largely descriptive, focusing on exploring the extent to which, and in what ways, the responses were similar or different between various groupings of schools. To achieve this, the survey response data was matched to school background characteristics where the respondent was a staff member in an identified school in England. The background data was taken from 'Get Information about Schools', Ofsted Management Information, and School Performance Tables over the same period.

The analysis of the data was conducted in SPSS for the quantitative (tick box style) data, and in NVivo for the qualitative (free text) responses. The free text responses were coded thematically (i.e. the comments were reviewed by one of the evaluators to identify key themes and topics), and each comment was then allocated into the relevant theme(s) or topic(s) depending on the subject matter of the comment. A second team member checked and verified the coding to ensure accuracy and consistency. Where appropriate, the researchers drew inferences from the quantitative data using, *inter alia*, parametric and non-parametric tests of variance to examine schools' perceptions of the conditions and practices that enabled or hindered their engagement with different strands of RSs' activity, and effective take up of evidence-based practices in their schools. Examples can be found in Appendix 8 where results of the factor analysis were reported.

Three-stage standardised CPD pro forma

It is not an intended purpose of this strand of the evaluation to directly compare individual courses and any impact they might have had, and all RSs were assured that their data would be analysed and presented in aggregate form. Therefore, the 12 courses that were the subject of the CPD pro formas have been divided according to their subject matter into those that were directed at school leaders, those that were intended to address teaching practice (aimed at classroom teachers and/or teaching assistants), and those that address mechanisms for engaging with and disseminating research (aimed at staff at any level, for example, training about developing research leads). These groupings are referred to as 'leadership', 'teaching' and 'research' courses respectively where this level of analysis is presented in this report. Table 2 shows how many courses and respondents there were under each of these three categories. It indicates that around half of responses to each of the three surveys are from attendees at teaching practice courses, between around a third and two-fifths are from attendees at leadership courses and only a small proportion are from attendees at research courses.

Table 2: Number of courses and respondents for each type of course

Course type	Number of courses	Respondents: Baseline		Respondents: On completion		Respondents: Follow-up	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Teaching practice course	6	124	55%	68	53%	53	51%
Leadership course	4	79	35%	55	43%	43	42%
Research course	2	23	10%	5	4%	7	7%
Total	12	226	100%	128	100%	103	100%

Telephone qualitative surveys

A data analysis framework was developed to record and refine emergent themes, identify patterns, focus subsequent data collection and synthesize key factors within and across individual cases (see Appendix 5). The development of the framework also considered the relevant research questions that the telephone qualitative surveys intended to explore. All interviews were digitally recorded and were analysed using the analytical matrices shortly after they had been conducted to ensure that emerging themes were fed into the research process. Analysis focused on exploring the influence of school contexts, leadership capability, and staffing capacity on individuals' and schools' engagement with RS activity within and across different groupings of schools.

Case study interviews and visits

All interviews were digitally recorded and analysed as above. The analytical frameworks for the qualitative telephone interview survey were used as a basis to develop the data analysis framework for the case studies. This approach helped to secure some consistency in the analysis of different strands of data and enable effective triangulation of research evidence. In contrast to the analysis of the qualitative telephone surveys which focussed on whether and how engaging with RS activity had made a difference to practice in schools, the case study analysis explored in detail what RSs *did* to broaden and deepen the reach of their activities and to enable change in practice. Thus, the attention was placed upon examining change in RSs' strategies and practice over time and the feasibility and scalability issues that might be specifically related to the characteristics of the region.

Synthesis of data analyses

The analysis of the RS network database and the survey data were conducted in parallel with the qualitative data collection (telephone interviews and case studies) in order to ensure that the results from different strands of data inform the development of each other. Findings from the qualitative analysis were used to supplement, contextualise, and explore the quantitative findings and, in particular, give greater depth of insight into the extent to which, and how, the RSN approach had made a difference to the take-up and implementation of evidence-based practice in schools at scale.

The results from different strands of data tell the 'stories', experiences and perceptions of different groups of participants. Their different perspectives were compared and synthesised systematically at key milestones of the research to provide nuanced responses to the research questions. This rich mix of synthesised data enabled the evaluation team to compare and contrast practices and actions between different groupings of schools, and recognise how variations in context, capacity, and capability combine to influence the effectiveness of this sector-led approach to scale up evidence-based practices for improvement in schools.

Timeline

Table 3 below provides a summary of the project timeline.

Table 3: Project Timeline

Project Phase	Research Activity	Staff responsible
Phase 1 (Jul 2016 – Jan 2017): Understanding the contexts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Observation of RSN get-together meetings 2) Initial visit to 5 RSs 3) Interview with EEF & IEE personnel 4) Analysis of RS action plans 	Qing Gu Simon Rea Lindsey Smethem Ben Bryant
Phase 2 (Feb 2017 – Oct 2017): Establishing initial conditions and practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Building RS network database 2) Baseline RS network survey 3) Telephone interview survey with a subsample of survey respondents 4) Follow-up telephone interviews with senior leaders of 5 RSs 5) Observation of RSs meetings and conferences 6) Interviews with EEF and IEE personnel 7) Developing CPD and training pro forma 	Kathy Seymour Qing Gu Simon Rea Lindsey Smethem Ben Bryant Kiaran Gill
Phase 3 (Nov 2017 – July 2018): Tracking changes in practices and conditions for effective take-up, feasibility and scalability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Building and maintaining RS network database 2) Using the three-stage CPD and training pro forma to baseline and track the impact of RS training on participating teachers' and/or school leaders' change in practice 3) Second visit to 5 RSs 4) Interview with EEF and IEE personnel 	Kathy Seymour Qing Gu Simon Rea Lindsey Smethem Ben Bryant
Phase 4 (Aug 2018- Aug 2019): Understanding change in practices and exploring impact	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continuing to building and maintain RS network database 2) Continuing to use the three-stage CPD and training pro forma to baseline and track the impact of RS training on participating teachers' and/or school leaders' change in practice 3) Follow-up RS network survey 4) Follow-up telephone qualitative survey with a subsample of survey participants 5) Third visit to 5 RSs 6) Interview with EEF and IEE personnel 	Kathy Seymour Qing Gu Simon Rea Lindsey Smethem Ben Bryant Paul Armstrong Emma Delow Kathryn Crowther Steve Long Miyoung Ahn
Phase 5 (Sep 2019-Mar 2020): Triangulating and synthesising evidence and reporting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Integrating and synthesising research evidence 2) Reporting 	Qing Gu Simon Rea Kathy Seymour

Key Findings 1: RSN Reach and Engagement

Introduction

This chapter discusses the reach and engagement of the five RSs' communications, training and innovation activities over a three-year period (2016-2019). It examines the contextual and performance profiles of schools and individuals that each strand of the RSs activity has attracted. The analysis of the communications, CPD and training, and innovation strands followed the same approach to enable us to compare the similarities and differences in the contextual and performance profiles of schools involved in different strands of the RS activity.

Table 4: Summary of key findings 1: RSN reach and engagement

Key Findings 1: RSN Reach and Engagement
The five RSs' mailing lists of newsletters (i.e. the communication strand) reached schools across the nine regions of England. Such national reach was successfully achieved in the first year of the national initiative and has continued to be strengthened since then.
However, the analysis of the newsletter open rate suggests that in most cases, individuals who signed up to RS e-newsletters were not necessarily engaging with the evidence and practices that the newsletters promoted. The open rate varied between 14% and 59% across most newsletters and the proportion of individuals who clicked on at least one link fell between 2% and 22%. This raises the question of whether the newsletters were serving as a mailing list to which schools signed up, or potentially useful resources for practice change.
Overall, the distribution of participating schools by level of disadvantage across each of the three RS activities was broadly in line with the national average of Ever FSM 6 over the three-year period, although socioeconomically more disadvantaged schools appear to be slightly over-represented. This finding offers support to EEF's commitment to improve disadvantaged schools and children.
Proportionally the total number of 'outstanding' schools (as judged by Ofsted) and higher achieving secondary schools was slightly but consistently higher than the national distribution in the RSs' communications strand over the three-year period. The over-representation of 'outstanding' schools in the CPD and training activity was particularly marked in the first year, and schools that played a lead role in the innovation strand tended to predominantly 'good' and better schools.
Taken together, the characteristics of participating schools in the first three years suggest that purposeful strategies and structural coordination are necessary to enable the RSN to attract greater participation from more schools that are in need of support for improvement.

Reach versus engagement

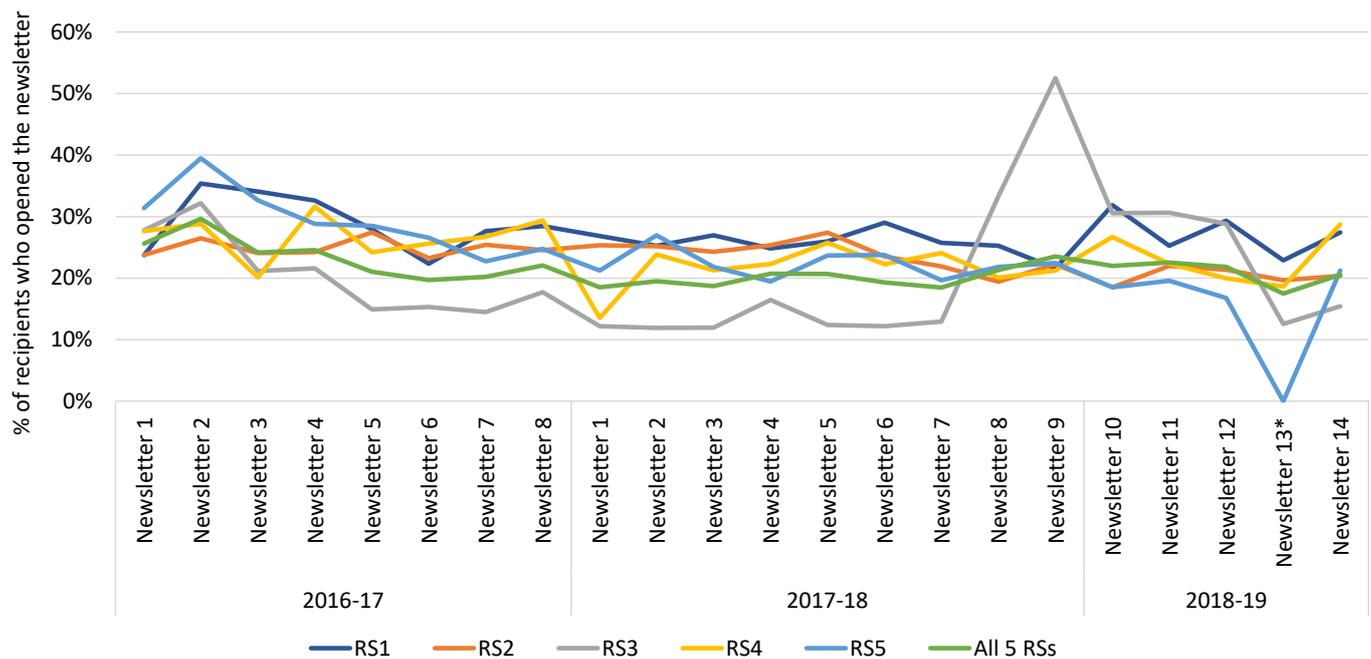
To provide some context to the analyses that follow in this chapter, it is important to clarify how we conceptualise the difference between *reach* and *engagement* in our analysis. Reach refers to the level of coverage of the RSs' communication activity focussing on the numbers of schools and individuals that have signed up to RSN e-newsletters. Engagement requires further steps of actions to show participants' interest in the resources provided (e.g. opening the links to resources). We also consider schools' participation in CPD and training as well as innovation programmes as engagement.

The communication strand of the database comprises all subscribers to the five RSs' email newsletters. Subscribers either actively opted to receive these emails by completing a sign-up form on the RS's website, or were 'passively' added by the RSs themselves due to having a connection with the RS, for example, being in the same multi-academy trust or teaching school alliance. Although some participants from the qualitative telephone surveys pointed to the level of passivity inherent in the communications strand of the RSN database; unfortunately there was no systematic data suggesting whether an individual had actively subscribed or been added to the subscriber list by the RSs.

Newsletters were distributed two to three times per term by IEE on behalf of each of the five RSs. The content of the newsletters usually included some 'core' content common to all five RSs' newsletters (for example, giving news of new EEF publications or opportunities to take part in trials) as well as RS specific information (such as information on forthcoming events such as training or conferences). The mailing platform used to distribute the newsletters, Campaign Monitor, allows for the recording of which subscribers open their email and which clicked on any links within the email. Although this recording system may not be entirely accurate as it will depend on the set-up of individual's email accounts as to whether they permit such information to be returned, this does provide our only indicator of the *engagement* with the newsletters. Using this data, an analysis was conducted to explore the extent to which subscribers of newsletters were engaged with the content by opening the emails and/or clicking on the links in the newsletters.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of recipients of the newsletters who opened them at least once for each each RS and the total across all RSs (labelled 'All 5 RSs') for each newsletter in the evaluation period. At individual RS level, open rates varied between 12% and 53% but when all five RSs are combined, the open rates ranged from 17% to 30%. There was a general trend for the open rates to be higher in the first academic year (2016-17) than in subsequent years (the second newsletter achieved the highest open rates), with most RSs seeing their open rates plateau from the second year. The time of the spike for RS 3 (newsletter 9) coincided with the reduction in the mailing list when GDPR was introduced in May 2018. It may suggest that individuals who opted to remain on the mailing list had some interest in engaging with the RS activity.

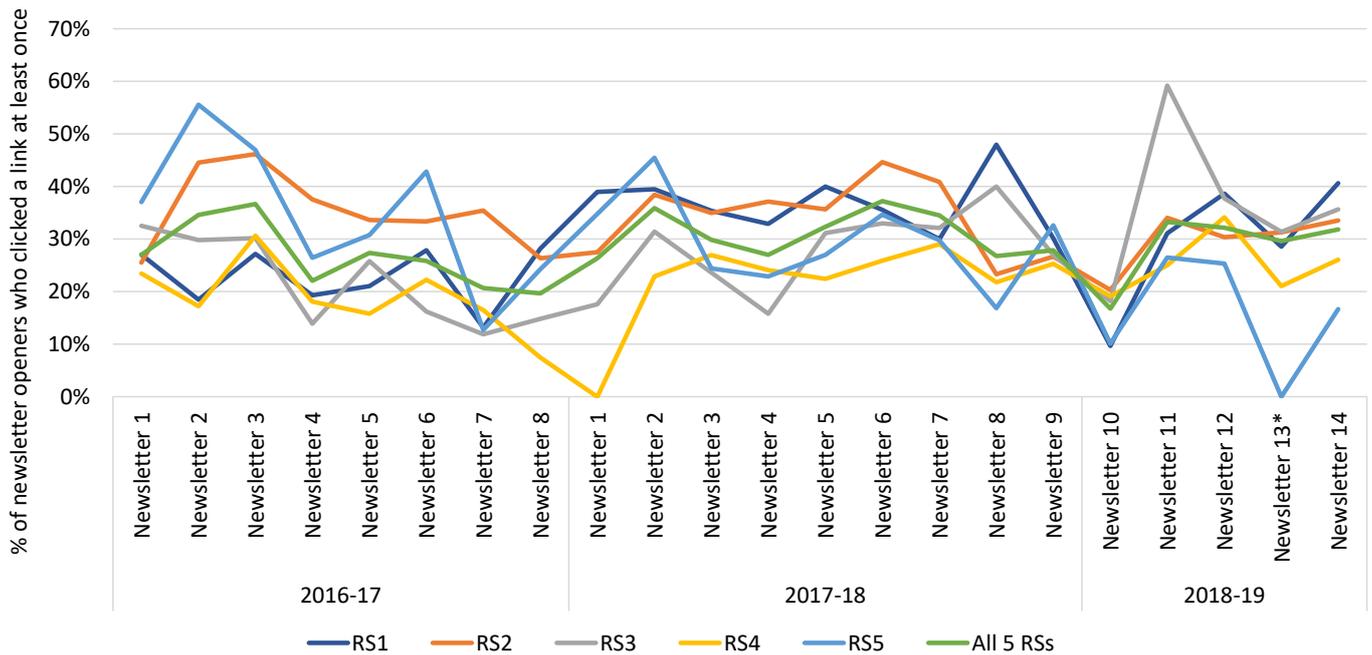
Figure 5: Percentage of recipients who opened each newsletter – by RS and overall



Note on Figure 4: *RS 5 did not send a Newsletter 13.

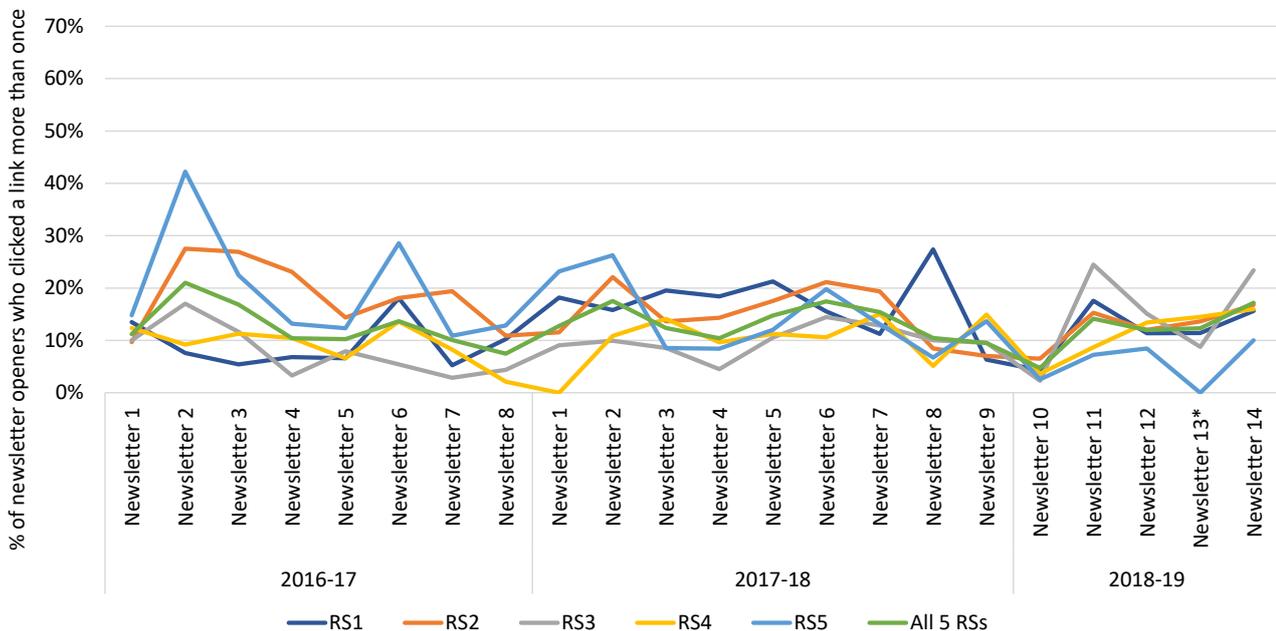
Figures 6 and 7 show the percentage of those who opened the newsletter who clicked on a link contained within the email at least once (Figure 6) and more than once (Figure 7 – note that this might mean clicking the same link more than once, or clicking on more than one different links within the same email). We can see that although the click rates are quite variable, for all but two of the newsletters fewer than half of recipients clicked on any links, and in most cases, fewer than a quarter of recipients clicked on a link more than once. While there are some wide variations in click rates between individual RSs, across all five RSs combined (the green line on the charts), the lowest percentage of openers who clicked at least once was 17% and the lowest proportion who clicked more than once was 5%, whereas the highest proportion who clicked at least once was 37% and the highest percentage of openers who clicked more than once was 21%.

Figure 6: Percentage of newsletter openers who clicked a link at least once – by RS and overall



Note on Figure 6: *RS 5 did not send a Newsletter 13. Note also that RS4 sent a Newsletter 1 in 2017-18 but 0 clicks were recorded, this may have been a technical issue with the mailing platform.

Figure 7: Percentage of newsletter openers who clicked a link more than once – by RS and overall



Note on Figure 7: *RS5 did not send a Newsletter 13. Note also that RS4 sent a Newsletter 1 in 2017-18 but 0 clicks were recorded, this may have been a technical issue with the mailing platform.

Taken together, the analyses of the newsletter open and click rates show that **it is likely that there are potentially large numbers of individuals who signed up to RS e-newsletters but were not necessarily engaging with these.**

The average open rate for the newsletters across all five RSs and all 22 newsletters that were sent out during the evaluation period is **21%**. The communications database recorded 6,216 individuals as recipients of newsletters, and of these 3,010 were recorded as zero opens against every newsletter they received, indicating that on an individual

recipient basis, the open rate is 52% (i.e. 52% of individuals were recorded as having opened at least one of the newsletters they received)⁷.

Thus, although RS newsletters may have 'reached' (in terms of signing up to newsletters) a large number of individuals and schools across the country, the quantitative evidence on the extent to which schools were actually 'engaged' (e.g. through opening newsletters and/or following links) with the evidence and practices that the newsletters had promoted remains limited. It also raises the question about the nature of the communications work: *To what extent is it simply serving as a mailing list that schools sign up to, or a network mechanism and resource that plays a role in supporting schools to effectively access and take up research and evidence-based practice?*

Reach through the communications strand

The *monthly newsletters* administered by the IEE had been a primary channel of communication for RSs to disseminate evidence-based practices and innovations to schools and individuals. As expected, the vast majority of the individuals that had signed up to RSN newsletters worked in schools, ranging between 71% and 94% across the five RSs over the three-year period. Other non-school based roles that subscribers held included local authority officers, staff at multi-academy trusts and school governors. The 'role' field in the sign-up form was not compulsory. Therefore, we did not always know what subscribers' roles were, other than that they were not from a school. This section focuses on subscribers from schools only and analyses the contextual and performance characteristics of the schools whose staff members had access to RSs' main communication activity.

As of summer 2019, 6,216 individuals from **2,048 schools** had subscribed to the RSs' newsletters⁸. Together, the five RSs' mailing lists of newsletters have **reached schools across the nine regions of England**. Such national reach was successfully achieved in the first year of 2017 and continued to be strengthened since then.

The geographical locations of schools in which individual participants worked were plotted on a map using the postcode of the school, as registered against the Unique Reference Number (URN) with the Department for Education (DfE). Each school is counted once regardless of how many people had received newsletters in each one. Figure 8 presents the density of schools that had subscribed to the newsletters across all five RSs by the end of the evaluation period. The spread of the schools confirms that the five RSs have achieved a national reach through their newsletters. The density of engaging schools is denoted by the colour coding with the shades of red denoting more subscribers and blues denoting lower numbers of subscribers across the areas.

Specific maps that illustrate the density of schools that are associated with each of the five RSs are presented in Appendix 7. The comparison of the maps show clearly that **although all RSs tended to attract more schools from their local region, RS2 had a considerably wider, national geographic spread than others**. Differences in individual RSs' strategies to develop, broaden and deepen their reach and engagement will be discussed in detail later in this report.

⁷ The data presented here is indicative and caution is needed to draw inferences from the data. This is because the accuracy of recording open and click rates is not 100%. Some email systems are set up so that they do not return such information to the mailing platform. Therefore, we cannot be sure that all of those who are recorded as not opening an email actually did not open it, or whether it was simply that this information was not returned to the mailing platform.

⁸ Note that this is much higher than the number of individuals who were asked to complete a follow-up RSN survey (as reported in the 'data collection' section of this report) because it includes anyone who had ever subscribed to a newsletter over the three-year evaluation period, whereas the survey invitations were only sent to current subscribers (with a valid email address) to the newsletter sent out most recently at the point of distributing the survey.

Figure 8: Density map of schools involved in communications: All 5 RSs (2019)

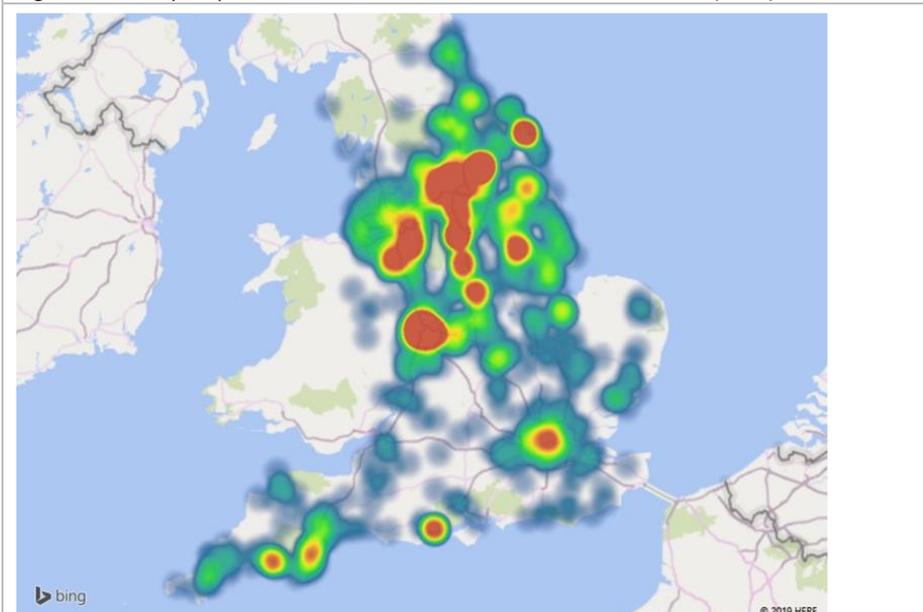


Table 5 below shows the number of individuals and the number of schools in receipt of the RSN newsletters from each RS over the three-year period. One RS consistently achieved the highest ratios of individuals per school across the three years as compared to the other four RSs – suggesting a potentially different strategy to signing up individuals to the newsletters whereby multiple staff members from some schools might have been signed up (or encouraged to sign up) *en masse*. Telephone interviews with a subsample of the baseline survey supported this observation that the RS used mailing lists from Teaching School Alliances and Multi-Academy Trusts to sign up individuals for newsletters. The slight decline in the third year was the result of the introduction of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in May 2018 when the RS required all subscribers to formally opt in. Although this ‘wholesale’ approach had rapidly increased the sign-up rates and, in theory, provided staff with access to information about evidence-based innovations and practices, further analysis suggested that this approach did not necessarily result in their *engagement* as judged by the low open rates of the newsletters (see below for detailed discussion).

Table 5: Individuals and schools that have signed up to RSN newsletters (2016-19)

	Number of individuals	Number of schools	Individuals per School
RS 1			
2016-17	284	117	2.43
2017-18	334	151	2.21
2018-19	356	142	2.51
RS 2			
2016-17	1082	676	1.60
2017-18	1440	898	1.60
2018-19	1586	862	1.84
RS 3			
2016-17	1760	81	21.73
2017-18	1859	134	13.87
2018-19	1147	136	8.43
RS 4			
2016-17	348	119	2.92
2017-18	424	196	2.16
2018-19	424	173	2.45
RS 5			
2016-17	294	189	1.56

	Number of individuals	Number of schools	Individuals per School
2017-18	482	270	1.79
2018-19	457	257	1.78
Total	6216*	2048*	3.04

* Excluding duplicate individuals and schools.

Reach and engagement through the CPD/training and innovation strands

Between 2016 and 2019 around 1,685 individuals from 979 schools and other education institutions⁹ participated in the training programmes provided by the five RSs (Table 6).

Table 6: Individuals and schools that attended CPD and training programmes offered by the RSs (2016-19)

	Number of individuals	Number of organisations/schools	Individuals per organisation/school
RS 1			
2016-17	60	27	2.22
2017-18	166	76	2.18
2018-19	69	39	1.77
RS 2			
2016-17	98	49	2.00
2017-18	211	133	1.59
2018-19	198	131	1.51
RS 3			
2016-17	11	9	1.22
2017-18	93	49	1.90
2018-19	43	23	1.87
RS 4			
2016-17	22	15	1.47
2017-18	408	388	1.05
2018-19	1	1	1.00
RS 5			
2016-17	53	42	1.26
2017-18	141	60	2.35
2018-19	27	22	1.23
Total	1685	979	1.72

The first four innovation grants were awarded by IEE in February 2017 and 30 school-led, small-scale pilot projects had been funded by March 2020. The evaluation team was given information on 15 successful applications to the IEE funding in 2019. These innovations were primarily developed by schools to test new ideas and practices that they were interested in, and many projects were carried out and evaluated by one school. It is therefore not appropriate to generalise the findings from these interventions. However, as the IEE put it, the benefits of implementing these innovation projects are

⁹ We believe that the actual number of attendants are much higher than the figures presented here because of missing data in the reporting process. This is a result of difficulties in obtaining attendance data from the RSs but also missing information when attendance lists were supplied (e.g. no school attributed to individuals)

not necessarily in the findings, but in the process that enabled schools to learn how to design and collect indicative evidence behind real-world initiatives (IEE website).

For each project there was one lead school and might have involved several participant schools (details of all participant schools were not always provided as part of the application). Lead schools were responsible for coordinating and running the project, while participant schools were involved to a lesser degree, usually by trialling the intervention that formed part of the project, and/or contributing data to the project. RSs' guidance and support was mainly provided at the application stage.

The key statistics about the schools and projects (as specified on the funding application forms) are as follows:

- 36 different schools were identified as being involved in innovation projects (excluding the supporting RSs)
- One of the schools featured in three projects and was the lead school for all three; the remaining 35 schools featured only once across the funding applications
- Of the 15 projects, five each were support by RSs 2 and 5, two each were supported by RSs 1 and 4 and one was supported by RS 3

It is no surprise that participating individuals and schools of both strands tended to be local to the RSs.

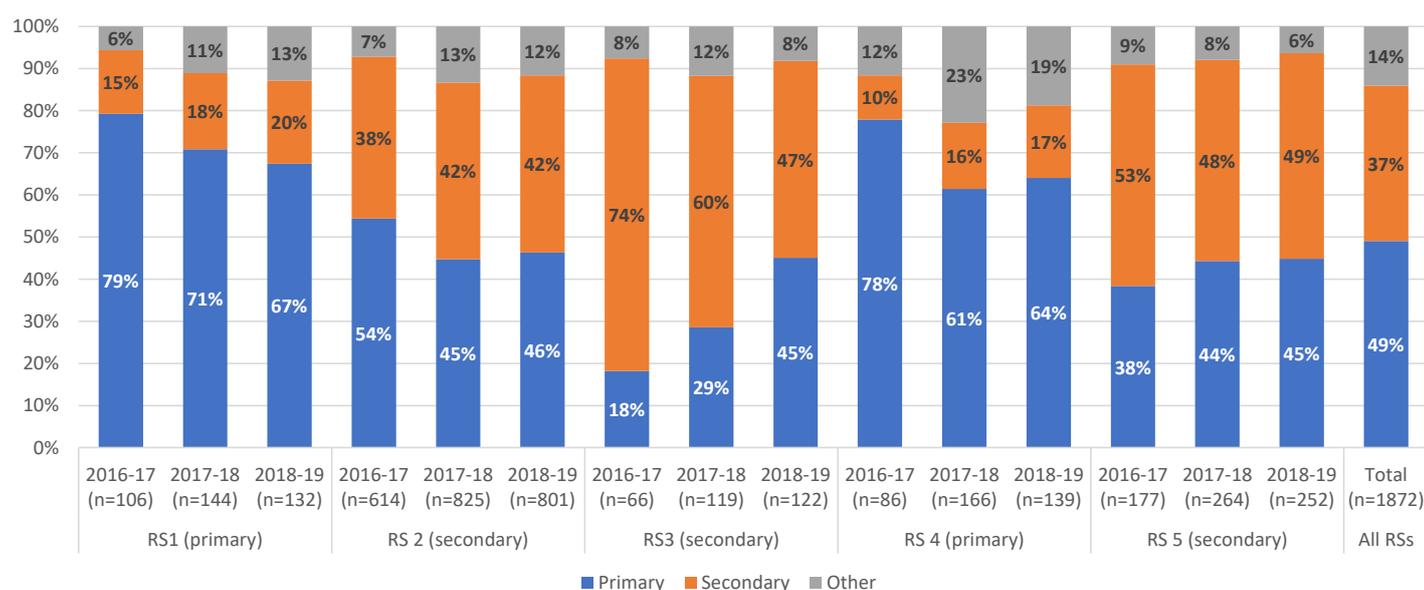
Reach by phase of education

Reach through the communications strand

Figure 9 shows that individuals and schools who subscribed to RSN newsletters tended to be from the same school phase as the RS itself – especially in the first year of their inception. As evidence in this report will show later, this may on the one hand reflect the makeup of school networks in which these RSs are involved (or leading) and their strategy to use their existing networks to develop RS activities. On the other hand, schools from the same education phase may perceive the content of the newsletters are more relevant to their contexts and be more likely to subscribe if the RS phase matches their own school's phase.

Although all five RSs had broadened their reach to other phases over the three-year period, this was achieved to varying degrees. Compared to secondary RSs, the vast majority of the schools that had signed up to primary RSs still tended to be from the same education phase.

Figure 9: Distribution of schools by phase (communications strand)



Note on Figure 9: The total 'n' (1,872) is lower than that shown in Table 5 (2,048) because while it was possible to identify that some individuals are from a school, it was not always possible to accurately assign them to a specific school, and where this was

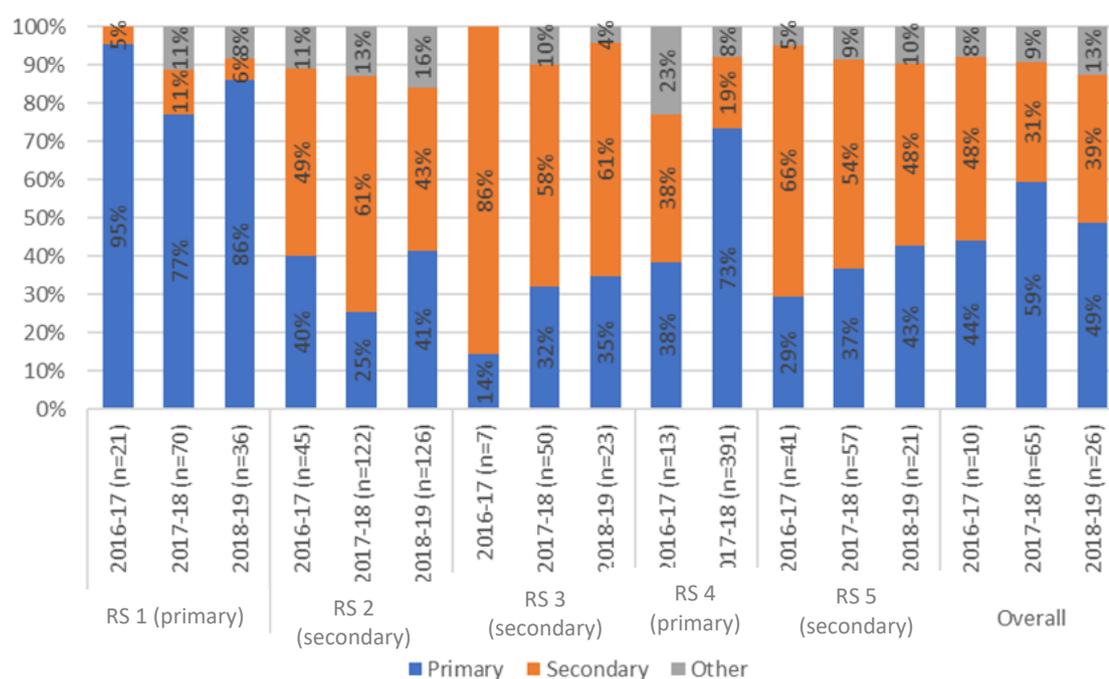
possible, information on the school was sometimes not available (e.g. where an invalid URN had been given and the correct one was not possible to ascertain).

Reach and engagement through the CPD/training and innovation strands

The profiles of the schools that had staff attending RS training programmes are remarkably similar to those of the communication strand. As Figure 10 shows, proportionally participants of the training programmes run by the two primary RSs were primarily from the same education phase. In contrast, participants of secondary RSs' CPD and training programmes had a relatively more varied profile although most still tended to be from the secondary phase.

Among those who engaged with the innovation strand, the 13 lead schools (note that although there were 15 innovation projects, one school was the lead for three projects, hence there were 13 different lead schools across the 15 projects) of the innovation projects were primarily from the same education phase as the RSs with which they were associated.

Figure 10: Participants of RS CPD and training programmes by phase



Reach by level of disadvantage

Reach through the communications strand

The distribution of pupil socioeconomic disadvantage – using the proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meal at any point in the last six years (Ever FSM 6) as a proxy¹⁰ – is highly skewed, reflecting the geographical concentration of poor families in particular communities (such as inner city locations). Nationally a greater proportion of English schools are in FSM bands 1 and 2 (i.e. less than 9%; 9% or more but less than 21%) than in FSM bands 3 and 4 (21% or more but less than 36%; 36% or more). Figure 11 shows that the distribution of schools by level of disadvantage (measured by Ever FSM 6) across the five RSs (the 'All RS' bar) is broadly in line with the national average, although socioeconomically more disadvantaged bands 3 and 4 schools appear to be very slightly over-represented and consequently, bands 1 and 2 are very slightly under-represented.

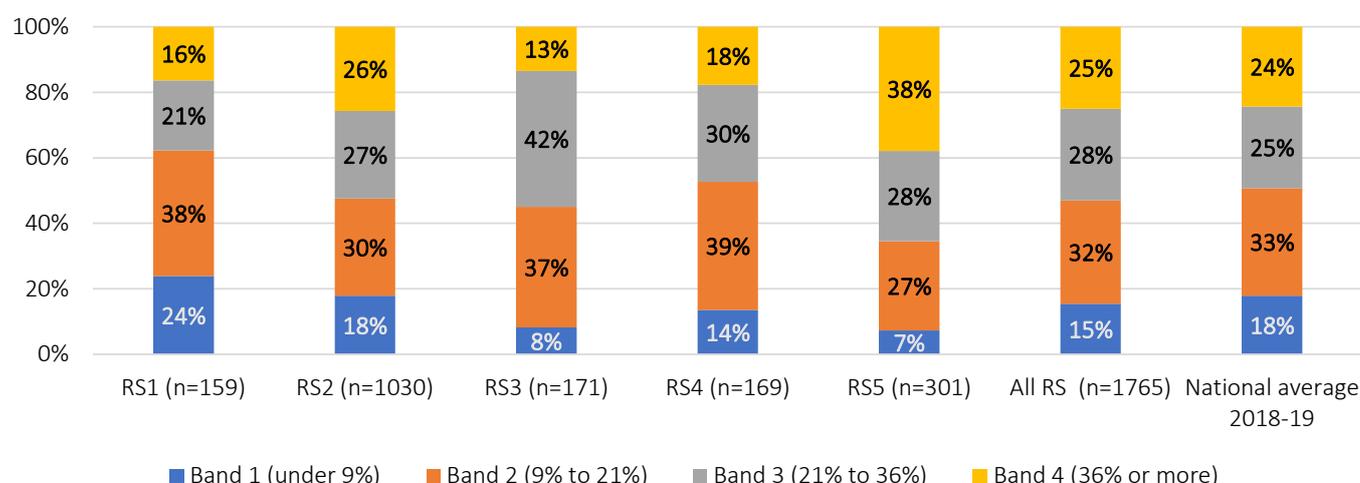
However, there are **variations** across individual RSs. RSs 1 and 4 had the highest proportion of schools in their communications networks in FSM Ever 6 bands 1 and 2 combined, indicating lower levels of disadvantage, while RS5

¹⁰ FSM data presented here is publicly available. In this report, we use the percentage of pupils that have been eligible for free school meals at any time in the last 6 years, known as 'Ever FSM 6'. All FSM analysis excludes nursery, post-16, alternative provision, and other schools with no valid data.

had a particularly high proportion of schools in band 4 (38% of schools) suggesting that their communications network includes a high proportion of schools with higher levels of disadvantage (as defined by Ever FSM 6 – see footnote 6).

This suggests that, based on the makeup of the communications network, across the five research schools there is **little evidence to suggest that socioeconomically disadvantaged schools are being over-recruited**, but that this has been the case for some individual RSs (notably RS5, but also RS3 has a high proportion of schools in band 3). There is therefore little to suggest that these RSs as a group have successfully addressed EEF’s commitment to improve the learning and life chances of disadvantaged children, in terms of the reach of their communications strand of activities. Where this does appear to have been achieved at RS level, this is likely to be due to socioeconomic features of their geographical location and the fact that both RSs who showed high proportions of disadvantaged schools among their newsletter subscribers had very strong concentrations of subscribers clustered around their own geographical locations.

Figure 11: Participants of RS CPD and training programmes by Ever FSM 6



Note on Figure 11: The n for ‘All RS’ does not equal the total ns for RSs 1-5. This is because duplicate schools have been removed from the ‘All RS’ figure (duplicates are caused by the same school being associated with more than one of the RSs).

Reach and engagement through the CPD/training and innovation strands

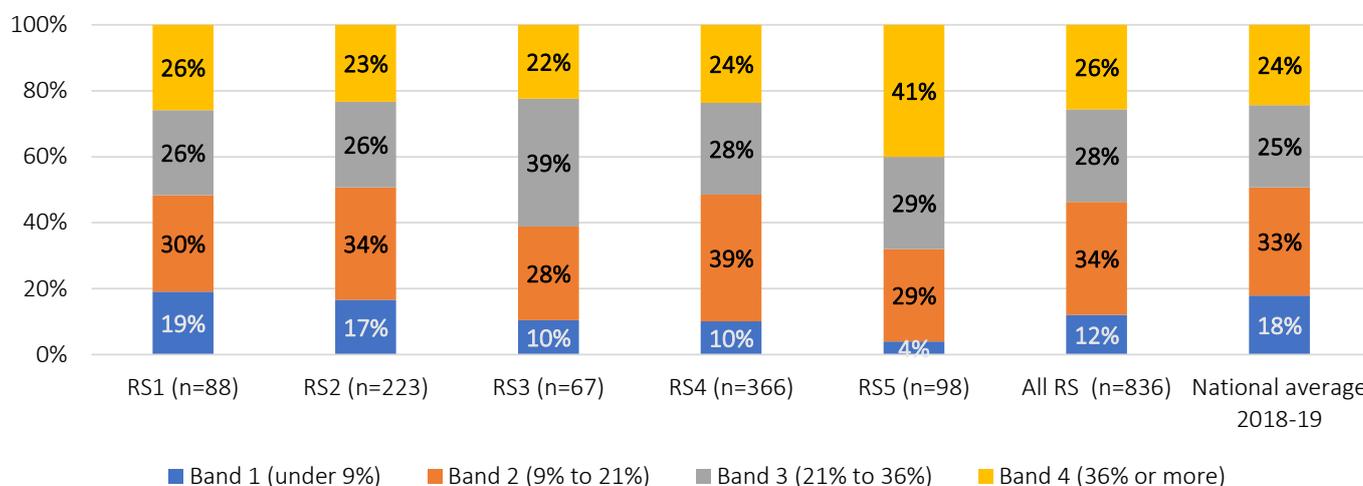
Figure 12 shows that across all five RSs combined, the schools that participated in the RSs’ training programmes were broadly representative of the national picture in terms of the proportions in each Ever FSM 6 band, with just a very slight over-representation of the Bands 3 and 4 (indicating more socioeconomically disadvantaged schools).

However, in contrast to the communications strand, the least disadvantaged band 1 schools in the training strand were markedly under-represented overall, and by individual RSs, RS5 had a particularly low proportion of participant schools from band 1, and only RS1 exceeded the national proportion of band 1 schools, and this was by just one percentage point. As was the case with the communications strand, RS5 and (to a lesser extent) RS3 showed the greatest over-representation of disadvantaged schools.

Overall the distribution of participating schools in the innovation strand is broadly in line with the national distribution of school by level of disadvantage (n=32)¹¹: FSM bands 1 and 2 schools were 13% and 38% respectively compared to 18% and 32% nationally. Consistent with the communications and training strands, the majority of the innovation schools (4 out of 6) associated with RS 5 were in the disadvantaged FSM bands 3 and 4.

¹¹ Based on the analysis of 32 schools whose information is available to us. They were either lead schools of the 15 innovation projects or played an active part in the innovation project.

Figure 12: Distribution of training participant schools by Ever FSM 6 (training)



Note on Figure 12: The n for 'All RS' does not equal the total ns for RSs 1-5. This is because duplicate schools have been removed from the 'All RS' figure (duplicates are caused by the same school being associated with more than one of the RSs).

Reach by Ofsted performance¹²

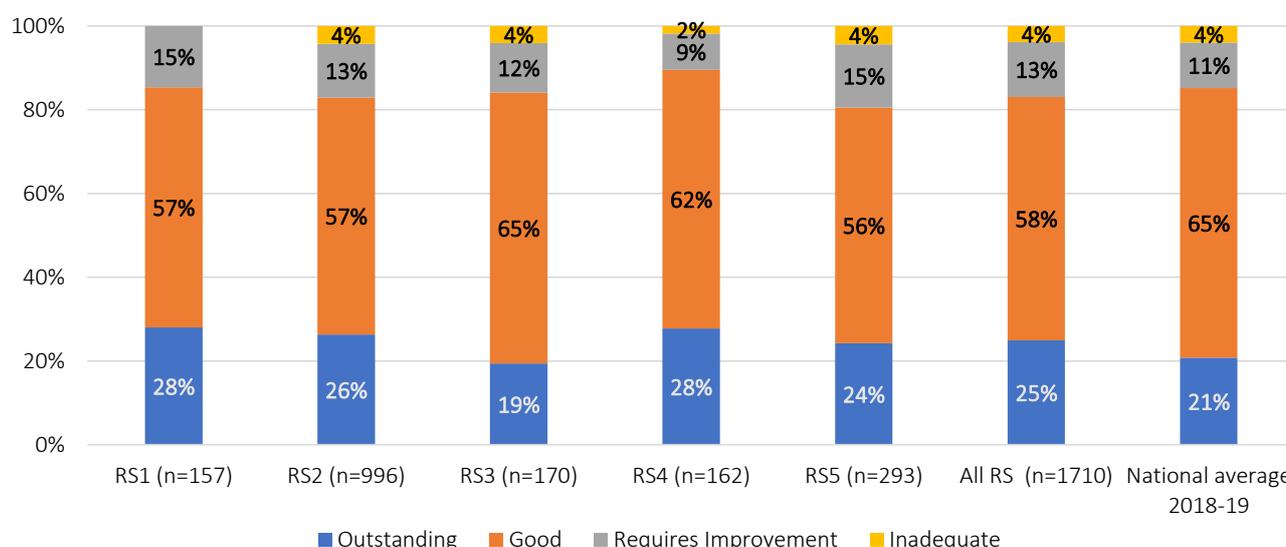
Reach through the communications strand

As Figure 13 shows, the proportion of 'outstanding' schools across the five RSs combined network is higher than the national average by four percentage points: 25% of schools in the communications network compared to 21% of schools nationally are judged to be outstanding in terms of their overall effectiveness. While the proportion of 'inadequate' schools in the combined all RSs network matches the national average of 4%, 'requires improvement' schools are slightly over-represented (13% in the communications network compared to 11% nationally) and 'good' schools are slightly under-represented (58% in the RS network as opposed to 65% nationally). Looking at the individual RSs, all except RS 3 have a higher proportion of outstanding schools in their communications network than there are nationally and only RS5 and RS2 have a higher combined proportion of requires improvement and inadequate schools than the national percentage.

The **over-representation of 'outstanding' schools in RSs' communications networks** is somehow not a surprising finding. It reinforces the observation that we reported in the evaluation of a Challenge Fund in the county of Suffolk (Gu et al., 2019) which also found that 'good' and better schools were over-represented in the scale-up campaign which invited *open applications* from across the school system to take up a matched funding opportunity to implement EEF's evidence-based practices. Similarly, in the RSs' communications strand individuals and schools were self-motivated to sign up to the newsletters that were designed to give them the access to information about how to use evidence-based practices and innovations for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Such repeated observations suggest that **attracting greater participation from more schools that are in need of support for improvement to take up opportunities and resources remains a challenge for system-wide scale-up campaigns.**

¹² The Ofsted data used for each academic year was the data published by Ofsted on 31st August immediately prior to the start of the academic year. For example, for the 2018-19 academic year the published data on 31st August 2018 was used as this was the most recent information available at the time the data was collected. The same approach was used to extract performance data from the DfE.

Figure 13: Distribution of newsletter subscriber schools by Ofsted overall effectiveness ratings (communications strand)



Note on Figure 13: The n for 'All RS' does not equal the total ns for RSs 1-5. This is because duplicate schools have been removed from the 'All RS' figure (duplicates are caused by the same school being associated with more than one of the RSs).

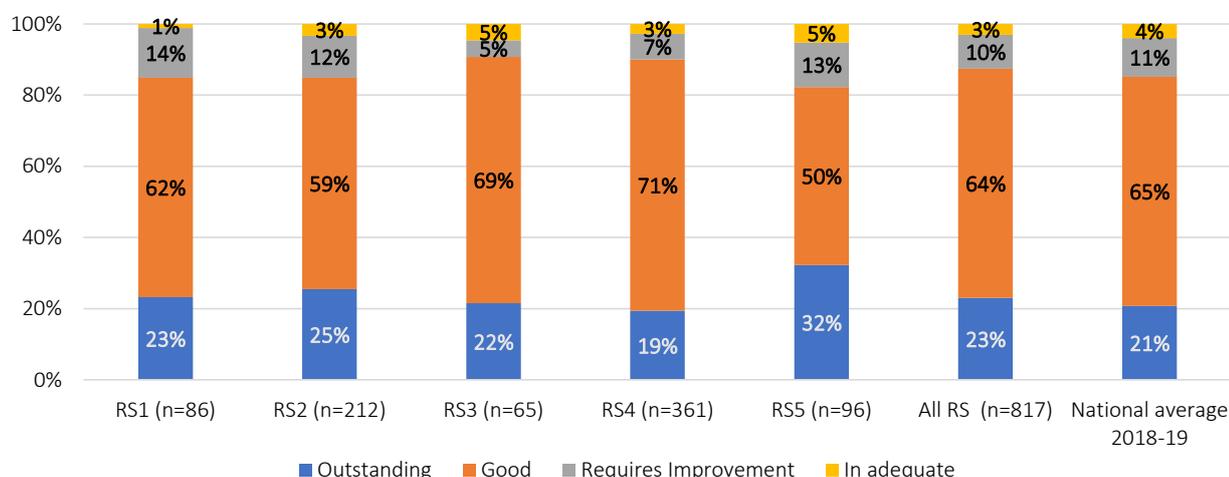
Reach and engagement through the CPD/training and innovation strands

Overall the profiles of network schools in the training strand were **broadly in line with the national distribution** although 'outstanding' schools were slightly over-represented and requires improvement and inadequate school slightly under-represented (Figure 14).

As for individual RSs, all but one of the five RSs saw their CPD and training programmes attract a higher proportion of 'outstanding' schools than the national distribution. RS5 appears to have been most successful in attracting schools with lower Ofsted ratings than the other RSs, but at the same time, this RS recorded the highest proportion of outstanding schools participating in their training.

The innovation strand represented a less diverse range of schools than the other strands in terms of Ofsted ratings. Schools that lead or play an active role in the innovation strand tended to be good (69% out of 32) or better (25%) schools based on their Ofsted judgement ratings. In RSs 1-3, all innovation schools had Ofsted rating of 'outstanding' or 'good'.

Figure 14: Distribution of training participant schools by Ofsted ratings (CPD and training strand)



Note on Figure 14: The n for 'All RS' does not equal the total ns for RSs 1-5. This is because duplicate schools have been removed from the 'All RS' figure (duplicates are caused by the same school being associated with more than one of the RSs).

Reach by school performance

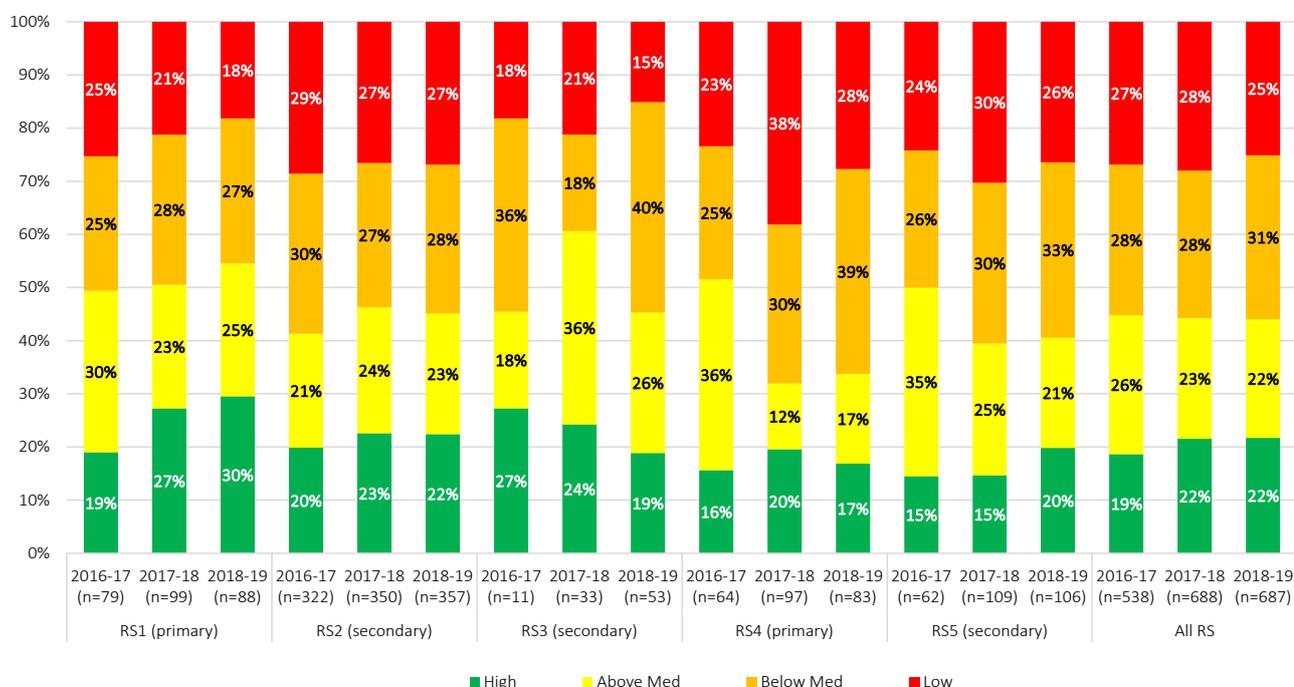
Reach through the communications strand

It is important to note that the evaluation is not intended to assess the impact of the RSN initiative on participating schools' pupil outcomes. The analysis of school performance has been used to identify whether, and how, the communications strand had attracted schools of certain performance profiles. The RSN communications database was matched to the Key Stage 2¹³ and Key Stage 4 performance data between 2017 and 2019. It is important to note that academic performance of a school is matched in arrears, and therefore the data in 2016-17 represented school performance before individuals in those schools had signed up to RSN newsletters and was used to establish the baseline. The charts presented in this section separate out the three academic years covered by the evaluation.

We divided the national key stage performance outcomes into quartiles. Whilst the quartile boundaries change year-on-year, the top quartile always consists of the top 25% performing schools and the bottom quartile represent the most underperforming schools. For each RS, the number of schools in each of the national quartiles was calculated as a percentage of the total number of schools. If a RS had the same variation in performance as the national picture, then it would have 25% of its schools in each quartile. As Figure 15 shows, the overall distribution of primary schools that had subscribed to the RSN newsletters across all five RSs **broadly fits into the national performance quartiles** over the three-year period.

However, there are variations across individual RSs. Similar to school distribution by Ever FSM 6, RS 1 and RS 5's network schools showed contrasting performance profiles and the difference is particularly marked in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Higher achieving schools are over-represented in RS 1's communications networks: 27% and 30% of their schools were in the top quartile in 2018 and 2019 whilst only 15% and 20% were the top quartile in RS 5's network schools in the same period. In contrast, around 60% of RS 5's network schools were in the bottom two quartiles in both years compared to 49% (2018) and 45% (2019) in RS 1's networks. Schools in the bottom two quartiles were also over-represented in RS 3 and 4's communication networks.

Figure 15: Distribution of primary schools in the communications network by quartile performance (KS2 % achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths)

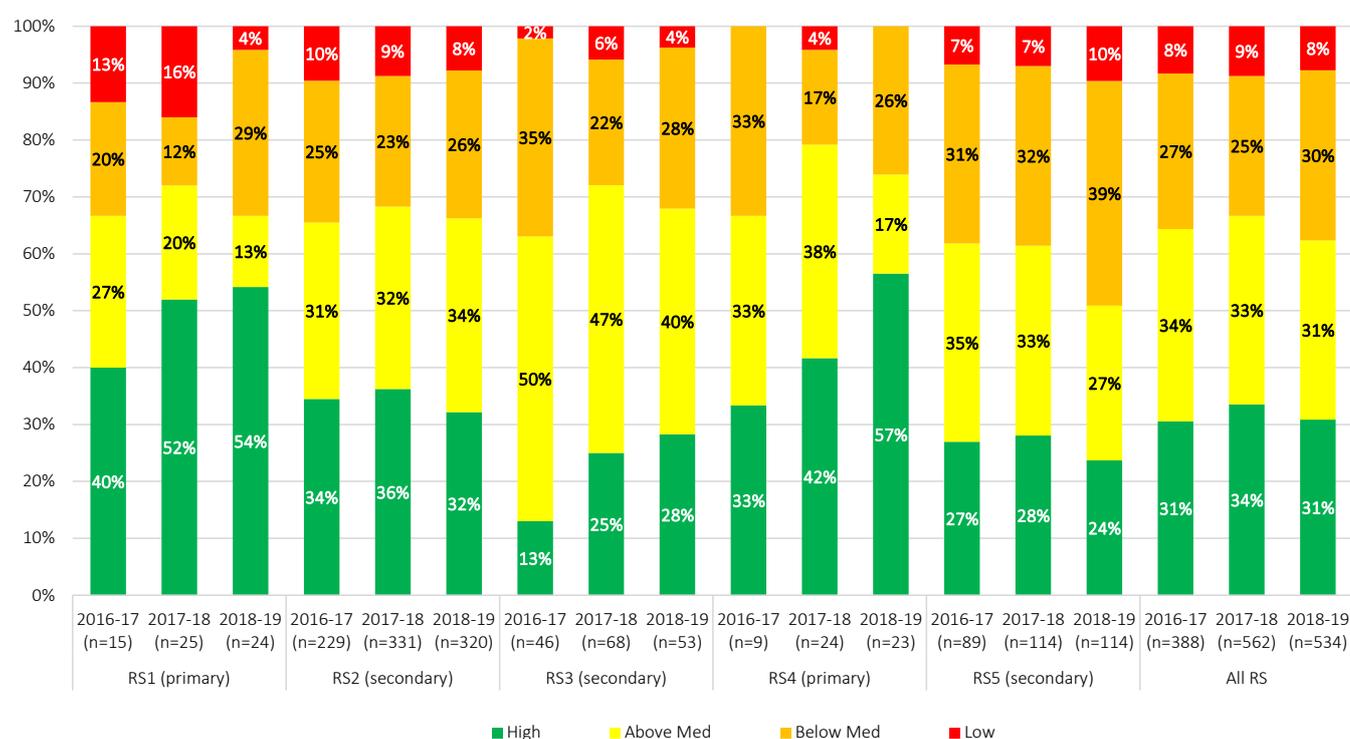


For Key Stage 4, analysis of the Attainment 8 measure of performance shows that **higher achieving secondary schools** (in the top quartile) **were markedly over-represented** in the five RSs' communications networks (Figure 16). The **over-representation of top quartile schools was particularly striking for the two primary RSs**, although note that the

¹³ The performance at Key Stage 2 was assessed using the percentage of children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (combined).

number of schools involved is low for these two RSs. In 2019, 54% (RS 1) and 57% (RS 4) of their network schools were in the top Attainment 8 performance quartile¹⁴. In contrast, secondary schools in the bottom quartile were considerably under-represented in these two RSs' networks. This finding may reflect RSs' different strategies to attract schools to participate in their activities. However, it may also point to the types of schools that are more likely to access resources and opportunities that are designed to promote evidence-based practices in classrooms and schools – supporting our earlier analysis that 'outstanding' schools tended to be over-represented in the composition of RSs' communications networks.

Figure 16: Quartiled Attainment 8 scores of schools in the communications network by RSs (communications)



Reach and engagement through the CPD/training and innovation strands

In the training strand, overall primary schools in the **bottom two quartiles were slightly over-represented** over the three-year period: 61% in 2016-17, 60% in 2017-18, and 57% in 2018-19 (Figure 17). There was also a **gradual increase in the proportion of top-quartile primary schools** attending the CPD and training programmes offered by all five RSs over time: from 12% in the first year to 24% in the third year. There were variations evident when viewed by individual RS, however, it must be borne in mind that the number of schools (n) for some RSs and some years is very low which means percentages can fluctuate markedly on the basis of just a small number of schools.

As for the innovation strand, 13 schools that lead or play an active role were in the primary phase. Just over half (n=7) were in the top two quartiles. Neither of the two schools in the bottom quartile were lead schools.

¹⁴ The relatively low number of secondary schools in RS 1 and 4's networks could have affected the distribution. The observation therefore needs to be treated with caution.

Figure 17: Distribution of primary schools that participated in training by quartile performance (KS2 % achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths)

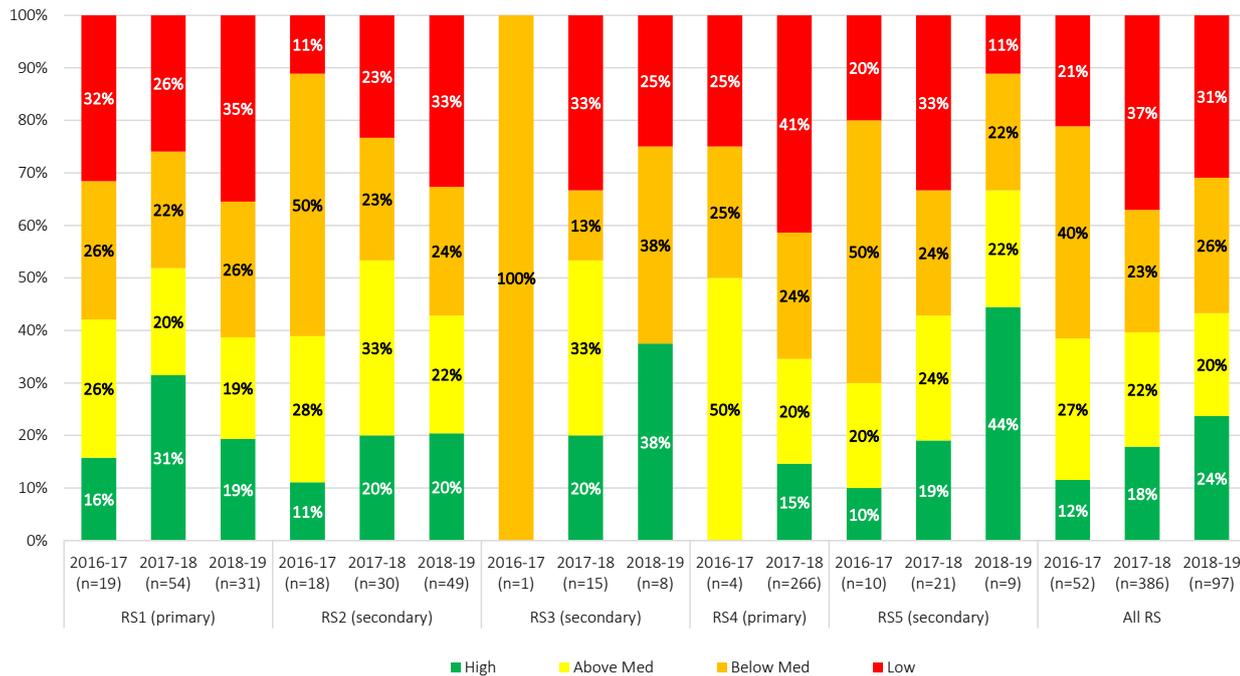
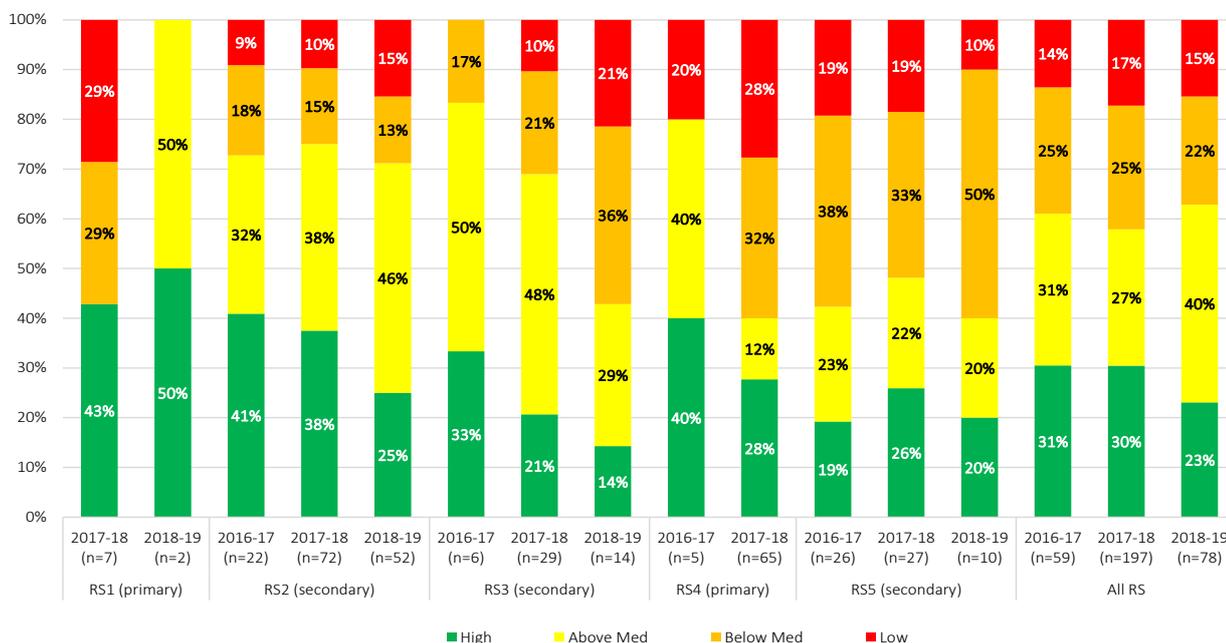


Figure 18 shows the quartiled Attainment 8 performance for schools participating in the training activities. In contrast to the pattern observed in the communications strand, overall the performance of secondary schools participating in RS training programmes were **broadly in line with the national distribution**. However, the participation of schools from the bottom quartile across the five RSs were consistently under-represented over the three-year period in terms of Attainment 8 scores (14% in 2016-17, 17% in 2017-18, and 15% in 2018-19). Also, across all RSs' training networks, schools in the top quartile tended to be over-represented in the first two years based on both attainment and progress outcomes.

In the innovation strand, **secondary schools in the top two quartiles were considerably over-represented**. Amongst the 18 schools that were either leading innovation projects or playing an active part in the projects, half were in the top quartile based on attainment 8 scores and 66% were in the top two quartiles based on progress 8 scores (22% in top quartile and 44% in the second top quartile).

Figure 18: Quartiled Attainment 8 scores of schools that participated in training by RSs (CPD ad training)



Key Findings 2: Feasibility – *Has the campaign happened as intended?*

Introduction

This chapter explores how the RSN campaign to promote evidence-informed practice in classrooms and schools had effectively attracted participation and engagement from schools, and why. The purpose is to have an informed understanding of the perceived roles of RSs in the current education landscape and examine in detail the conditions for, and barriers to, schools' effective take-up and implementation of the RSN campaign. The data sources for discussion in this chapter include the RSN surveys, telephone interviews with a subsample of the quantitative surveys, and case study interviews with the five RSs.

Table 7: Summary of key findings 2: Feasibility

Key Findings 2: Feasibility – Has the campaign happened as intended?
The RSN programme experienced a slow start. The bumpy truth of its early development in the first year was that, as a senior leader put it, ' <i>RSs are building the plane while flying it</i> '. The challenge was rooted in a lack of clarity, and sometimes misunderstanding, of the roles and identities RSs in the school system. Defining and clarifying the conceptual and operational roles of RSs became an iterative learning process as the EEF and IEE were exploring, with the RSs, how to create support structures and systems that would enable RSs to realise their knowledge brokers' role between EEF's evidence and school practice.
The five RSs learned that the RS badge would not ' <i>naturally</i> ' enable them to become ' <i>big players</i> ' in the system. Rather, they could only have an influence if they were strategic about forming complementary partnerships and relationships with existing key players in the landscape of school improvement within and beyond their locality.
Building relationships through face-to-face meetings and personalised email communications was a key strategy to reach and engage schools initially. Then increasingly all RSs had been working with a wider range of school improvement partnerships to develop and capitalise on project-oriented networks. An ongoing concern has been to engage hard-to-reach schools who might be seeking quick-fix solutions rather than a longer-term approach to develop new cultures and mind-set about school improvement processes and practices.
The place-based hub model that drew upon collective resources and expertise in ready-made networks and partnerships was perceived as a positive approach to address the challenge of reaching and engaging schools in need. The EEF acted as an important and necessary mediating layer (or broker) in the system to help some RSs to tap into regional school improvement activities.
The need to build and strengthen delivery capacity is another important lesson for some RSs and the EEF. In the third year especially, using the RS work as professional development opportunities to identify talent and grow research champions or Evidence-Leaders in Education within RSs themselves and their associated MATs and TSAs emerged as a popular cascade model of capacity building.
Results from the RSN follow-up survey and the qualitative telephone survey suggested that RSs' high-quality CPD provision <i>alone</i> is unlikely to bring about the intended change in practice in schools. The quality and support of senior leadership in schools that had received the CPD training was found to be equally important and a necessary and significant condition for change. Our survey suggested the absence of senior leadership buy-in and support was more likely to result in little or no change in behaviour or culture in participating schools.
Much of the motivation for participant engagement with the RS activity is related, directly or indirectly, to supporting school improvement. In essence, the RS activity was seen by participating schools as a platform for the further enhancement of staff professional development and capacity building, and an important source of support for evidence-informed practices. The most commonly cited barriers included geographical proximity of the RS, lack of time, capacity or resources, and limited relevance of the RS provision to schools' needs.

Broadening Research Engagement: The Role of RSs in the Campaign

Moral and professional compass: Why became a RS?

All of the five RSs had a sustained track record of school improvement and extensive experience of leading school partnerships for collaboration and improvement¹⁵. As importantly, their senior leaders shared a strong belief about why research and evidence should be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and had enacted such belief in their schools to develop cultures that promoted evidence-informed practices. In addition, they all had been involved in

¹⁵ An important eligibility criterion to become a RS.

EEF funded trials and projects prior to their application to become a Research School – the experience of which reinforced their view that they were **part of a larger, systemic drive** towards an evidence-informed profession in which teachers should take the responsibility for shaping research and practice. Taken together, such success and experience provided them with the **credibility, relationships** and **infrastructures** that were necessary to fulfil the roles of RSs and played a key part in their decision to apply for this new initiative. Their decision to apply to become a RS was essentially driven by a moral call, and a professional call.

A moral call All RS emphasised that being involved in this national initiative was a **moral call**. For them, being a Research School was about *'people with integrity'* (Research Leader) supporting other schools to improve teaching and learning and to make evidence-based practice and research accessible to a greater number of teachers and leaders within and beyond their local areas. In essence, this was about helping to improve the outcomes of other pupils in other schools. For example,

'Becoming a Research School will enable us to collectively bridge the gap between research and practice at classroom level, school level, cluster level and across the region. We are ambitious for what we can achieve together to impact on the lives of learning of pupils.'

(Website of a RS)

A professional call The decision to apply was also driven by a professional response to a current, systemic change in the teaching profession. The Research School model was seen as a positive move away from the traditional 'sage on a stage' CPD model and would thus send a strong message about professionalising R&D to other schools. It was felt that the work by Research Schools, TSAs and Maths Hubs should fit together to create a healthy marketplace which enables schools to access what they need. Thus, becoming a RS gave them an opportunity to work with other schools and join up a diverse and fragmented school-led system. A leader of a RS lamented that the brand of Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) did not always confer a guarantee of high quality professional development or school improvement support. They hoped that the **brand of Research School** would offer that guarantee which would encourage schools to engage and enable RSs to be a driver of school improvement in the fragmented system. The following accounts illustrate such altruistic and professional imperatives:

'The Executive Headteacher had a vision of Research Schools as a mechanism to reach the most vulnerable schools, to promote evidence-based practice, and to facilitate higher quality school improvement work in the school-led system. He saw this mechanism meeting systemic challenges, including a declining role of local authorities, poor quality CPD in surrounding Multi-Academy Trusts, and raising the quality of local schools servicing the deprived areas. Both the Director of the Research School and the executive head believe that their work in the 'middle tier' (i.e. working in the local authority and with RSCs and the DfE) has been influential in creating impact beyond their Teaching School Alliance to reach a wider range of schools.'

(RS Lead)

The evolving roles of RSs: What being a RS entailed?

The RSN initiative has been through profound changes over the three-year period. Central to this journey of change has been a concerted and joint effort from all five RSs (together with EEF and IEE personnel) to search for and establish a shared understanding of *what RSs are for*, and as importantly, *how to achieve it*.

The initial challenge

After the initial launch meeting in July 2016, the RSN programme experienced a *slow start*. The bumpy truth of its early development was that, as a senior leader put it, *'RSs are **building the plane while flying it'***. The lack of clarity was not necessarily related to the overarching purpose of the initiative as it was clear to the five RSs that they were the **'catalyst' for culture change** in classrooms and schools. This was achieved through disseminating RSN newsletters and other means of communication, providing CPD and training programmes to schools in their local areas, and modelling and supporting schools to use an evidence-informed approach to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The lack of clarity, and sometimes misunderstanding, had been centred upon how their roles and identity as the **knowledge broker** between EEF's evidence and schools were interpreted and enacted by different parties at the outset of the RSN initiative. There was a view that the RS model was *'a support mechanism for R&D'* whereby RSs were appointed to fill an 'understandable' gap in the Teaching School provision. They were perceived, both by RSs and their partners, as *'champions for research'* from whom people could find out more about how to use the research evidence to improve practice so that school leaders were *'better prepared to make choices on sound reasons'*. The RSs that held

such a view articulated a commitment to grow individuals with research interests and skills within their schools, networks and school improvement partnerships. There was also a view that the RS funding was an opportunity to enable RSs to use additional resources and capacity to strengthen and advance their existing projects, innovations and practice related to research use in schools. These innovations and projects were strategically important to RSs (and in some cases, their school improvement partners) because they allowed local talents to be nurtured and deployed to address local school improvement needs and priorities.

However, such views only resulted in disappointment and additional demands on time and resources from the RSs as they soon realised that defining and understanding the role of a RS was an **iterative process**, not least because the EEF and IEE were also exploring what 'successful' RSs ought to look like and the pathways to enable and achieve the success. In addition, it was felt that the RS model was designed with already capable and research-engaged schools in mind. The challenging reality was that many schools were unfamiliar with research use and might have felt the concept intimidating or alien as RSs attempted to translate some 'lofty ideals' of research-based practice into introductions of evidence-led work for them.

Clarifying and consolidating the roles of RSs

The passion and commitment to promote evidence-based practices in classrooms and schools were widely shared across the senior leaders of the five RSs. At the outset, some thought the RS badge would 'naturally' enable them to become a 'big player' among many existing stakeholders in the landscape of strategic partners around regional schools improvement. However, they found that RSs could only have influence if they were '*savvy and strategic*' about **forming complementary partnerships and relationships with existing key players in strategic school improvement** within and beyond their locality.

Their experiences in the first year had further reinforced their belief about the importance of putting research and evidence-based practice at the core of teaching and learning. They articulated the view that RS was a useful '*badge*' which, thanks also to the credibility of EEF, offered a way of connecting efforts to improve the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning with evidence-based practice and CPD. The former view that RSs were there to look for innovation, implement research, and provide schools and teachers with a valid basis for change in practice were found to be replaced with the understanding that their role was to act as **a bridge between research (especially EEF's evidence) and practice**:

'help us as practitioners to be more discerning about research – how is this right for our context – so we're not passive consumers, and enabling a more professional dialogue.'

(senior leader of a RS)

Thus, after the initial challenge, all five RSs became more confident about expanding the reach and engagement of their work within and beyond their local areas. However, it was felt that **changing school cultures towards evidence-based practice across the system might remain a desired outcome** for RSs. Although the RS programme gave the profession a much-needed opportunity to develop and embed an evidence-based culture of teaching and learning, an ongoing concern was that some schools and teachers might be **seeking quick-fix solutions** rather than a longer-term approach to develop new cultures and mind-set about school improvement processes and practices:

'This is an issue for the wider school system in terms of understanding that research evidence isn't something where, in an 'outstanding' school, you just send your high flying teachers off to university for fantastic seminars. It is actually rooted in your daily decision making, and expertise is necessary for all aspects of your school improvement work – so changing the sense about the purpose of research evidence and about how schools can shift their thinking and change some of their actions based on good external evidence supporting the internal understanding of the children that they have. And, so there is a bit of a changing understanding about what research evidence is and that is part of our role. ... we've got to try and shift the emphasis in terms of if you are a school in special measures, the solution you might have been offered by an Ofsted consultant might be short term and superficial so that is an argument we need to make clearly and powerfully.'

(Director of a RS)

It was believed that the **key to gaining access to schools in difficulty was building relationships grounded in quality and trust**.

Building and expanding the capacity

The last two years had seen all RSs invest in capacity building both in their own schools and in their networks and partnerships. It was not only a key strategy to sustain the expansion and reach of their work, but also a necessary strategy to build in **succession planning** within the RSs.

Internally (within the RS) capacity building was achieved through developing, broadening and deepening the **capacity, skills and specialisms of the core team** to lead different strands of the RS work. Streamlining the core team allowed the key personnel to have fewer competing responsibilities and thus enabled them to focus on education phase or subject specialism related activities. One secondary RS, for example, appointed a senior leader who used to be an Assistant Headteacher in a local primary school with a strong interest in research and development, to work with the RS Lead. This new appointment had enabled the RS Lead to spend more time on outreach work across the MAT rather than within the RS itself. When the RS Lead left the RS later in this project, this appointment provided security and sustainability for the RS work.

Using the RS work as professional development opportunities to identify talent and grow research champions or **Evidence-Leaders in Education (ELEs)** within the RS and its associated MATs and TSAs emerged as a popular **cascade model of capacity building**. For example, one RS developed the role of Research Leads in each of its Trust schools. A yearlong training with input from the RS Lead and EEF was provided to them. These research leads had leadership responsibilities in teaching and learning and were expected to lead on R&D across their schools and eventually on aspects of the RS work outside the Trust. To help them develop their skills, they were asked to undertake small-scale research trials in their own schools using evidence into practice '*because it is easier if you've done it yourself*' (RS Lead P).

The **place-based hub model** drew upon collective resources and expertise in ready-made networks and partnerships (such as TSAs, local authorities, regional maths hubs) to broaden and share capacity within a locality. Similar to the cascade model, their key strategy also involved identifying and nurturing local champions/ELEs and in some cases, Associate RSs, to create 'buy in' and leadership from other schools. The difference is that this model focussed on building school improvement partnerships that provided the RSs with the mechanisms, relationships, knowledge and skills that were necessary for them to address local school improvement needs and priorities, and through this, broaden and deepen their reach, engagement and impact across different schools in particular regions or areas.

Thus, although most RS leads had always recognised that the RS work '*was all about school improvement*,' the place-based model enabled them to broaden its remit more than originally planned. Working closely with local authorities and/or other local school improvement partnerships (e.g. teaching school alliances, MATs) to provide training and school improvement support was perceived as a positive move to address the challenge of **reaching and engaging schools in need rather than 'good' schools** which, as evidence from the database analysis shows, were already attracted to the RS programme. There were examples where schools had been targeted by the local authorities or '*encouraged to be involved*' (RS lead) in projects with the RSs. The value of working through these '*umbrella bodies*' (including the regional Teaching School Council) was to link the RS work to local and regional school improvement priorities, gain access and leverage with schools, and use local capacity and relationships to promote RSs' influence on change in school practices in more **responsive, relevant and sustainable ways**.

However, there were differences in how the five RSs achieved their regional reach. Two secondary RSs represented examples where the reputation of their senior leaders largely attracted local and regional school networks and local authorities to establish connections. In contrast, another primary RS's experience highlighted the important role of **EEF as a mediating layer and broker** between schools and the system. They channelled knowledge and expertise and brokered connections and relationships between the RS and local school improvement infrastructures, and in doing so, created new processes and structures which not only enabled RSs to expand their reach and influence, but also helped them to prioritise resources and activities to support schools, especially those that are disadvantaged and hard-to-reach, to change and improve.

Recognising the need to be supported by a mediating layer in the system – which acts as a channel to bridge relationships and connect school improvement efforts within and beyond particular localities – is reflected in the comments by RS leads. There was a shared view that the school system had become so fragmented that it would take time to navigate through all different players. An ongoing challenge confronting them had been to make productive links at the local and regional levels (e.g. through gaining support from the Regional School Commissioner (RSC), the regional Teaching School Council (TSC), or local authorities) so that RSs could play an important role in supporting targeted school improvement activities. In areas where the LA had limited capacity to help join up school and reach schools that need support, the provision of brokering and buffering support for RSs to make contact with key gatekeepers and engage the hard-to-reach schools (especially their leaders) was felt to be particularly relevant and necessary.

Linking up with systems-wide initiatives

Linking up with Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) proposals and projects was a good example that demonstrated RSs' strategic decision to become further engaged with local school improvement partnerships (e.g. LAs, TSAs) and through this, deepen their reach and support for vulnerable schools. This development also revealed a clear

understanding amongst the five RSs that they needed to be responsive to the constantly changing national educational contexts.

The roles that RSs had in SSIF proposals and projects varied from project to project. Some focussed more exclusively on building capacity through the provision of evidence-based training. For example, the SSIF bid that a secondary RS developed with the regional TSC enabled them to expand a leadership focussed CPD offer to other parts of the region. In a different SSIF project led by a local TSA to support 30 primary and secondary schools in writing in Years 6 and 7, a RS's expertise was used to strengthen the evidence base for the proposed interventions and their potential impact. For RSs without a 'ready-made market' that a TSA affords, the SSIF projects were also seen as an opportunity to address the local competition with TSs and the regional TSC by providing a different school improvement offer in the locality.

In addition, there was recognition that being involved in externally funded school improvement programmes like the SSIF projects could provide RSs with additional *financial income, resources and some level of sustainability*.

Capitalising on project-oriented networks

Increasingly all RSs had been working with a wider range of school improvement partnerships, networks and mechanisms over time. On the one hand, these partnerships had considerably broadened their reach within and beyond their locality. On the other hand, they had also reinforced the **fluid, project-oriented nature of the networks** that RSs drew upon in the delivery of their activities. A project or programme developed with a local authority, for example, could have become a network in itself:

'Well, [we are] working with existing structures and not trying to mould others. ... At year two it was very much us working at a strategic level with them to develop that [evidence-based approach] and then us leading the dissemination right across the area. So it was working within those strategic networks both at the school cluster level but also in terms of the local authority. ... We've built on those different networks and relationships that we and others have fed into. ... So there are things that happen naturally because of proximity and regularity of work streams but, generally, they just fit into the bigger picture. I think it would be hard for us to think of it as the X research school network because I think it has so many different offers to different people and people access us in different ways and it could just be a random email that we get or a series of emails and then we might never hear from them again.'

(RS Lead R)

A shared view by the RS leads was that such project or activity-based networks would continue to grow over time, but that their growth would be **organic rather than targeted or strategically planned** to take on schools that were not yet engaged.

Motivation for Engaging with RSs

Much of the motivation for participant engagement with RS activity can be related directly and indirectly to matters of school improvement. Evidence from the two RSN surveys and the telephone interview surveys points to three key themes relating to motivation:

- 1) *Research School activity fitted alongside an existing or emerging school culture of research and evidence informed practice*
- 2) *Research School activity was seen as a platform for staff professional development and capacity building (as a means of school improvement)*
- 3) *Research School activity was helping schools to establish new or developing existing external links with other schools (thereby facilitating a more outward facing approach to their practice and pedagogy)*

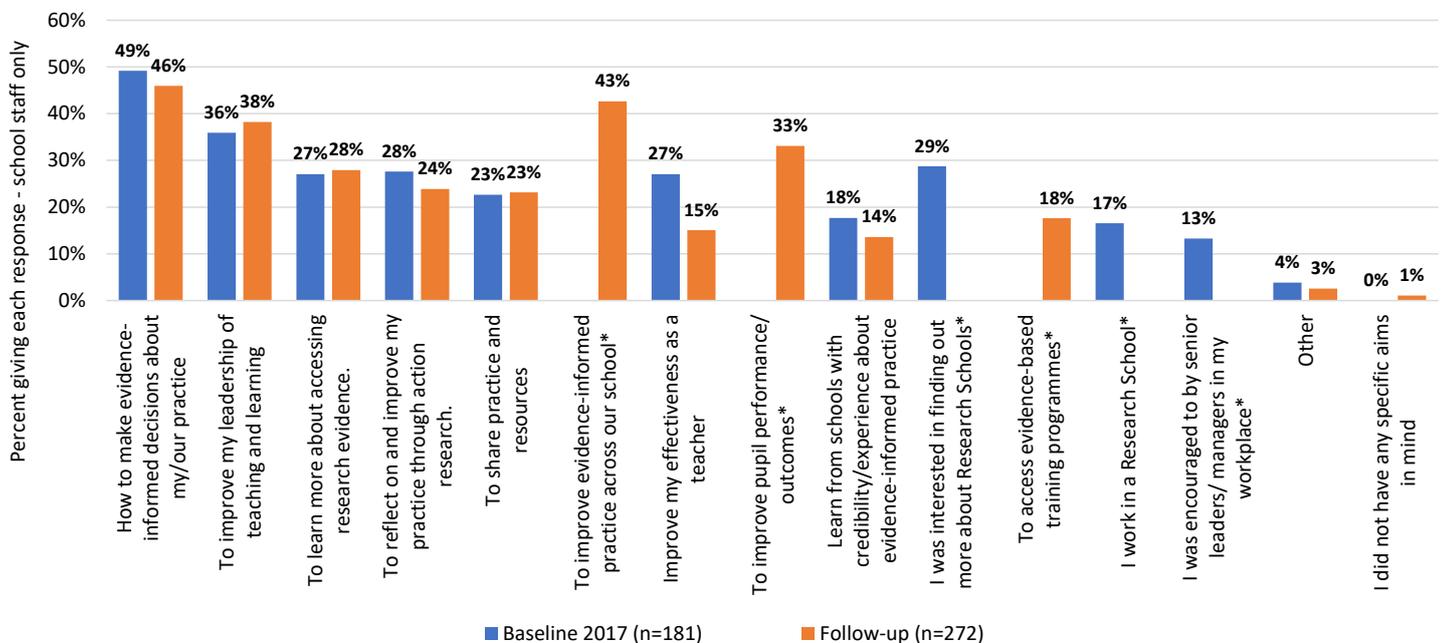
(1) Supporting research and evidence informed culture

The surveys of engagers / participants in the Research School Network¹⁶ sought information on respondents' key motivations for getting involved with the RSs and many of the most frequently given responses (from a tick box list) related directly to engaging with research evidence (Figure 19). For example, the most frequently cited motivator among school staff respondents to both the baseline and follow-up RSN surveys was to learn more about how to *make evidence-informed decisions about their practice* (49% in the baseline survey; 46% in the follow-up survey). *Improving evidence-informed practice across our school* was only included as an option in the follow-up survey but was a motivator for 43% of school-based respondents. *To learn more about accessing research evidence* was a motivator for just over

¹⁶ As reported in the methods section, the response rate was 26% for the baseline survey and 11% for the follow-up survey.

a quarter of respondents in both surveys. Some of the other frequently cited motivators related less directly to engaging with the research but focused more on the potential consequences of doing so, for example, *improving my leadership of teaching and learning* was a motivator for just over a third of respondents to both surveys and, *improving pupil performance/outcomes* (included only in the follow-up survey) was a motivator for 33% of school staff respondents.

Figure 19: Respondents' motivations for engaging with RSs / participating in RS activities – RSN baseline and follow-up surveys, school staff only

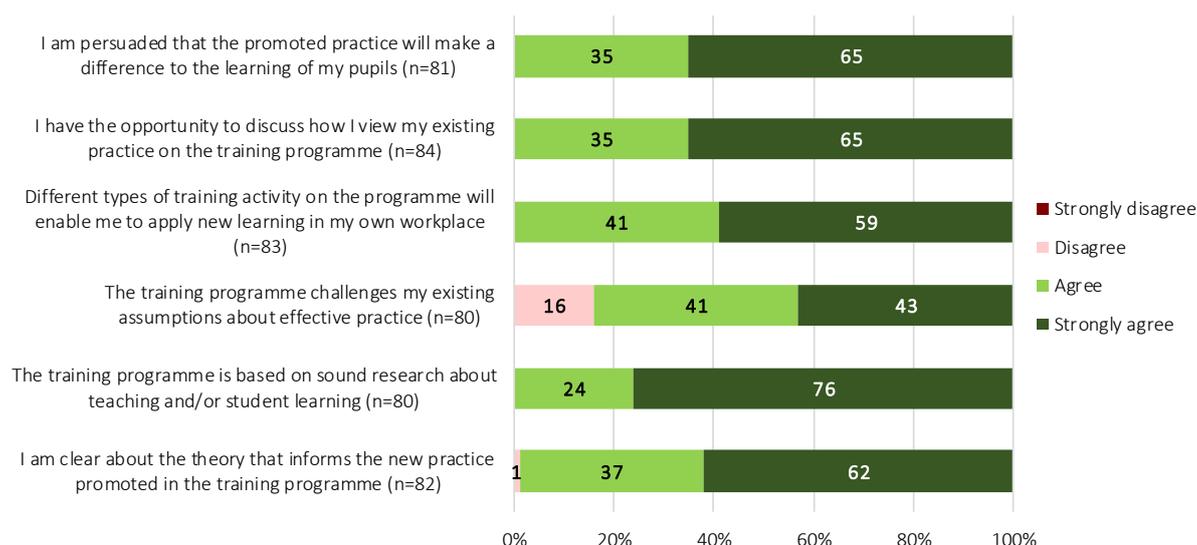


* These items appeared as a response option in only one of the two RSN surveys

Evidence from the CPD pro forma surveys provides additional evidence to support participants' perceived benefits of RSs' CPD and training programmes. In the *on completion* survey, respondents indicated how far they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements about their experiences and perceptions of the training course. Figure 20 presents their responses and shows that respondents were **predominantly positive** about all aspects measured by the survey. The statement eliciting the highest proportion of 'strongly agree' responses was *the training programme is based on sound research about teaching and/or student learning* (76% strongly agreed). The statement attracting the most 'disagree' responses was the *training programme challenges my existing assumptions about effective practice* which 13 respondents disagreed with (16%).

The data from this question were examined by course type, but due to the high level of agree and strongly agree responses, there were *no notable patterns evident to suggest that attendees at certain types of course were more likely to hold certain opinions about their training experience than those who attended other types of course.*

Figure 20: Experiences and perceptions of the training programme: on completion survey



Despite whether their schools had a prior work relationship with the RS, or whether their schools had a strong culture of research use, almost all participants in the telephone interviews reported that they (or their schools) were drawn to the RSN because they **recognised the importance and value of evidence-based practice** for improving the quality and outcomes of teaching and learning. Engaging and working with a RS was seen as a viable means of achieving this. In some cases, the **work of the RS aligned with a pre-existing culture of evidence informed practice** and is therefore serving to strengthen this agenda:

‘I’ve been doing research as a class teacher in my classroom for years and as head of school introduced the approach to all staff for developing their practice a few years ago. It is the best CPD ever and it really engages staff. Staff choose areas that fit in with the school improvement plan, for example, behaviour for learning, independent learning and STEM. Staff often talk about their research in staff meetings.’
(Head of School, Primary)

In other instances, there was an **emerging ethos of research that participating schools are keen to develop further**. According to this respondent, in engaging with the RS *‘we hope to gain support in developing a culture that is evidence informed, to engage with the evidence and learn how to synthesise what we learn from various sources that is likely to work in our context; to help us be evaluative and reflective in what we’re doing so we can make a difference to children.’*

Other respondents cited a **professional interest in research** as a key driver for their involvement in this initiative. As this headteacher explained, *‘I like learning and want to make a difference to the children, so I thought one of the best ways to do that was accessing [the research via the newsletter].’* Similarly, this headteacher pointed to his strong belief in research and evidence as a pillar of school improvement. Consequently, he viewed **Research Schools as a progressive and important source of support**:

‘I thought the Research School was a really good idea and applauded it at the time. As it’s grown, and X [RS] developed strong links with a local university (as have we), then it became a natural progression for us to be involved really.’
(Headteacher, secondary)

The comment from another secondary headteacher also showed his desire to learn from the RS how to lead his school to become evidence-informed in practice:

‘My primary aim for becoming involved in the Research School Network was to strengthen the culture in the school in terms of evidence-based practice becoming more routine – i.e. staff automatically looking for evidence and evaluating changes. We also need to build up our knowhow and expertise in how to do things like action research effectively. Also, as we are a teaching school and involved in developing CPD for other schools, we want to be sure that we peddle things for which there is an evidence base and which are likely to have an impact.’
(Headteacher, primary)

A smaller number of telephone interview participants cited the EEF and the reputable work it had been involved with in terms of educational research and practice as a motivating factor for their involvement with Research School activity.

According to this participant: *'the fact that [the course] had the gold-plated standard of the EEF, gives real credence to it. I went for it because I knew they [EEF and Research School] were important organisations.'*

(2) Supporting professional development

Many schools in the telephone interviews regarded **RS activity as an important means of staff professional development and capacity building**. For example, this might be through increasing staff motivation for their practice:

'Everyone is hoping to see continued school improvements but for me it's about staffing and colleagues getting excited about something new that they haven't heard about before and also that we are putting them on these programmes as a reward for their hard work and effort. They are then more likely to embrace that when they come back into school.'

(Senior leader, primary)

Similarly, as this headteacher explained, engagement with the Research School provided opportunities for staff to reflect on their own practice and how they might change and improve how they teach:

'I was happy with the sort of things that were happening at Huntington and it encouraged me to want to sign up for anything they were involved with. I'd listened to their teachers talk about thinking about what they were doing and how they could get better at it. They were willing to say what hadn't worked - there was an honesty, which is what you need with research in education.'

(Headteacher, primary)

In other cases, respondents had taken advantage of positions within the RS itself to develop and extend their practice and influence:

'I wanted to use other skills I have rather than just deliver lessons to students. The Research School offered an avenue to be a Research Co-ordinator. They were highlighting an element of education that mainstream schools hadn't picked up on and gave me an avenue to develop a specific thing I was interested in, and then schools got interested in using it.'

(Assistant headteacher, primary)

Interview respondents also pointed to **collaboration as a motivation for engaging with a RS**. Some schools were eager to develop networks with other providers to learn about how they implement research informed practice:

'We wanted know more about how we could use evidenced based interventions to refine our own interventions, to look at the kind of impacts these could have and also look at the other toolkits online to see what we could do, what we could tweak and what we could modify to support our own practice.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

Another respondent working in a high performing school built upon this issue by suggesting that their engagement with the RS and evidence informed pedagogical practice is a key factor in **staff motivation and retention**: *'We're aware that staff tend to stay here, so we don't get new staff with new ideas, so we need to ensure that we are staying current and not in our own bubble.'*

(3) Expanding and consolidating partnerships for improvement

In the follow-up telephone interviews, many schools had developed links with a RS **to enable them to become more outward facing in their practice as an improvement strategy**. For example, a teacher at a secondary grammar school, currently deemed to be requiring improvement, told us that Ofsted had commented on their lack of external links and introspective approach: *'so as soon as we got those links with X [Research School] that was ticked off and we've developed many external links now'*. Similarly, respondents from some of the smaller schools in the sample remarked how the RS was acting as **an important means of networking and knowledge exchange for their isolated settings**. Conversely, some of the other schools had existing partnerships with their Research School (that pre-dated the designation) and therefore continued to collaborate as normal, as in the case of this respondent who commented that: *'we've been teaching schools together for a long time so the minute they applied to become a Research School it was the add-on that made sense.'*

Conditions for Effective Take-Up of the RSN Campaign: *Enablers*

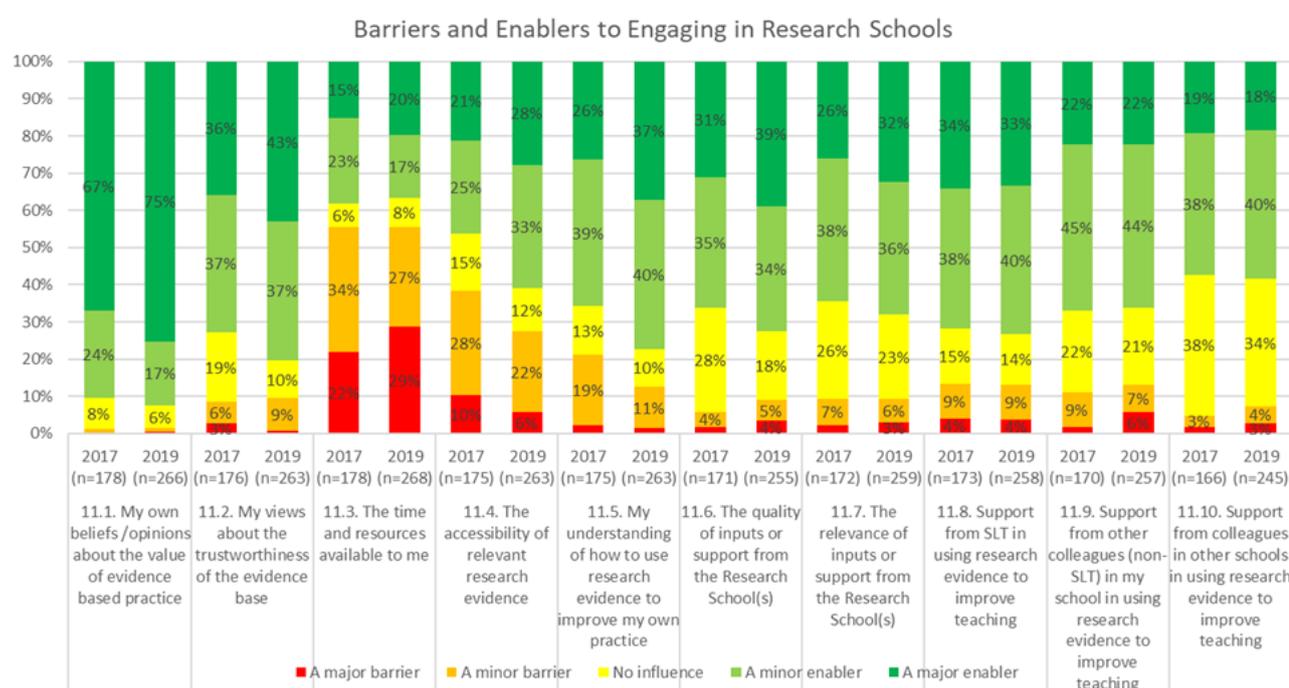
The combined evidence from the two RSN surveys and the two rounds of telephone interviews points to five conditions that were *most commonly and frequently* cited as having enabled participating individuals and schools to be effectively engaged with the RS activity:

- *Personal beliefs and understanding of research use in practice*
- *A positive pre-existing relationship and history of partnership activity with the Research School (often including close geographical proximity)*
- *Research School Activity aligned to school ethos and school improvement priorities*
- *Quality of provision and support provided by the Research School*
- *Quality of support from senior leaders and colleagues*

(1) Personal beliefs and understanding of research use in practice

Figure 21 shows the extent to which respondents felt that different factors had acted as either enablers or barriers to their engagement with RS activities. Results from both surveys show that the major enabler to engagement was respondents' *own beliefs or opinions* about the value of evidence-based practice (67% and 75% in the baseline and follow-up surveys respectively). This is followed by their *views about the trustworthiness of the evidence base* (36% and 43% respectively), and their *understanding of how to use research evidence to improve their own practice* (26% and 37% respectively). However, although participants felt that these factors were major enablers to facilitate their engagement with RS activities, as we will report later in this report, it was school-oriented factors, rather than these individual-oriented factors, that were found to be significantly associated with participants' reported change in practice.

Figure 21: Enablers and Barriers to Engagement with RS Activities (2017 and 2019)



(2) Pre-existing relationships and history of partnership activity with the RS

Not all schools in the baseline telephone interviews had prior engagement with RSs. Amongst those that had (around half), prior work relationships with the RS played an important role in drawing them to the RS activities. There were also examples of schools that were within the same TSA or MAT.

'We were part of the same MAT before it became a Research School. We have felt part of the school's journey – our staff has seen the school improve and this has had a big impact on our own school.' (Senior leader, primary)

'We took part in a research project with X [RS] three years ago. The project has finished now, but it trained me up in evidence-based practice and gave me an insight in how to use it in school development.' (Senior leader, secondary)

In the follow-up survey, a number of respondents also highlighted their close working relationship and **history of partnership activity with the RS** as an enabling factor in their current collaboration and engagement:

'We've worked with X [RS] for a long time, we are the two biggest secondary schools in York and we have a fairly common intake. Also, there are only eight secondary schools in York so everyone knows one another and tends to work together ... We collaborate and work with Huntington so often that nobody 'bats an eyelid' when we do things together now.'

(Headteacher, secondary)

This response was typical of many across the sample and underscored **why centrally driven initiatives that involve collaborative working are often more likely to succeed when overlaid on pre-existing partnership structures**. This tends to be strengthened further when schools are in close **geographical proximity** to one another. In the case of RSs, this is a pertinent issue particularly if they are hosting professional development programmes and training events that require in-person attendance and time out of schools for participants.

'The Research School is very local to us. We know the staff well. We know the staff who have written the blogs on the newsletter and this makes them more meaningful. For example, there was a blog about reading for pleasure. We had attended that conference ourselves, but without the newsletter signposting it to us, we wouldn't have known about it. Being close means we can access their training programmes easily and staff from the Research School come into school to lead training sessions here too and support staff in leading learning.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

(3) RS activity aligned to school ethos and school improvement priorities

Equally, when an **initiative aligns with a particular whole-school focus** or existing improvement priorities then effective take up is more likely. This was a relatively common theme across the telephone interview samples, **particularly in schools where the culture of research and inquiry is either embedded or emerging** as in the case of these examples:

'There are clearly lots of overlap between the work we are doing and the work of the Research School. Once we have more of an understanding of how we all work then we can work together more effectively and there are lots of positives there.' (Senior leader, primary)

'Research School activity chimed very strongly with the approach we were taking and we were already attuned with their work.' (Headteacher, primary)

According to this headteacher of a primary academy: *'the Research School links very much to my thinking, my theories and the way I want my school to go. They are a useful ally to work alongside'* whilst this headteacher, of a maintained primary school in a high deprivation context, explained how their approach has: *'got to be research based because I want it to suit our school and I don't want anyone to say it's not going to work here.'* A senior leader from this same school also talked favourably about accessing the latest research and evidence to address specific areas of improvement: *'I know it sounds ridiculous, but I feel like a whole world has opened out that I had no idea existed until this year, and it's been brilliant. I don't know why we didn't do it years ago.'*

It appears that there was a general consensus between staff members at different levels of seniority in respect of their perspectives on the benefits of a research informed pedagogical approach to teaching and learning.

(4) Quality of provision and support provided by the RS

The **quality and variety of provision from the Research School** was another frequently cited factor amongst telephone interview respondents. Indeed, for some, such as this participant, the support and resource available was superior to what they might access elsewhere:

'When we looked at sharing practice with other schools in the area we've had very little support from them and we get the impression that nothing has been achieved in terms of influencing good practice. With X [RS 1] we feel that they want to share what they know but also only share stuff that is evidence-based and genuinely want to improve outcomes for students in all schools, not just their own.'

(Senior leader, primary)

Likewise, the **applied nature of the interventions** available through the RS, was well received amongst teachers looking for ways to develop their practice. According to this respondent: *'unless my staff hear about practical strategies they can't engage with it – and I think that is what the Research Schools do very well.'* Similarly, as this respondent explained, *'I am fascinated by pedagogy, and the Research School provides access to many more minds like my own – a big network'*. In addition, some respondents reported favourably on the **clarity of communication** from the RS as this individual pointed out: *'we are trying really hard to be as joined up as possible in a complex system. That includes knowing what is out there – whether that is from the newsletter, or through dialogue.'* Likewise, as this respondent asserted: *'the guidance documents are invaluable – Beautifully presented and very complex ideas are made accessible to very busy teachers.'* The **accessibility of the RS** was also a key enabling factor, as this participant pointed out: *'I can email them [Research School] and they get back to me very quickly are very helpful.'*

Moreover, the succinct and accessible format of the newsletter was seen as helpful for busy practitioners, as this participant asserted in the qualitative telephone survey: *'teachers will read academic research if it's chopped into bite sized bits.'* As we have highlighted in other sections of this report, professional development rates as one of the most common means by which RS engagement is evidenced across schools within the sample. This does not appear to differ widely according to school type or performance. For some participants, the newsletters acted more as **reassurance that they were doing the right things** or as a device to support their pedagogical decision-making:

'Much of the stuff we read in the newsletter sort of 'ticks off' and supports what we are already doing. It makes us think about what we are already doing rather than anything revelatory.'

'I don't see it as a 'silver bullet' but more of a 'go to' if you're between decisions.'

Others used the newsletters alongside other forms of dissemination, as this individual told us: *'I signed up [for the e-newsletter] partly in case I miss things on social media. It provides a useful summary.'*

Results from the survey analysis support the interview findings indicating that factors related to the quality of support from RSs were perceived as major factors that made a positive difference to engagement with RS activities. As Figure 21 shows, around one in three respondents in both surveys reported that the *quality of inputs or support from the RSs* (31% and 39% in baseline and follow-up surveys respectively) and the *relevance of RSs' inputs* (26% and 32% respectively) were major enablers for their engagement.

(5) Quality of support from senior leaders and colleagues

Leadership support on using research evidence to improve teaching was reported by a third of survey respondents as a major enabler for their effective engagement with RS activities (34% and 33% in baseline and follow-up surveys respectively) (Figure 20). In addition, around one in five survey respondents reported that *support from other colleagues in the same school* (22% in both surveys) and *from other schools* (19% and 18% respectively) were major factors that enabled them to engage with RS activities effectively.

Principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the RSN survey data to explore which factors were more likely to be associated with respondents' reported impacts in their own practice and at school as a result of their engagement with the RSs (Q9). We combined Questions 7 (i.e. leadership support for promoting and adopting evidence-based practices) and 8 (i.e. enablers and barriers to engagement with RSs) in the follow-up survey to identify both school-level and individual-level variables in the factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis (KMO= 0.85), and all KMO values for individual items were greater than 0.64 which is above the acceptable limit of 0.5.

PCA of the 17 items in Questions 7 and 8 revealed the presence of **four components** with eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 64.40% of the variance. Table 8.1 in Appendix 8 presents the factor loadings after rotation. The results in Table 8.2 (also Appendix 8) indicates that there are no statistically significant correlations between the four factors:

- Factor 1: Senior leadership support for using evidence to improve teaching and learning
- Factor 2: Time, resources and ability to access research evidence
- Factor 3: Quality and relevance of support from RSs
- Factor 4: My beliefs and views about the evidence base

PCA of the 10 items in Question 9 revealed **one component** suggesting that there is only one underlying factor structure (i.e. dimension) relating to respondents' perceived impact as a result of their engagement with the RSs (Table 8.3 in Appendix 8). Table 8.4 (Appendix 8) presents the results of the correlation analysis on factor scores of Q7, 8 and 9 – indicating a *moderate* association between respondents' perceived impact of their engagement with RSs (Q9) and

Factors 1 ($r = .426$) and 3 ($r = .542$), and a *weak* correlation between impact of engagement and Factor 2 ($r = .207$). However, there is no association between perceived impact and Factor 4.

The results of the correlation analysis show that the **quality and relevance of support from RSs and in-school leadership support** for using research and evidence to improve teaching and learning were most likely to impact on respondents' change in practice and the cultural change in their schools. These two factors are themselves not statistically correlated, but both showed significant associations with the areas of impact that respondents reported in the follow-up survey. In comparison, although the association between impact of engagement with RSs and *access to research use* was important, it was much weaker. It is important to note that there was no statistically significant associations between the *individual-level factor of self-beliefs* about evidence base and use and perceived impact of engagement.

Further analysis was then conducted to explore whether the above associations were likely to retain in relation to the three groupings identified in Q10a in the follow-up survey, that is, i) respondents who have implemented one or more changes; ii) those who are planning to implement change; and iii) those with no plans to take actions of change. The results are presented in Table 8.5 in Appendix 8 which confirm the observations in Table 8.4 but add more detailed and interesting evidence to help understand the relationships between factors of change and impact. There are three key observations from this additional analysis:

- 1) Amongst the respondents who *have implemented change* in their work contexts, support from school leadership and RSs showed stronger, moderate associations with their perceived impact of change, compared to their ability to access research and evidence base.
- 2) Amongst those who *are planning to implement change*, access to research and evidence base was no longer significant. School leadership support and quality inputs from RSs were both moderately associated with respondents' perceived impact on them and their schools. In addition, these two factors were themselves significantly and moderately correlated.
- 3) Amongst those with *no plans* for change, the only significant association was found between leadership support and inputs from RSs, but this association was *negative and moderate*. *This observation, in the context of the above two, suggests that the mismatch in support (or potential tensions) that respondents had experienced from their school leaders and the RS(s) might have contributed to their lack of action in terms of change.*

Taken together, the factor analysis and correlation results suggest that it is not necessarily the staff's self-beliefs about evidence use that make a difference to change and impact. Also, quality support and inputs from RSs alone are insufficient in bringing about intended change in individuals or schools. **Leadership support and quality inputs from RSs are both crucial and significant.** When the buy-in from school leaders was positively aligned with RSs' quality input, then the staff who were engaged with RS activities were likely to see the impact of their engagement on change in practice and culture. In contrast, the absence of leadership support and the tensions between leadership expectations and RSs' input were associated with little or no change in behaviour or culture.

Respondents across the telephone interview samples, working at different levels of seniority, also told us how crucial it was to have the **support of senior colleagues to cultivate a culture of evidence informed practice**. For example, this might take the form of dedicated staff time for research activity, as in the case of this school where: *'every third staff meeting is focused on research, there is time to read research and time to look at their own classes and their own needs'*. Similarly, as this participant suggested:

'When you have enough people out there saying the same thing that will encourage others to change – I've got people in almost every faculty who are following research and are talking about being "research-informed."

The example from an assistant headteacher of a primary school also showed the crucial role of senior leaders in creating and promoting a structure and culture that encouraged and enabled staff to share the outcomes of their practice-based inquiries:

'We celebrated the inquiry work everyone did with a festival at the end of the year. Everyone produced an A3 poster about their inquiry. The posters were displayed for the festival and there was a carousel of the most successful to help staff pick up ideas for the next cycle. We have also created an online platform where staff upload videos of lessons. This has been useful for the inquiry process as staff can share footage of before and after an intervention.'

Others reflected positively on RS events and the opportunities they provided for **networking and knowledge exchange with colleagues outside school**:

'You attend a training course, meet like-minded professionals that are on the same journey as you ... the social element is massively, massively important. My contacts over the last 2 years have all been developed through working with the Research School. People underestimate the value of face to face and the social element of research. It's the best way of spreading information.'

Conditions for Effective Take-Up of the RSN Campaign: *Barriers*

The challenge to engage 'hard-to-reach schools'

Working with local school improvement mechanisms and partnerships to attract and engage vulnerable, disadvantaged and hard-to-reach schools was perceived by all five RSs as key to achieving and sustaining the impact of the RS model in the school system. There was a shared moral commitment amongst the RSs to help the schools in most need of support, although they also recognised that these schools were least likely to engage and to stay engaged. The analysis below by a RS Lead explains at depth that the challenge for these schools to engage was often deeply rooted in their inward-looking culture and limited capacity.

'... the reality is that, in our school system, you've got rich and poor both financially but also in terms of time and emphasis, and so you've got schools who are under the Ofsted aegis in terms of requiring improvement or underachieving and they do not have the time or capacity to engage with a lot of Research School work. So our model doesn't work for them or solve their problems quickly enough. So what you find is that good and outstanding schools have much more capacity and openness about their work and they will engage with external partners and you've got good schools who want to develop their training to become brilliant and investing in tools and support networks that help them do that. In terms of my moral purpose, I want to help the schools in most need of support, but the reality of what we offer and what is taken up means that we get schools who are in a healthy position in terms of accountability and that equates to the socio-economic status of the children they take.'

(RS Lead T)

All RS Leads raised an important issue for the wider school system in terms of understanding that the use of research evidence needs to be rooted in the daily decision making processes in all aspects of the school improvement work. It was perceived that this evidence-based, whole school approach had indeed driven the success of their schools.

The barriers to engagement and impact

The combined evidence from the two RSN surveys, the CPD and training surveys and the two rounds of telephone interviews points to three conditions that were most commonly and frequently cited as having constrained participating individuals and schools to be engaged with the RS activity:

- *Geographical proximity of the Research School*
- *Lack of time, capacity and money for staff to attend professional development and training*
- *Research School provision not suitable for or applicable to the school's requirements*
- *Lack of leadership buy-in and support*

(1) Distant geographical proximity

Unsurprisingly, **the geographical proximity of the RS** was reported as a significant factor in the extent to which schools could engage in activity with a number of respondents suggesting their nearest RS was simply too far away. This was a source of some frustration amongst respondents who felt they and their schools were missing out on an important source of improvement and support, as this senior leader from a secondary school explained: *'if we were down the road from X [RS 3], we'd be there every other minute!'*

'If we want to drive research based practice in the school, it's about making it as easy as possible for people to learn and get involved. Teachers are really busy, it needs to be easy to take the next step; a Research School closer than 2 hours drive away would be beneficial.'

(Senior leader, primary)

'Geographically, it's a real challenge for us to engage more than we have been doing because, at the moment, the cost outweighs the effectiveness.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

The **place-based hub model** that involved setting up **satellite schools** (later when EEF's policy became available, **Associate RSs**) was perceived as a positive way forward – which could harness local knowledge, skills, capacity and resources to provide access for some of the schools located further distances away. For example, in a county with a long coastline and vast agricultural areas, growing local hubs to build connectivity between schools, and small, vulnerable schools especially, was believed to be a promising step change by this Teaching School Director:

'[The RS Lead's] intention ... was to grow relationships across the region, and identify where the talent was, identify where the capacity was and the vision was, and work with those partners. And they [the successful Associate RS] are brilliant that they have been recognised in that [capacity], and I think we will still continue to work with the other unsuccessful associate research school hubs and the satellite schools because ... the work still needs to continue. So, I think that's been an absolutely vital strategy.'
(Director, Teaching School)

It is important to note that this issue of geography not only related to RS proximity but also the distance between schools and a lack of capacity within schools. Distance was perceived to have posed particular challenges for schools in isolated, rural communities, as this respondent highlighted:

'Location is a barrier in terms of us being able to work in partnership with other schools in our region. For us, many of our schools are so far away that being able to work collaboratively can be a challenge, particularly if it's a project that involves children whereby it's challenging to organise transport for them to visit other schools etc.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

(2) Lack of time, capacity and resources

Another very common barrier to schools engaging with and accessing RS activity and provision relates to a **lack of resources** both *human* and *financial*. One in five respondents in the baseline survey (22%) and close to one in third in the follow-up survey (29%) reported that the time and resources available to them was a major barrier to their engagement with the RS activity (Figure 21). As this individual in the follow-up telephone interview asserted: *'it is hard to get out of school and there is not a lot of money either. Although the courses are reasonably priced, it is a lot of travel, plus the time out of school.'* Likewise, according to this headteacher: *'the financial pressure in the system put it much lower down a headteacher's list of priorities.'* The double impact of finding money for the professional development programmes and also cover for staff whilst they were attending such training was a heavy burden for many interviewed schools:

'If they're going to scale this [RS model] up then they need a standard re-numeration model that ensures individuals are paid including their cost to employ at the right level.'

(Headteacher, primary)

Although respondents from a range of schools drew attention, more broadly, to the financial constraints under which the whole system is operating, the time, resource and capacity issue appeared to be felt **most keenly amongst smaller (typically primary) schools** as they tended to have smaller budgets and fewer staff and situated in more remote locations which makes travel a challenge.

'We have not been able to go on as many courses as we would have liked because of the budgetary constraints. We are a small school. I'd love to go on more courses but there just isn't the financial resource.'

(Headteacher, primary)

Time was also a precious commodity that had proved to be a barrier to RS engagement for many participants: *'To seriously improve things for students, we need to ring fence time.'*

'If you are going to change the way you do something, it's hard – it requires coaching and reinforcement and we don't have the resource to do as much as we would like. We would love to have coaching triads that would concentrate on evidence-based practice but there is no time or budget – we can barely staff the curriculum.'

(Headteacher, primary)

However, in some cases, the lack of time and resources to engage with RSs was perceived to be the result of a **lack of support for the initiative from senior leadership**. This manifested itself through questions over possible impact of teacher engagement with the RS or through having little opportunity to attend professional development:

'Teachers from other schools are seeing a positive impact from attending CPD, they are given the time and space to implement change – we need to be making that space here. That's a frustration for me.'
(Headteacher, secondary)

In addition, there was some confusion around the different providers within the system, how all of this was funded centrally, and the financial implications for individual schools:

'My opinion is that there is an issue around double funding because if the Research School are being funded then they should be providing a service to schools but we are also paying them for their services. Also, what services are the Research School providing to the Teaching School system? Otherwise, the government are paying us to pay them and they are already being paid. So there needs to be some clarification around this I think.'

(Senior leader, primary)

(3) Lack of relevance to schools' priorities and needs

According to some qualitative telephone survey respondents, it remained difficult to say with any confidence whether and how their engagement with the RS had a tangible impact on practice and learning. The **relevance, responsiveness and quality of the content of RSs' provision** was perceived as a matter of concern for some.

For example, in some cases it was felt that the RS had not offered anything new, as this telephone interviewee, a senior leader in an 'outstanding' secondary school, asserted: *'we haven't felt that anything we've attended has been useful. We are fortunate that we are in a great school, doing very well. At the last event I went to they were preaching to the converted.'* This individual, a senior leader from an independent secondary school, reflected on a similar situation:

'We have been involved with research-informed practice before Research Schools existed. Interactions with the Research School have been part of a much bigger programme of interaction with research. There has been a culture shift since I started (4 years ago), but that is not attributable directly to the Research School.'

(Senior leader, independent secondary)

Other telephone interviewees **questioned the usefulness of the training and development** although many suggested this was more to do with their school being at a mature phase of evidence informed practice. As this leader from a high performing school explains: *'it was really a distilling of EEF evidence which I had already read about, so there was nothing new. The smaller workshops didn't add anything to my own understanding – it's not a criticism. If we weren't so well versed in research at my school it would have been really good. It depends on your starting point.'*

Of those interviewees that reported their settings to be at a relatively mature phase of research informed thinking and practice, they tended to be working in higher performing schools. Similarly, this headteacher of a (single) secondary academy trust was less complimentary about the content of the RS training – claiming it was not quite as expected and that they already had many of the suggestions in place within their school. However, they did draw attention to the rich set of resources they were able to draw upon through their RS engagement to inform staff professional development and learning: *"we now have a library of research articles, journals and wider reading material that we have used extensively. They were packaged up in a folder on a memory stick which made it very simple to access. I have directed staff to them multiple times over the past year."* Some respondents, such as this headteacher of a high performing primary school, felt the programmes did not meet for their needs and priorities for improvement:

'We haven't engaged with the [Research School] CPD this time round because the twilights haven't matched where we are with our school development plan and that's just my approach really. My feeling is that unless you're going to do something with it there and then it's just sending someone on a course, getting a folder, putting it in a cupboard and carrying on as before.'

(Headteacher, primary)

In addition, interviewees from alternative provision providers or smaller primary schools may also felt that the RS did not have the expertise or knowledge of their contexts to be able to offer appropriate support. Similarly, this participant was trying to find some support for a school project on disadvantaged learners and literacy:

'When I was looking for specific support in my context with a team who was quite well versed in using evidence-informed practice - we just wanted help to formulate that more securely, but we couldn't find anyone to help us do that.'

(Headteacher, primary)

In contrast, the following primary school leader suggested that their local RS's focus on pupil premium children was not relevant to the pupil intake of their school:

'I feel that the research school located closest to my school has such a large number of disadvantaged children that the suggested resources have limited impact in my setting. We have a considerable number of adopted children (8%) but incredibly low 'deprived' students.' (Senior leader, primary)

Other participants in both the baseline and the follow-up interviews raised broader concerns over what they perceived to be a **lack of clarity around the function of the RS** initiative and the kind of support and provision they were offering to schools:

'I was not 100% sure of their [Research Schools] purpose – if it's to support schools in using evidence or carrying out evaluations themselves, just organising events isn't enough. You need a programme so that schools get a coach or more support. Do they have the capacity to do that? Schools need more support in understanding the evidence base. I thought their role was to lead research, from their title – but that's not the support we've had - their role seems to be more disseminating information.' (Headteacher, primary)

Some of the participants suggested that because their **school was high performing and already working with a number of different partners**, they had little impetus to engage with the RS initiative. As this respondent pointed out: *"My school have a top rating, we are closely linked with 2 universities, we're in a strong teaching alliance, we're running Masters and NPQMLs - we haven't got a SLT who are thinking we need help here – so I think that limits our involvement [with the RS] ... there isn't the drive."* What this example also shows is that judgement on the *relevance* of RSs' provision to a school's priorities and needs was a **leadership call**. The following comment from a RS Lead explains, at least in part, why it had been challenging to engage hard-to-reach schools:

'... it has not been sufficient just to have the RS available for weak and vulnerable schools as they won't engage. Vulnerable schools lack leadership capacity, don't know what support they need, and don't think research is the answer. It requires an additional lever to get the schools to engage, either a MAT or an LA.'

(Senior leader, RS)

Other respondents suggested the pressures faced by headteachers to get results encouraged a **culture of quick fixes** rather than a more measured and reflective evidence informed approach. Below are examples from two different middle leaders, one from an academy and another from a maintained school:

'That's a frustration of the system we live in ... The Heads [in this Trust's Academies] are committed to a research-informed approach but there isn't always the time allowed to do this properly in terms of conducting a research project, evaluating the findings and then implementing it. When you are looking at whole school change it is a long-term strategy.'

(Middle leader, secondary)

'Staff have been nervous of trying something new as they are very conscious of a culture where results were seen as the ultimate measure.'

(Middle leader, primary)

(4) Lack of leadership buy-in and support

In the qualitative telephone surveys we identified examples of senior leaders **struggling to find time** to read the newsletters (amongst a diverse pool of information and resources that schools receive on a regular basis) and/or pass them on to other leaders and staff in their schools for further discussion or actions. It appears that in many cases, without leadership buy-in and engagement, the e-newsletters struggled to serve the purpose of enabling schools to access the current practice of research and evidence use for improvement. For example,

'I rarely have time to read the newsletters. I just have a quick scan. It's nice to be kept in touch, but I don't tend to circulate them. The SENCO is signed up but no-one else.'

(Senior Leader, secondary)

'The newsletters are useful, but I know we are not using them as well as we could. We are not getting the maximum use from them as they remain at SLT level. One of the challenges of engaging schools is that they become overwhelmed with information, ideas and suggestions. The difficulty is being able to filter the information and give the right information to the right people.'

(Headteacher, secondary)

The following comment from the CEO of a primary-led MAT provided a contrasting example to the above quote. It shows that when senior leaders really understand what 'being research-informed' means in theory and practice, they are committed to creating structures and opportunities which embed **research-informed practice as a mind-set and a way of working** in their schools. As we have learned from the evaluation of R&D in Teaching Schools, their schools would be highly unlikely to experience the difficulties as claimed by this respondent: *'our biggest difficulties are teachers who are great classroom deliverers but they're not interested in the research because they don't believe it can teach them anything they don't already know.'*

'Peter [pseudonym], the head teacher, is doing the masters' and he's very interested in research. He's followed on from the Leading Learning training, and he's doing the Teacher Development Trust's CPD leadership programme. He's been instrumental in setting up this group that we call the Ripple Lead Group. So he's been out, he's spoken to head teachers. And we've made it a priority in the Trust to identify somebody in each school who has clout. ... we're not going to let it be bulldozed by any other senior leadership problems. It's going to be prioritised in school.'

So for the last year those ripple leads have met every half-term. Peter leads the group, and it's a bit like a developing developers' group. So we're training them in how to engage with research, how to use the toolkit. They all have their membership of the Chartered College of Teaching paid for by their school, so there's at least one person in school who has access to a research database. And we're just trying to build that culture that CPD shouldn't happen in isolation from research and inquiry and literature.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

It is important to point out that this is not a particularly widespread issue across the sample but one that is nonetheless noteworthy as it is suggestive of the range of competing pressures that schools are under to address improvement (engaging with research being just one). Our evaluation of the Teaching Schools (Gu et al., 2016) highlighted the importance of school leadership in nurturing and shaping staff's attitudes and understanding of evidence-informed practice. As this participant explains, the support of senior leaders within their school is vital in this regard:

'I think it needs to be given more priority. The SLT are supportive, but perhaps not as proactive as they could be. We should be getting more from our engagement with the Research School. The culture is developing but it is not embedded yet, and until then it won't be a genuine priority that is internally driven, rather than be driven by extrinsic factors such as 'every other school is doing it.' There are those [staff members] that will buy in to it, those that are will buy in with some encouragements and those that will be resistant because they can't see the value of it.'

(Senior leader, primary)

We would end this chapter with this CEO's interpretation of research-informed practice as it reveals the pivotal role of school leaders in determining not only *whether* a school would choose to *participate* in the RSN campaign, but more profoundly, whether their participation is likely to result in *sustained engagement* with research and evidence use in the classroom:

'There's still so many people in the local teaching school landscape here who think that being research-informed means teachers doing action research in the classroom. And it's not that there's anything the matter with that at all. It's part of it. But they don't understand that it means engaging with literature and really high-quality, being critical consumers of research evidence and literature work done by other people.'

I think the toolkit is a great starting point for people who perhaps don't have any training in educational research to start to think about what they might take from the evidence that's out there. I think the EEF do a fantastic job of mediating that for people who are not specialists, to say, you know, "If you're looking for something to help you plan how you're going to improve English in your school, well, here's some evidence taken from systematic reviews that might help you in that thinking." I think the problem is that not everybody has that background and training and understanding, and they're still looking for quick fixes. But I think there's a difficulty with people reading the findings with a critical eye, and being able to synthesise evidence from different sources, and to understand that nothing works everywhere, and everything works somewhere.'

(CEO, secondary-led MAT)

Key Findings 3: Evidence of Promise – *Is there evidence of intended impact?*

Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which, and how, schools' participation and engagement with the RSN campaign had led to change in culture and practice. The chapter explores how and to what extent the information and learning that individuals and schools accessed through the three strands of RS activity had been implemented in their schools. It also investigates the outcomes and impacts and relates this to the theory of change. It is important to note that it would be too early to identify tangible evidence of impact in schools that had been associated with the five RSs in different capacities. It is also important that we are cautious in interpreting the *breadth and depth* of impact identified through visits to RSs where we tended to meet schools and individuals who, especially when engaged in the same TSA or MAT, also shared the passion and commitment to promote an evidence-based culture in the school system. Likewise, the survey data is highly likely to represent individuals who are more engaged and committed to exploring and utilising the evidence-base, and this may have made them more likely to complete an evaluation survey. Nonetheless, hearing from individuals with different roles and in different capacities in relation to the RS work has presented us with promising evidence that deep engagement with RS activities *can* and *has* brought benefits to their own practice and the culture and practice of their schools.

Table 8: Summary of key findings 3: Evidence of promise

Key Findings 3: Evidence of promise – Is there evidence of intended impact?
The view that the RSs were playing a vital role in a systemic shift towards evidence use was widely shared. As the catalyst for culture change in classrooms and schools, the provision of quality CPD and training activity had increasingly become the centre of RSs' attention and effort over time. The innovation strand had made the least progress or impact.
The majority of the RSN survey respondents reported that their engagement with the RS activities had enabled them to understand and/or engage with evidence in some way, for example, by developing their understanding of the value of the evidence base and/or how to access and use it. Those who reported to have engaged more 'deeply' with the RS activities were more likely to indicate positive impacts in these areas.
RSs' CPD and training courses were more likely to impact on participants' professional beliefs and behaviour, especially in terms of using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice, than subject knowledge or quality of teaching practice. Participants on leadership-oriented programmes were more likely to report this positive impact.
In the 2019 follow-up survey, respondents from 'outstanding' schools were particularly more positive about the impacts related to leadership support and collaboration between colleagues. In contrast, those from disadvantaged schools were less positive about the impacts on these two areas or the capacity and skills in their schools to use evidence-based practice.
Case study interviews suggest that tapping into the existing school improvement mechanisms, networks and partnerships in the region was perceived by RSs as a necessary strategy to access the required resources, expertise and capacity that would enable them to engage schools to promote the evidence-informed approach for school improvement. Although there were structural, cultural and resource challenges, once achieved, the real success, as perceived by interviewed and surveyed participants, was in the re-energised and enhanced relationships and trust with school partners and stakeholders, and associated with these, a regional commitment and mechanism for improvement.

Perceptions of Change and Impacts from Participating Schools

Perceptions of impact on practice, culture and outcomes

• Perceived impact on practice

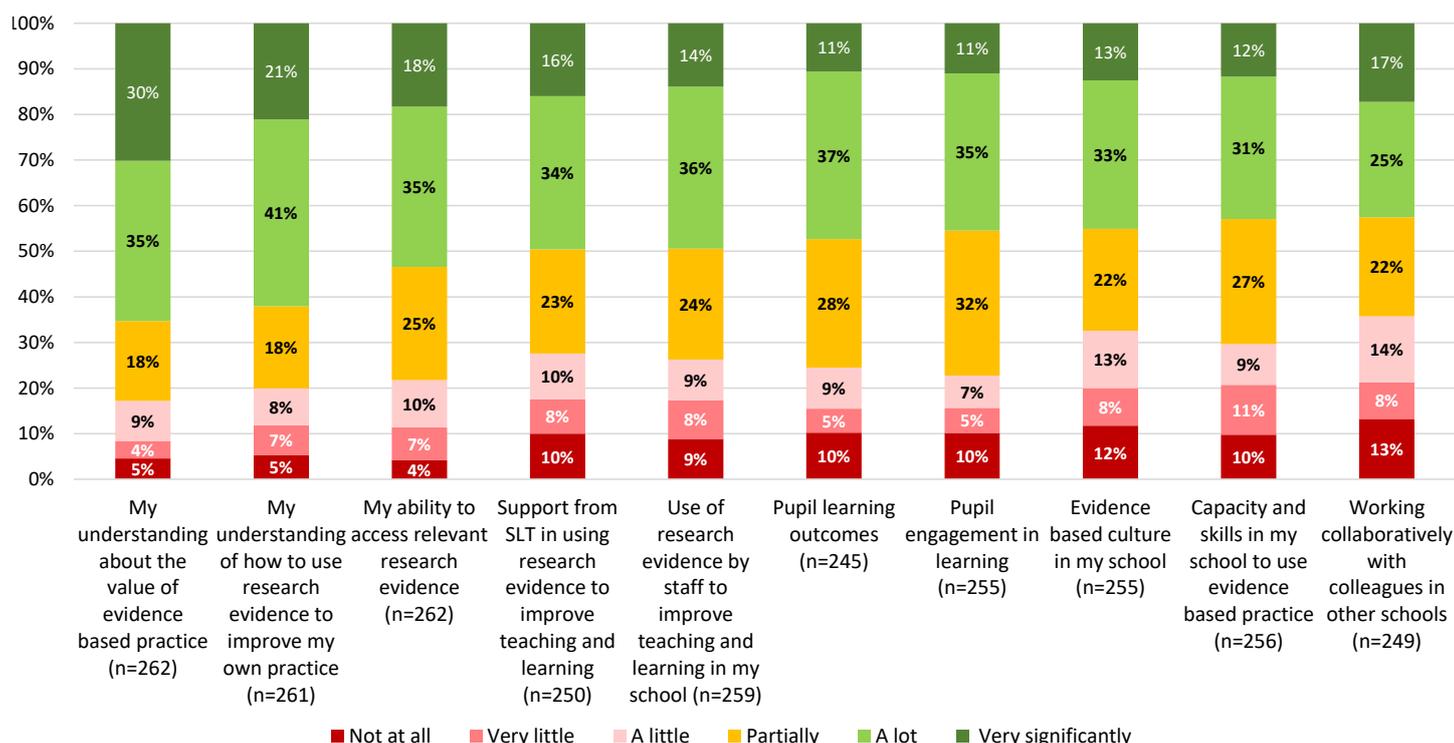
The RSN follow-up survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they had noticed any impacts on a range of areas of their professional practice as a result of their engagement with the RSs. Figure 22 shows that the five areas which received the highest proportions of combined 'very significantly' and 'a lot' responses from school participants were all related to their **understanding and ability to use research and evidence to improve teaching and learning**:

- *My understanding about the value of evidence based practice* (65% 'a lot' or 'very significantly')
- *My understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice* (62% 'a lot' or 'very significantly')
- *My ability to access relevant research evidence* (53% 'a lot' or 'very significantly')

- Support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching and learning (50% ‘a lot’ or ‘very significantly’)
- Use of research evidence by staff to improve teaching and learning in my school (50% ‘a lot’ or ‘very significantly’)

Thus, for at least half of the survey respondents, participation in RSs’ activities was felt to have contributed to the foundations for deeper engagement with evidence-based practice in workplaces.

Figure 22: Extent to which respondents to the follow-up RSN survey have noticed impacts in a range of areas as a result of their engagement with the RSs



The qualitative telephone surveys provided additional, detailed evidence to help make sense of the above change in practice. Interview participants welcomed the **applied nature** of the CPD and training programmes and highlighted their **changes in teaching practice** as a result. For example, this headteacher of a maintained primary school (rated ‘good’ by Ofsted) told us about changes in how they taught vocabulary to their students with English as an Additional Language (EAL):

‘Vocabulary would be a good example. Three years ago we were looking at our EAL and disadvantaged pupils and we identified a common trend of a lack of vocabulary and we need to do something about it ... we did some research and found that these pupils couldn’t talk in full sentences. It was at that time that [RS Director] was starting to do stuff around closing the vocabulary gap and we realised we could save ourselves 6 months of trawling through the evidence by using his training so we used it to supplement our own stuff.’

(Headteacher, primary)

Likewise, having attended RS training, this respondent, a literacy coordinator and lead practitioner working in a secondary academy (also an Ofsted ‘good’ school), explained how he adopted a discipline specific approach to literacy within his school *‘and that is a revolution in literacy co-ordination whole school; before, it was one literacy policy that covered every discipline. When a maths teacher sees that you are engaging with his subject personally, there is so much greater buy in.’* Similarly, following work with their RS on marking, this secondary academy within an area of relative deprivation had moved away from a generic, whole-school feedback policy to a key stage specific approach creating a more efficient and effective process. One of their middle leaders explained: *‘We don’t mark everything, we mark according to what we want in our faculty and Key Stage. That has been a step forward – It’s more effective feedback, although it hasn’t saved work. The marking and feedback is of a higher quality.’*

This headteacher of a primary academy (currently ‘requiring improvement’ according to Ofsted) adapted her approach to writing following training in this area with their RS: *‘We started with writing, which was awful, and saw such quick*

results – we used the cycle that X [from the RS] had drawn up for us from the research and we could see it was working. It [Research School] is now our go-to place for school improvement.’ In another example from the same school, the headteacher explained how one of her KS1 teachers changed her approach to spelling following consultation of the research in this area. This approach had been taken up across the whole school:

‘She does a diagnostic of the children’s spelling ability on an individual basis. The teaching is based on the morphology of the word, not the phonetics. This approach is now being developed across school. Staff are looking more carefully and with a more skilled eye on which it is the children can’t do so we can tailor the teaching of spelling more closely to the mistakes the children are making. We’re trialling it here, and if successful it will be rolled out to other schools in the Trust that are struggling with spelling.’

- **Perceived non-instrumental impact on staff attitudes and confidence: shift in school culture and policy**

Results from the qualitative telephone surveys also suggest that RS training programmes have contributed to change in participants’ attitudes towards research use. Some respondents talked about the **reassurance and justification** they felt having attended RS training, as this class teacher reflected: *‘I like the way it validates what you are already based on gut instinct and enables you to hone your practice. Take Modelling for example – you need to think about what is good and what isn’t good about it – rather than just say here’s a model that says this. It’s taking it a step further.’*

A small number of respondents told us how **attitudes amongst staff members at different levels have changed** as a result of RS engagement and the **cultivation of an evidence-based approach to teaching and learning**. This example is from a teacher working in a primary school within a context of high deprivation:

‘Everyone is a lot more confident, both teachers and teaching assistants, to ask questions such as: ‘why are we doing this intervention? What impact is it having?’ Those conversations are a lot more confident now, even to the point where the teaching assistants will suggest ways in which certain interventions can be modified and improved ... people have got more ownership of what they are doing and why.’

(Classroom teacher, primary)

The following comment is from a middle leader and classroom teacher in another primary school that is situated in a much more affluent locality:

‘I understand teaching a lot more, have more confidence – when delivering messages to staff. It is much clearer as I can say that there is evidence behind it.’

(Middle leader, primary)

Despite the widely different socio-economic contexts within which these two respondents are situated, they have consistent claims as to the attitudinal changes within their schools as a result of engagement with the RS programmes.

It is perhaps, then, no surprise that some interviewees, albeit a minority of our telephone interview participants, pointed to **cultural shifts** within their schools with an **emerging dialogue and discourse around evidence informed pedagogy and practice** and the importance of educational research as a source of practitioner knowledge. The following respondent is a senior leader in a secondary academy:

‘We run senior and middle leader networks and subject networks and we’re all talking about this kind of stuff ‘how’s your school implemented this?’ ‘What’s your school doing about that?’ and I think the research school absolutely supports that.’

(Senior leader, secondary)

In other examples, participants have told us how attitudes towards teaching have changed as this individual said: *‘I feel like I’m part of something really significant. There is a palpable sense of excitement. People really enjoy engaging with evidence, and evaluating what children are doing.’* Likewise, other respondents, like this senior leader from a secondary academy school (first example) and this middle leader from a secondary maintained school (second example), linked **renewed optimism and supportiveness amongst colleagues** to their RS engagement:

‘We don’t shove the research down their throats. We just make suggestions like: ‘The research has said this works, why don’t you try it?’ If someone has said it’s not working, then they might go and support each other about why it’s not working.’

(Senior leader, secondary)

'I think there is more willingness to have a go and because these ideas are coming from a reputable course. If it doesn't work it isn't seen as a failure as a teacher, but that it may need modifying for this context.'

(Middle leader, secondary)

Whilst other senior leaders talked about the shared sense of **ownership and responsibility amongst staff with regards to evidence-informed improvement strategies**:

'All these people who are able to run their own research project and provide feedback to the school. It is not the SLT telling people what research says – but we now have staff that have done their own research and can feedback on how it worked within their specific context, and it can be adapted accordingly.'

(Senior leader, primary)

The interviews with senior leaders from two TSA schools associated with a secondary RS highlighted how RS training and support had **enabled like-minded school leaders** (who were already **'a convert'** to evidence-based practice) **to gain greater confidence** in being able to draw on research evidence in their work within their schools and/or as system leaders. They had used the learning from the "Leading Learning" programme to develop new CPD frameworks in their schools and through this, embed a more evidence-based approach to specific aspects of practice within their school.

Respondents also told us how they **adapted whole school policies and structures** after engaging RS activity. At this school, a primary maintained that was deemed as 'requiring improvement' by Ofsted, they changed how they taught maths, as this senior leader explained:

'We were looking at different ways of teaching maths, using concrete, pictorial and abstract methods. Rather than just do one staff meeting on that, we did 30 minutes of input every week, so it was a real focus, and everyone knew it wasn't just a focus for 2 weeks and would then be forgotten. It has massively changed how we teach maths across the school.'

(Senior leader, primary)

The following respondent recounted a similar example following their attendance on the RS training which she described as a 'game changer' in respect of their approach to feedback:

'It taught me how to access educational research, to evaluate it, how to put things in place in a scientific way and measure them - and that cascades through school. When we re-wrote our policy on feedback and looked at workload, I knew where to go for the research, how to read it and how to make a decision about whether it was reliable. It changed us from doing what was fashionable to what had a proper research base.'

(Senior leader, primary)

Culture change as a non-instrumental impact was also in evidence in the 2019 RSN survey, but at a slightly lower level than some of the more direct impacts relating to teaching practice: close to half of the respondents (46%) reported that their involvement in the RS activities had impacted 'a lot' or 'very significantly' on the 'evidence based culture in their school' (Figure 22). In addition, 42% reported 'a lot' or 'very significantly' impact relating to *working collaboratively with colleagues in other schools*.

- **Perceived non-instrumental impact: enhancing professional development**

Professional development is a common theme identified from the qualitative telephone surveys. Interview respondents highlighted positive shifts in this area as a consequence of their engagement with the RS. This might take the form of **cascaded learning** after colleagues had attended RS training:

'I used some of the materials and approaches from the training I attended to evaluate which of our interventions were having an impact both short term and longer term and which ones were sticking summatively rather than just hitting intervention targets. The CPD helped me to do this with a clearer and more accurate focus.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

Others told us how the CPD and training had helped them and their colleagues to **understand the nuances of interventions** such as the importance of reflection and the ways in which impact and influence might take time to become visible:

'The teachers here are really on board with CPD. They're getting the opportunity to go in, ask questions of students. They're really understanding now that it's really important to get feedback about what works and doesn't work.'

(Headteacher, primary)

More broadly, a minority of respondents talked about the wider impact and influence of RS training on **capacity building amongst staff** and the longer-term implications of this. As this respondent, Director of a cross phase MAT, explained: *'We're developing professionals and leaders ... We're investing in our colleagues to become more expert and feel valued and this will lead to retention and also influence recruitment.'* In this context, the potential of the RS to influence and inform professional development of staff across a wider network of schools such as a MAT is potentially very powerful. The evidence also confirms the quantitative evidence that **the buy-in and support from senior leadership plays a crucial role in enacting and reinforcing impact of the RS activities in changing in-school practices and culture.**

In this case, a respondent recounted how, as a direct result of attending Leading Learning training, a headteacher of a rural primary school in the MAT completely transformed the professional development programme in his small village context. Notwithstanding the small scale of this context, this was seen as having had a visible impact on teachers' professionalism and attitudes and also on pupil outcomes:

'He identified 3 main priorities; we looked at student's ability to read and problem solve (1st priority) through lesson study every week for 12 weeks and freed up the relevant teachers so they could do that. Every 3rd staff meeting the teacher research group looked at spelling (2nd priority), and then allocated specific time for coaching teachers own development need (3rd priority). Last year 100% students achieved the expected standard in writing and 90% in reading. It is a tiny sample with only 10 children, but it was a significant improvement. The teachers' talk about it - they were isolated in a rural bubble and now they have come out into the sunlight – and they talk about it like that. They hadn't known what they were missing before.'

(Senior leader, primary)

Taken together, it is important to note that the schools within these qualitative telephone survey examples cut across different phases and different levels of performance. Successful implementation (or at least the perception of this) and perceptions of impact therefore were not limited to schools that were already performing well. There is little evidence from the data of any commonalities between school type, phase or level of performance in terms of level of research engagement. Rather, this appears to depend on a multitude of within-school factors including level of understanding of and engagement with research from the headteacher and the senior leadership team and the extent to which this has filtered through into school wide practice.

• Perceived impact on pupil learning

Interviewed respondents in the qualitative telephone survey, particularly those working within the classroom, commented on the **impact of RS activity on pupil learning** and how this manifests itself in a number of different ways. For instance, a teaching assistant at a primary academy, gave the example of a warm-up introductory session run by the RS as part of a programme that involved pupils being encouraged to draw 'squiggles' as a way of improving their handwriting. She commented that this was something the pupils really enjoyed and that their pencil control had improved over the course of the intervention period. In a similar way, the following respondent told us how they worked with the RS to look at different learning styles and alternative models of teaching. They then applied a new approach to teaching and learning across their school which had so far proved more efficient and effective:

'Having a model and structure has been useful. It's more time effective; it may only be 2-3 minutes a day, but that does count. The children at the end of the week are only getting the key learning that they need at that time. It's more focussed, and their reading is developing a lot quicker.'

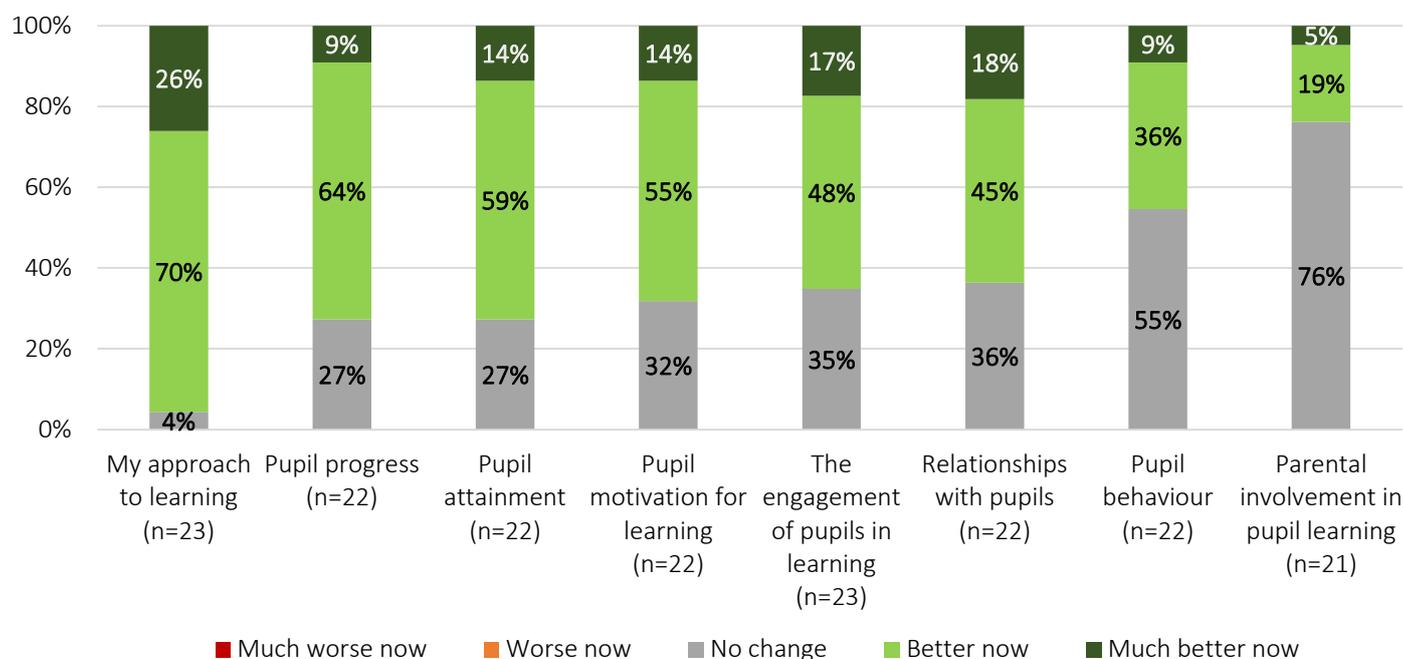
(Classroom teacher, primary)

Across the sample, respondents repeatedly told us that it was **difficult to measure the direct impact** of their engagement with the RS. However, as the examples illustrate, there was a strong sense amongst many of the participants we spoke to that the **adoption of a more evidence-based approach was making a difference to pupil learning**. As this senior leader of a primary school suggests: *"I'd be hesitant to attribute all of that to engagement with the RS, but certainly an evidence-based approach has done no harm."*

Figure 22 above lends some supportive but tentative evidence from the 2019 RSN survey: 48% and 46% of the respondents respectively reported that participating in RS activities had 'a lot' or 'very significantly impact on *pupil learning outcomes* and *pupil engagement in learning*. Results from the CPD pro forma follow-up survey offer additional

evidence to support the association. Figure 23 shows the responses to the question which asked respondents to indicate the extent to which things have improved or worsened following the training programme in relation to a range of aspects directly affecting pupils. The aspects in which respondents were most likely to report that things were 'better now' or 'much better now' were their **approach to learning, pupil progress** and **pupil attainment**. The areas where respondents were most likely to report no change were parental involvement in pupil learning, pupil behaviour and relationships with pupils.

Figure 23: Extent to which things have improved or worsened following the RS training programme – CPD pro forma follow-up survey respondents



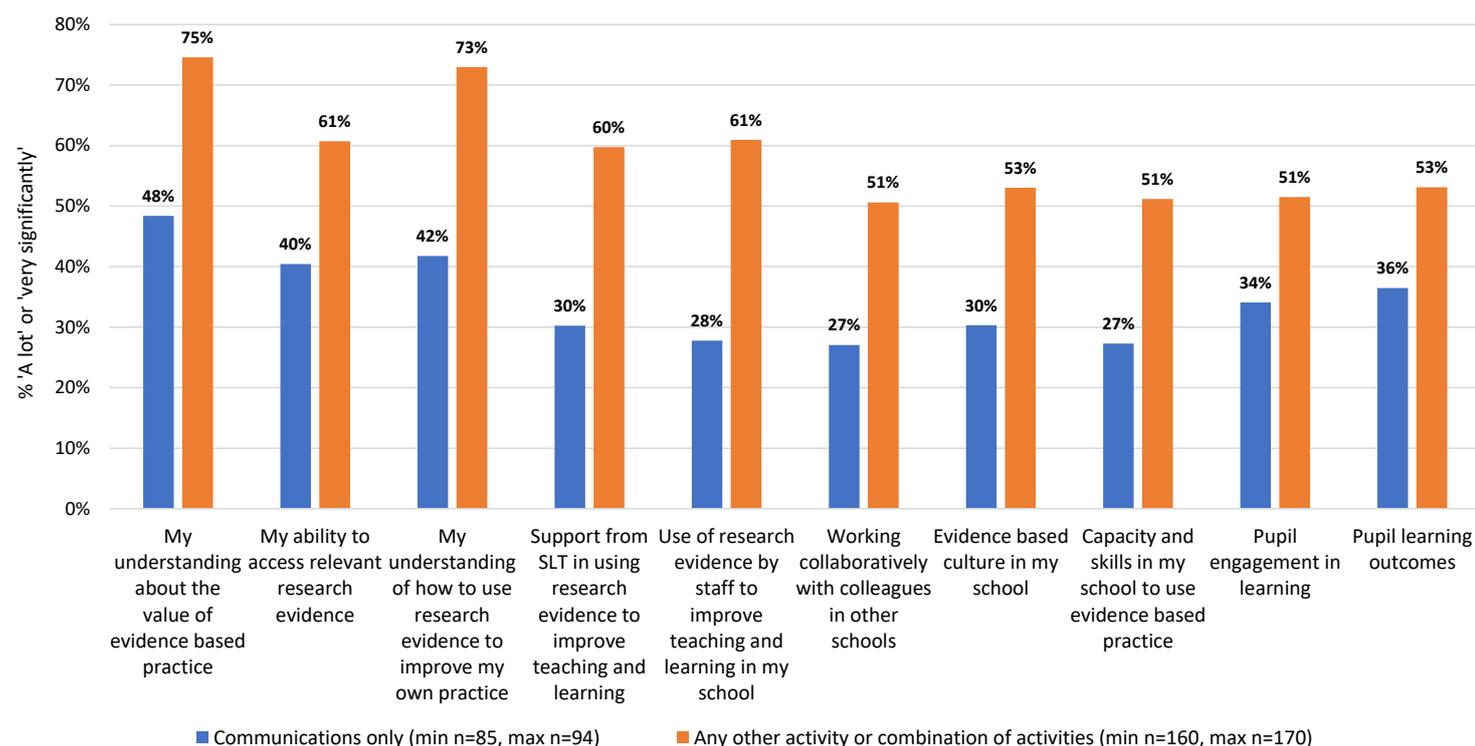
Variation in perceived impact and change by types of RS activity

We also explored whether the *type of RS activity* school staff had engaged with might have affected their levels of reported impact on the same range of teaching and learning related outcomes in Figure 22 above. Figure 24 below shows the combined proportions of 'a lot' and 'very significantly' responses to this question based on whether respondents to the RSN follow-up survey reported that they had engaged with communications activities only, or any other activity or combination of activities (from the three main strands of activity: communications, CPD and training, and innovation).

It shows that **those who engaged more 'deeply'**, i.e. with activities other than just communications, were **more likely to report impact levels of 'a lot' or 'very significantly'** than those who had only been involved in the communications strand. However, it is still of note that between approximately a quarter and half of those who engaged only with communications reported 'a lot' or 'very significant' impact¹⁷. The figure also shows that around three-quarters of respondents who had engaged in activities other than just communications reported impact levels of 'a lot' or 'very significantly' against *my understanding about the value of evidence based practice* and *my understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice*.

¹⁷ This positive pattern may be interpreted with it in mind that the survey respondents were self-selecting and hence might be over-representative of those with a more active interest in RSs than other engagers as is perhaps evidenced by the fact that they completed a survey. However, such positive (or sometimes negative) bias in survey results are common to survey studies.

Figure 24: Percentage of respondents to the follow-up RSN survey reporting impact levels of 'a lot' or 'very significantly' in a range of areas as a result of their engagement with the RSs, by the type of RS activities they had engaged with

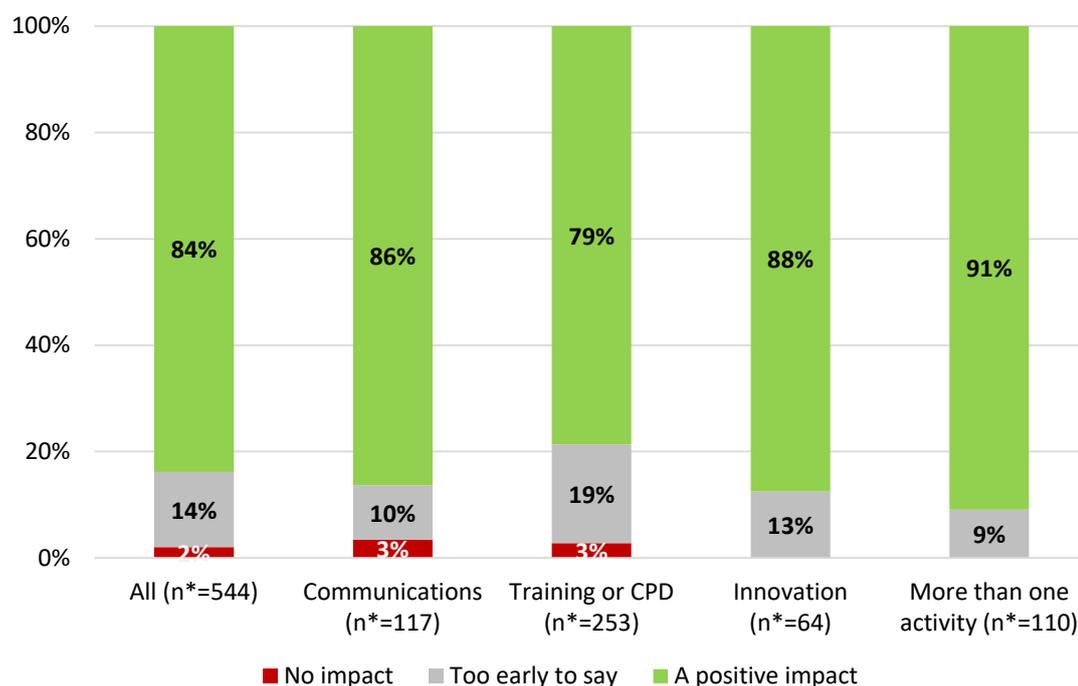


The RSN follow-up survey also asked the respondents whether they have *implemented any changes* to their teaching practice as a result of their engagement with the RS(s). Against each change they had made, the respondents were asked to indicate which of the three RS activities contributed the most to the implementation of the change. Nearly half (49%) of changes were attributed to *CPD and training* activities, followed by 20% to *communications* and 13% to involvement in an *innovation* project. Nearly a fifth of changes (19%) were said to be due to involvement in *more than one type of activity*.

Respondents were then asked the extent to which each of the changes in teaching practice they reported (they were able to list up to three changes) had achieved any impact. Figure 25 shows the extent of perceived impact against the type of RS activity that they felt had contributed to them making the change. Note that the base numbers for the chart (denoted by 'n') refer to the number of *changes*, not the number of *respondents*.

Overall, 84% of changes reported were said to have had a positive impact. When viewed according to the RS activity which contributed to the respondents making the positive changes, the difference in perceived contribution from across the three RS activities was largely marginal. Those changes that were attributed to *more than one activity* or to *innovation* activities were marginally likely to have reportedly had a positive impact. Given the nature of the innovation projects which is about trialling new ideas in practice, this is not an entirely surprising finding.

Figure 25: Reported impact of changes already implemented by the RS activity which had contributed to respondents making the change (follow-up RSN survey)



(1) Perceived impact relating to communication

The telephone interviews with a sub-sample of RSN survey respondents also addressed the role of the communications strand in facilitating engagement with the evidence base. Many interviewees highlighted the usefulness of accessing the e-newsletters. They may not have resulted in direct change in practice; nonetheless, they provided schools and individuals with **summaries of the latest pedagogical research**, the helpful hints and tips for teaching, and the links to evidence based and practical resources:

'It's always useful to have that prompt. You're bombarded with so much information that having it consolidated in one place rather than having to keep going to check a website is great.'
(Middle leader, secondary)

'It gives me the headlines, so I know what to go and look at ... sometimes we don't have the access to what we need, or the time. The newsletter does a lot of my job for me. It is trusted, easy and accessible.'
(Senior leader, primary)

The **newsletters provided a gateway to an invaluable source of information** that allowed them to be more outward facing, as this middle leader explains: *'I feel that I am better informed with what is going on, I see the bigger picture. I feel I know more about the general atmosphere around the country, which you don't get as classroom teacher.'* In another example, a senior leader (primary) told us how their professional development programme was organised around project groups operating under a different topic related to an area of evidence-based research (e.g. metacognition; articulation of thoughts). Each group then ran action research projects to trial an approach and refined it as necessary before the senior leadership team weaved it all together. The areas of practice signposted within the e-newsletter informed the group topics.

(2) Perceived impact relating to CPD and training

Figure 26 shows the extent to which respondents to the CPD pro forma follow-up survey reported that the training programme they attended had impacted on aspects of their knowledge, teaching practice, classroom management and professional beliefs and behaviours one term upon completion of the training. Note that the achieved sample is relatively low (103 individuals completed a follow-up CPD survey), but there are some trends evident in the responses.

Most of the aspects that elicited particularly high proportions of 'a lot' and 'very significantly' responses tend to fall under the **'professional beliefs and behaviours'** category, suggesting that these are the areas that the training was perceived to have impacted most significantly.

The individual aspect that received the highest proportion of 'very significantly' responses was ***using research evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice***. Slightly more than a third of the respondents (36%) reported 'very significant' impact in this area. This is encouraging evidence for the RSs because this relates to one of the main purposes of their activity: *"to create a network of schools that support the use of evidence to improve teaching practice."*

Figure 26: Extent to which the RS training programme attended has impacted on aspects of respondents' knowledge, practice and beliefs – CPD pro forma follow-up survey

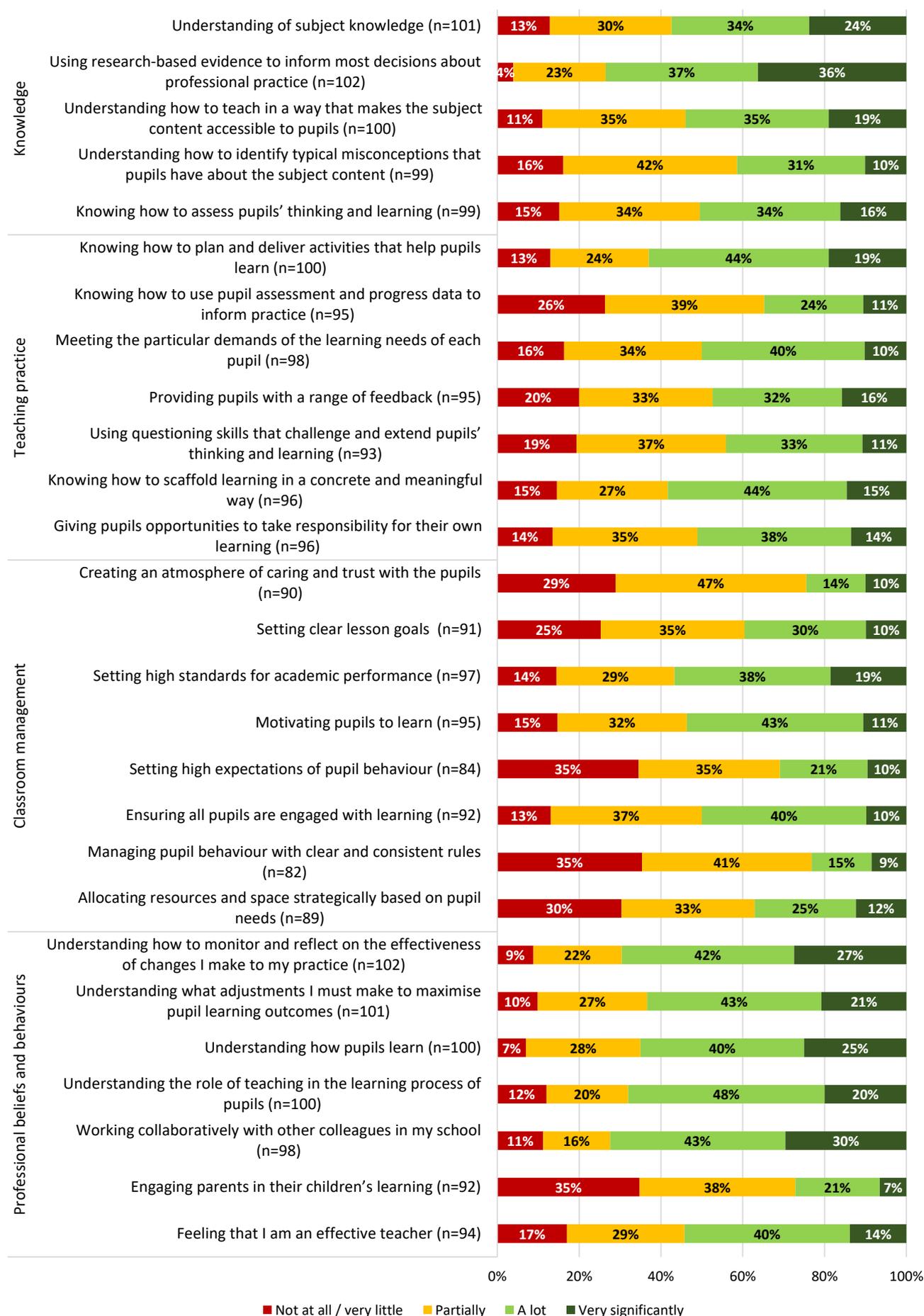
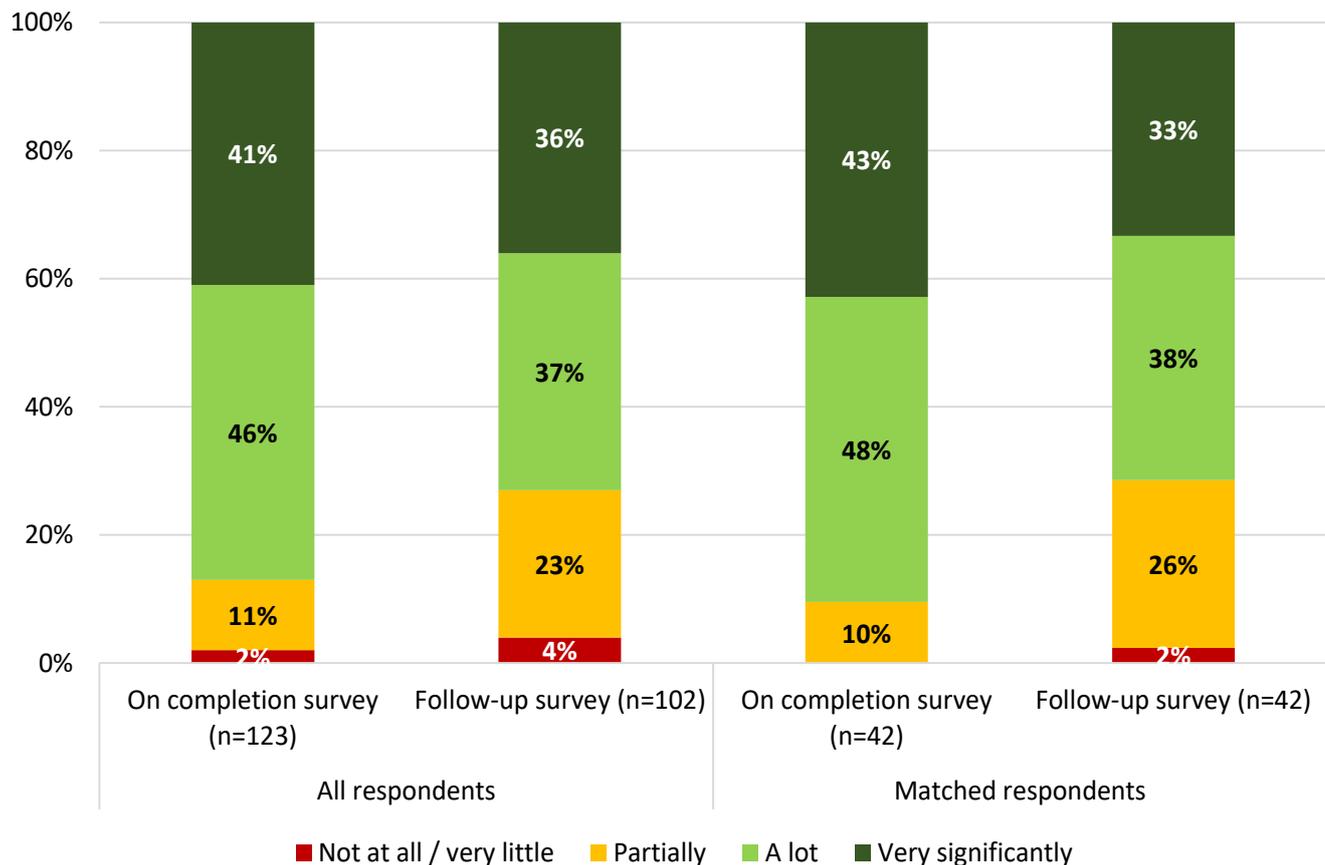


Figure 27 shows reported levels of impact for *all* respondents to the *on completion* and *follow-up* surveys, and for just the 42 individuals who were identified as having completed both an on completion and follow-up survey for any given training course (i.e. *matched* respondents). The purpose of this analysis was to eliminate any variation that might be introduced due to the fact that we are not comparing the same set of individuals when we look at all respondents to both surveys.

In the on completion survey (i.e. completed as soon as the training programme ended), around nine out of ten across *all* respondents and the *matched* respondents reported that the impact of their CPD and training programmes was ‘a lot’ or ‘very significantly’. Also for both respondent groups, the vast majority (seven out of ten) reported ‘a lot’ or ‘very significantly’ impact in the follow-up survey. The observed positive patterns lend support to the quality of the RSs’ CPD and training programmes and its potential impact on change in practice.

However, it is notable that a greater proportion of the *matched* respondents reported ‘partial’ impact in the follow-up survey – a 16% increase from the on-completion survey. The proportions of the respondents reporting ‘very significant’ and ‘a lot’ impact decreased from 43% to 33% and from 48% to 38% respectively. Although caution must be exercised when interpreting these statistics because the sample size is rather small, nonetheless, the observed change in perceptions raises the question as to **how far the training impact can be sustained in the context of use over time.**

Figure 27: Extent of impact of the training programmes on ‘using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice’, on completion and follow-up CPD pro forma surveys, all respondents and only those who completed both surveys (‘matched respondents’)



(3) Perceived impact relating to innovation projects

Very few respondents had engaged in this aspect of the RS activity¹⁸, so the evidence from interviews on impact is rather limited. A very small number of proposals were submitted for research funding from the IEE but most had been unsuccessful. Only 15 projects were awarded at the time of the follow-up qualitative telephone survey in 2019, and most had only just started. The evaluation of each project was carried out by the lead school(s), and their process data would not be sufficiently robust for consideration here.

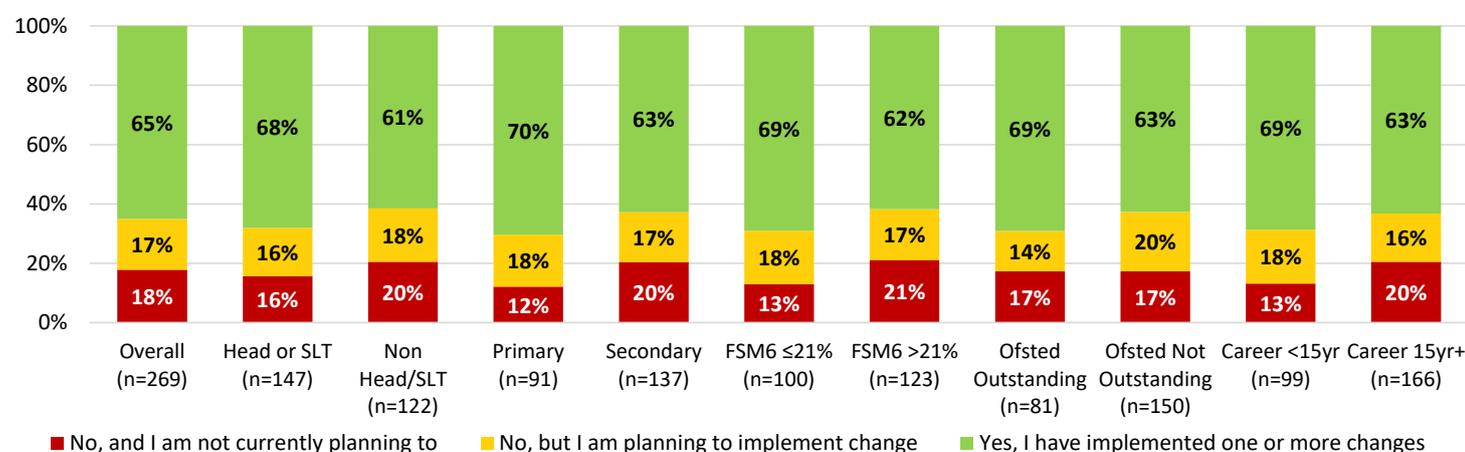
Variation in perceived impact by school and individual contexts

The RSN follow-up survey also asked 'Have you implemented any changes to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s)?' Figure 28 shows responses overall and broken down by different characteristics of respondents and their schools. Overall, nearly two-thirds of respondents said that they had implemented one or more changes as a result of their involvement with the RSs and while 17% were planning to make a change, a further 18% indicated that they had not made and were not planning to make any changes.

Across the various school background characteristics, any differences in response patterns are marginal. We can see that those from **primary schools**, **schools with lower proportions of disadvantaged children** (gauged by EverFSM6), and **those whose school is rated by Ofsted as outstanding** were slightly more likely than others to report having made a change, but the differences are quite small.

According to the characteristics of individual respondents, those in **SLT roles** and those **who have worked in schools for less than 15 years** were slightly more likely than non-SLT and those who have worked in schools for more than 15 years (respectively) to report that they have implemented at least one change as a result of their RS engagement, but again the differences are marginal.

Figure 28: RSN follow-up survey responses to: Have you implemented any changes to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the RS(s)? (All and by background characteristics)



Perceptions of Outcomes and Impacts from RSs

Catalyst for change and improvement in RSs

Becoming a RS was seen by senior leaders as the 'best strategic designation' (Headteacher of RS) which had provided status, opportunity, funding and associated with these, additional capacity and broadened partnerships to the RSs. The status had enabled them to become more focussed, more reflective and more confident in using evidence-based practice to continue to deepen the culture of inquiry and transform the quality of teaching and learning of their schools.

¹⁸ 38 Respondents to the baseline RSN survey and 62 respondents to the follow-up RSN survey reported that they had been involved in an innovation project.

The quotations from Huntington RS's Ofsted report (2017) provide an excellent example of how the RS status was used effectively by school leaders **as a catalyst for change, development and improvement in the school**:

'The school's 'Research School' status has had an extraordinary impact on teachers' understanding of how to improve their practice. ... the school is steeped in research-based practice, which is leading to pupils making rapid gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding. ... Teachers have a deep understanding of how pupils learn. They are supported in testing out theories of how to improve their teaching further through the excellent work of the Research School. Leaders are innovative in using an evidence-based approach to checking that changes to teaching or the curriculum are firmly grounded in evidence and linked to appropriate research. This exciting approach attracts and retains high-quality teachers and non-teaching staff.'

(Ofsted, 2017: 1, 3)

Similar examples can also be found in other RSs where the RS work has been **aligned purposefully and effectively** with the work in the RS itself, and where applicable, schools in their Trust and/or TSA. In the interviews RSs' senior leaders emphasised the importance that all the RS work and CPD needed to address the priorities of their schools in ways that continue to shift the mindset, language and culture of using evidence and inquiries to inform decisions in their practice.

The CEO of a RS, for example, stressed that the RS role was fundamental to their work as a MAT, and that they would use other sources of income to continue with the work even without EEF funding. He was very positive about the impact of the RS work and believed that it had contributed to *'transformational'* changes in their Trust. He was pleased to see that the language used in regular discussions in the schools had been increasingly based around evidence and research. His view was endorsed by another senior leader from the Trust: *'The research angle is encouraging us to be more objective and discerning about what we do.'* The staff in his school were now looking more critically at targeted interventions, becoming more reflective about impact, and were more willing and open to a research-based focus on practice.

Harnessing regional capacity: A legacy of change

Tapping into the existing school improvement mechanisms, networks and partnerships in the locality was perceived by RSs as a necessary strategy to access necessary resources, expertise and capacity required to engage schools with the evidence-informed approach to school improvement. There were many challenges to achieve this – one of which was to manage the tensions between competition and collaboration amongst schools (and groups of schools) within a region. However, once achieved, the real success was in the **re-energised and strengthened relationships and trust**, and associated with these, a **regional mechanism for improvement** that would enable committed and passionate leaders to take concerted action to provide a **coordinated, coherent and contextually relevant support** for all schools in the locality.

As a senior leader of a RS commented, it was not financially viable to have a RS on every street corner for them to gain a kind of impact at scale. What was perceived to be *'absolutely vital'* was that the RSs *'work strategically through as many partners as they can.'* The vision of this RS had always been to disseminate, share, develop and empower, and to make sure that *'we have got dozens and dozens and dozens of local leaders, specialist leaders, and then the model that the research school are using, which is the evidence lead. So they have actually got some capacity to deploy, to lead training or do bespoke work in a school.'* In strong disagreement with the **RS 'celebrity' approach**, the senior leader emphasised with passion that building and embedding a place-based hub model to harness regional relationships and capacity had been in the DNA of this RS from the very early days:

'So my experience ... is that the [RS] is not built around the CEO and it's not built around the RS, and if it was, it would have failed because if you rest on the achievements and the outcomes of an individual person and on an individual school that isn't sustainable. That doesn't bring all of that capacity, all of that capital, and all of those relationships, which will drive improvement.' (Senior leader, RS)

Thus, in terms of impact, the RS lead stated,

'If you think that at some point, there won't be any more money for research school and if we're going to leave a legacy, our legacy will be in those evidence-leads. If we can grow that capacity, so you've got more people, it would be great to have one in every school. It would but we'll probably never achieve that but we do need that conversation to be changed, so it becomes, well of course we're using evidence and when they say evidence, they're not just meaning pupil data, they're actually looking at what the research is telling you. That's our end point, in three, four years' time.'

(RS Lead)

The interviews with senior leaders of another RS painted a similar story. Having learned that being a RS would not necessarily bring about the *'big player'* status they had envisaged, the RS Lead invested a tremendous amount of time and energy to foster links with TSAs and local authorities in the local areas, and develop partnerships that agreed to operate on a joint and coherent strategic approach to school improvement priorities in the region. The RS acted as the **conduit between the TSAs and the EEF** in that they connected the TSAs with the latest developments in research-based practice, and built up a strong reputation and credibility as **a knowledge broker in the local system**. The legacy and influence they have achieved, however, goes beyond a more coherent and coordinated education system in the region. Through their increasingly targeted, commissioned bespoke programmes, they have also begun to create, albeit still *'embryonic'*, a more **'involved' model** of helping schools to be diagnostic about the needs of their pupils and learn to reflect on and draw out evidence about *what has worked*, rather than trying to capture hard evidence of improvements in pupil outcomes.

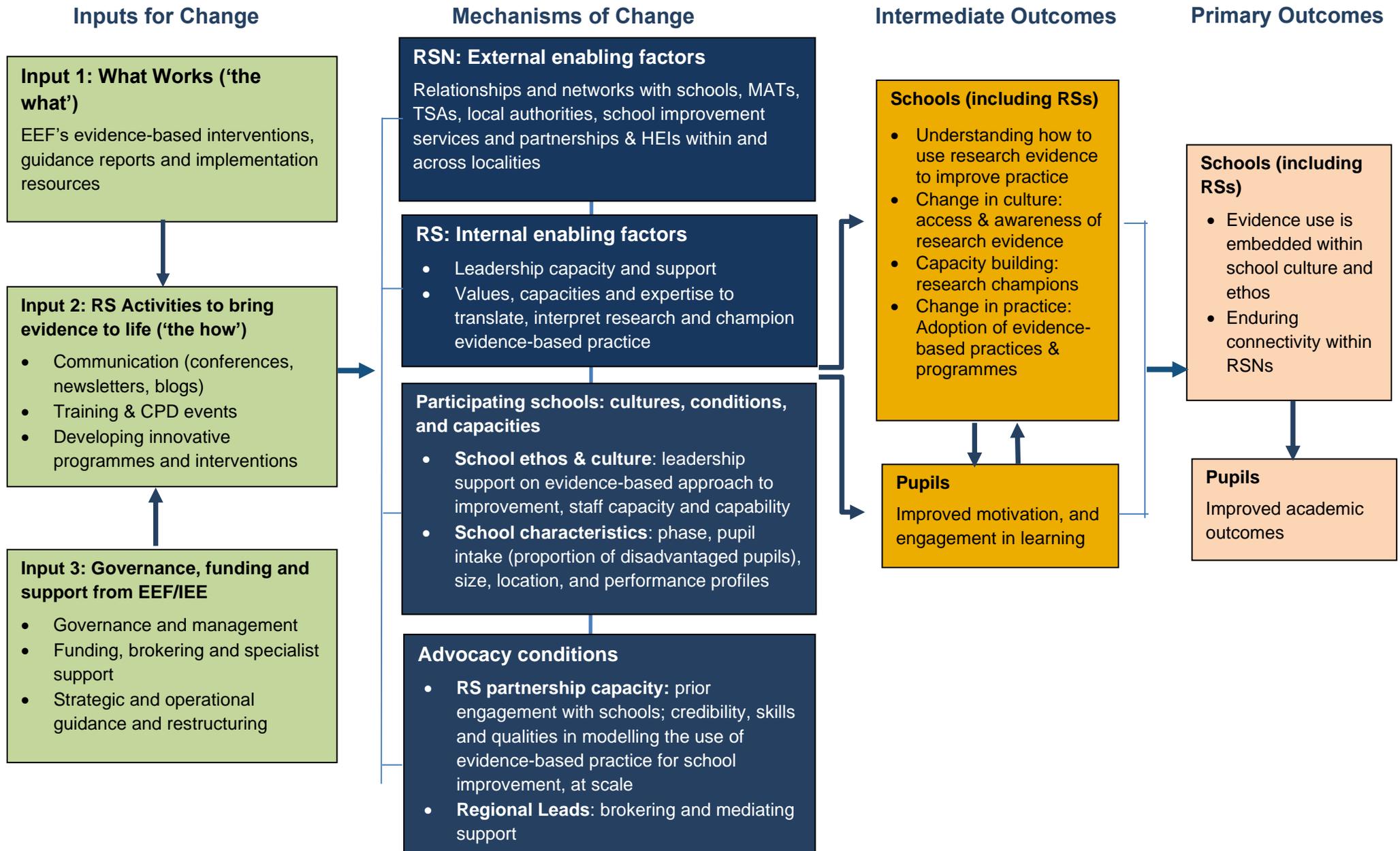
Theory of Change

The theory of change is presented in Figure 29. Drawing upon the quantitative and qualitative evidence in this evaluation, the process of change outlined in the model shows the relationship between the necessary resource and capacity inputs, structural and cultural conditions, a range of intermediate outcomes and longer term impacts (both direct and indirect) that the RSN initiative intends to bring about.

It is important to note that some of the impacts will take some time to become evident, in particular, improved academic outcomes, which will require a few cycles of external assessment before any trends become evident, and even then it might be difficult to attribute any changes to involvement with the RSs. The evaluation did, however, gather some evidence on the intermediate outcomes and some more tentative evidence of progress towards the impacts. The outcomes and impacts can be viewed in terms of those that affect the RSs themselves, and those that affect the schools that have engaged with the RSs – as we have addressed in this chapter.

Figure 29: Theory of Change for the EEF Research Schools Network (RSN) Evaluation

Purpose: to test and learn whether the sector-led approach via the Research Schools Network is a viable way of supporting schools to develop evidence-based practices at scale



Key Findings 4: Scalability – Is the approach affordable, sustainable and scalable?

Introduction

This chapter discusses issues regarding the scalability, affordability and sustainability of the RS model to scale up evidence-based practice in schools. Specific focus is placed upon the governance, financial and capacity sustainability of the model. Discussions are based on interviews with RSs and the EEF and IEE personnel, RSN surveys, and telephone interviews with a subsample of the surveys. All cost data was provided by the EEF.

Table 9: Summary of key findings 4: Scalability

Key Findings 4: Scalability – Is the approach affordable, sustainable and scalable?
The need for sustained central funding income was emphasised consistently across the case study interviews. The income provided RSs with a necessary sense of security and continuity which enabled them to focus their energy and effort on quality provision, capacity building, infrastructure enhancement and strategic future planning.
The central funding alone was not sufficient to cover all the costs, and not all RSs were convinced about the long-term financial sustainability of their work. Some felt that if significant, sustainable funding to support school improvement (e.g. Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF), teaching school hubs) continued to emerge, then RSs who were successful with these grants would continue to be in a healthy position to generate the necessary, additional income for their work. Other income streams included funds from MATs and local authorities but they could be rather limited.
Although the majority of the respondents to RSN surveys expressed their intention to continue to <i>participate</i> in RS activities (95% in 2017 and 85% in 2019), in the 2019 survey only approximately one in four (27%) planned to <i>deepen their engagement</i> with the RS activity.
Transforming evidence into effective practice in classrooms through RS activities turned out to be a more challenging task than the EEF had originally envisaged. What added to the challenge was the lack of shared understanding between the EEF and IEE of what constitutes RSs' roles, activities and outcomes. As a consequence of their learning from the first three years of implementation, the EEF increased their central and regional capacity to support RSs' delivery significantly, and took the execution of the RSN initiative further down the path of targeted, place-based (regional) support for school improvement.

To what extent is the funded programme perceived to be affordable?

For cost evaluation, in addition to the funding awarded to RSs, we were provided with data on the costs to EEF and IEE of setting up and running the RSN initiative, which we estimate as £200K. This represents around 8% of the total costs of the scheme. Note that the Research Schools programme is slightly different to other programmes and initiatives evaluated by EEF, therefore it is not possible to use the standard cost per pupil approach to the cost evaluation. However, costs per school based on what we know about the cost of the programme and the number of schools that have engaged with the RSs have been calculated and this is detailed below. Appendix 10 also provides a more detailed analysis and explanation of how the costs were calculated.

Based on the information provided to the evaluation team, the **final costs** (excluding staff costs) for Wave 1 RSs are presented in Table 10. Note that because we were not provided with year on year breakdowns, the costs per year represent the average across the three years.

Table 10: Wave 1 costs over three years

Expenditure type	Cost per year 2016/17	Cost per year 2017/18	Cost per year 2018/19	Total cost over three years
Direct funding to RSs (from EEF / IEE)	£333k	£333k	£333k	£1,000k
Management and support	£316k	£316k	£316k	£950k
Website, events, Google drive, travel, etc.	£11.5k	£11.5k	£11.5k	£34.5k
Developer support	£19.2k	£19.2k	£19.2k	£57.5k
Total	£395.6K	£395.6K	£395.6K	£1,187k

While it usual to establish a cost per pupil when evaluating programme and interventions, in this instance this is not possible since pupils did not directly interact with the programme. Instead, a cost per ‘engaged’ school has been calculated. The engagement database recorded 2,440 schools as engagers¹⁹ with the RSs. Based on this, over the three years, the costs per school (excluding EEF/IEE staff costs) are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Wave 1 average costs per engaged individual and engaged school per year and over three years (excluding staff costs)

Expenditure type	Average cost per school per year	Average cost per school over three years
Direct funding to RSs (EEF / IEE) [£1,000k]	£136.61	£409.84
Management and support [£95k]	£12.98	£38.93
Direct Costs (Website, events, Google drive, travel, etc.) [£34.5k]	£4.71	£14.14
Developer support [£57.5k]	£7.86	£23.57
Total [£1,187k]	£162.16	£486.48

Staff from EEF and IEE also contributed significant amounts of time to setting up and running the programme. Data on the financial cost of their time was not available to the evaluation team but we were provided with details of the number of days each staff member was allocated to the RS programme overall (i.e. across Wave 1, Wave 2 and the OA RSs) and on the length of time of their involvement. Based on this information, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff allocated to Wave 1 of the project from EEF and IEE is 2.2 FTEs in the first year, and then one FTE in each subsequent year.

Sustainability and Scalability

The assessment of scalability needs to be considered in relation to issues regarding the system’s appetite for effective take-up, and sustainability in terms of finance and capacity, and associated with these, the effectiveness and quality of implementation of this initiative.

The system’s appetite for take-up: fulfilling the potential?

Despite some concerns and reservations, the interviews with RSs and school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants who were involved in RS programmes and activities reveal a general consensus that the RS approach has the potential to model and promote evidence-informed practice in schools, and through this, change the ways in which professional development is understood and implemented in schools. This approach enabled them to see how their peers took research into the classroom and produce positive results, and how research was used as a ‘powerful’ way of promoting change in practices and cultures in schools.

‘It’s what’s needed. For a long time, research was sent to schools via universities. It wasn’t necessarily in the areas schools needed and the language wasn’t usually accessible by teachers, therefore few teachers read it. Flipping it round and conducting micro research and taking it back to universities to conduct in a bigger way, makes research more practical and provides greater core knowledge.’

¹⁹ ‘Engagers’ are defined as anyone who engaged with any of the range of RS activities and were recorded on the evaluator’s database, this includes subscribers to the newsletter, attendees at RS training, conferences and twilight events, participants and leads in the IEE-funded innovation projects, etc. These figures exclude anyone who was recorded as an engager but was not linked to a school.

(Deputy Headteacher, secondary)

The view that the RSs were playing a vital role in a **systemic shift towards evidence use** was widely shared in the interviews. RSs represented *'a grassroots approach to the use of research in education'* and *'add a legitimate edge to what we are doing in the classroom; for years we were fumbling in the dark.'* It is perhaps then no surprise that some interviewees especially welcomed the observation that the nature of teaching and leadership was developing through an **increased emphasis on research in schools – a rationale that had motivated many schools in this evaluation to engage with RSs to drive improvement.**

'I think that by grounding teaching and leadership practice in research it means that actually things can be evaluated more vigorously than just picking things out of hat and seeing if they work or not.'
(Headteacher, secondary)

'A big role [of the RSs] is to make looking at research in education the norm, and enabling the Senior Leadership Teams to have the strength to bring more rationality into what sometimes is not a very rational world.'

(Headteacher, primary)

For many of interviewed participants, the RS model had fundamentally **changed how their schools understand and implement professional development.** They provided a **link between research and practice** by making research more accessible to practitioners for use in their schools and classrooms:

'The CPD offer from teaching schools and the way specialist leaders in education have been accredited has been a yawning gap in research evidence engagement. It is more about getting bums on seats than engaging teachers in CPD that is sustainable. Research Schools are bringing research together with teacher's professional learning ... they should be completely intertwined.'
(Senior leader, secondary)

Another recurring theme in response to our enquiries into scalability relates to the extent to which RSs were reaching out to and **engaging with vulnerable schools** across the system. It was believed that there was real potential for RSs to work with schools in challenging circumstances given their remit and the resources they had at hand, as this headteacher told us: *'If you've been through 'Requires Improvement' (like us) and you know that teaching and learning has to improve but you're not sure how, then Research Schools are a valuable tool.'* However, it was also acknowledged that struggling schools often found it difficult to experiment with new practices due to the pressures they might be under: *'It's not as easy for vulnerable schools to be trialling new stuff – it should be, but they feel there is a time constraint.'*

However, the challenge to engage hard-to-reach schools is not related to time constraints alone. As we have learned from the interviews, there are other, more fundamental issues related to engaging the hard-to-reach schools. **In essence, developing and embedding evidence-based practice is about improving the quality of the daily decision making process in classrooms and schools.** It requires schools shifting their thinking and nurturing the necessary expertise that enables them to make external evidence relevant to how teachers teach and how children learn in their own contexts. As the CEO of a primary Associate RS commented, to achieve this is 'such a massive task':

*'I think there will be huge challenges because vulnerable schools are not vulnerable for nothing. I think the idea that 'we'll change the world with a few CPD programmes' is very ludicrous. But if we could get some joined-up thinking going on, so that the EEF would be talking to the DfE about their school improvement programme, and that the people operating in the system have all had access to that information, so that people are speaking a common language. But it's such a massive task. ... And the challenge of training and educating all the various leaders of the various levels in school – heads, senior leaders, all the specialist leaders that we have, evidence leads, national leads – all these people, **they don't all hear the same message. They don't attend the same training. And they're dancing to different tunes.'***

(CEO, Primary)

For the following Director of a RS, developing evidence-based practice is a **moral and professional issue** for the wider school system because it is not about good schools continuing to get better but about teaching as a profession, learning to become more intellectually informed and challenged about their decisions and actions. As we discussed in the previous chapter, it is such moral and professional compass that drives, deeply and persistently, senior leaders to fulfil the potential of the RSN initiative in the system:

'I think the reality is that, in our school system, you've got rich and poor both financially but also in terms of time and emphasis. So you've got schools who are under the Ofsted aegis in terms of requiring improvement or underachieving and they do not have the time or capacity to engage with a lot of Research

School work, so our model doesn't work for them or solve their problems quickly enough. So what you find is that good and outstanding schools have much more capacity and openness about their work and they will engage with external partners and you've got good schools who want to develop their training to become brilliant and investing in tools and support networks that help them do that.'

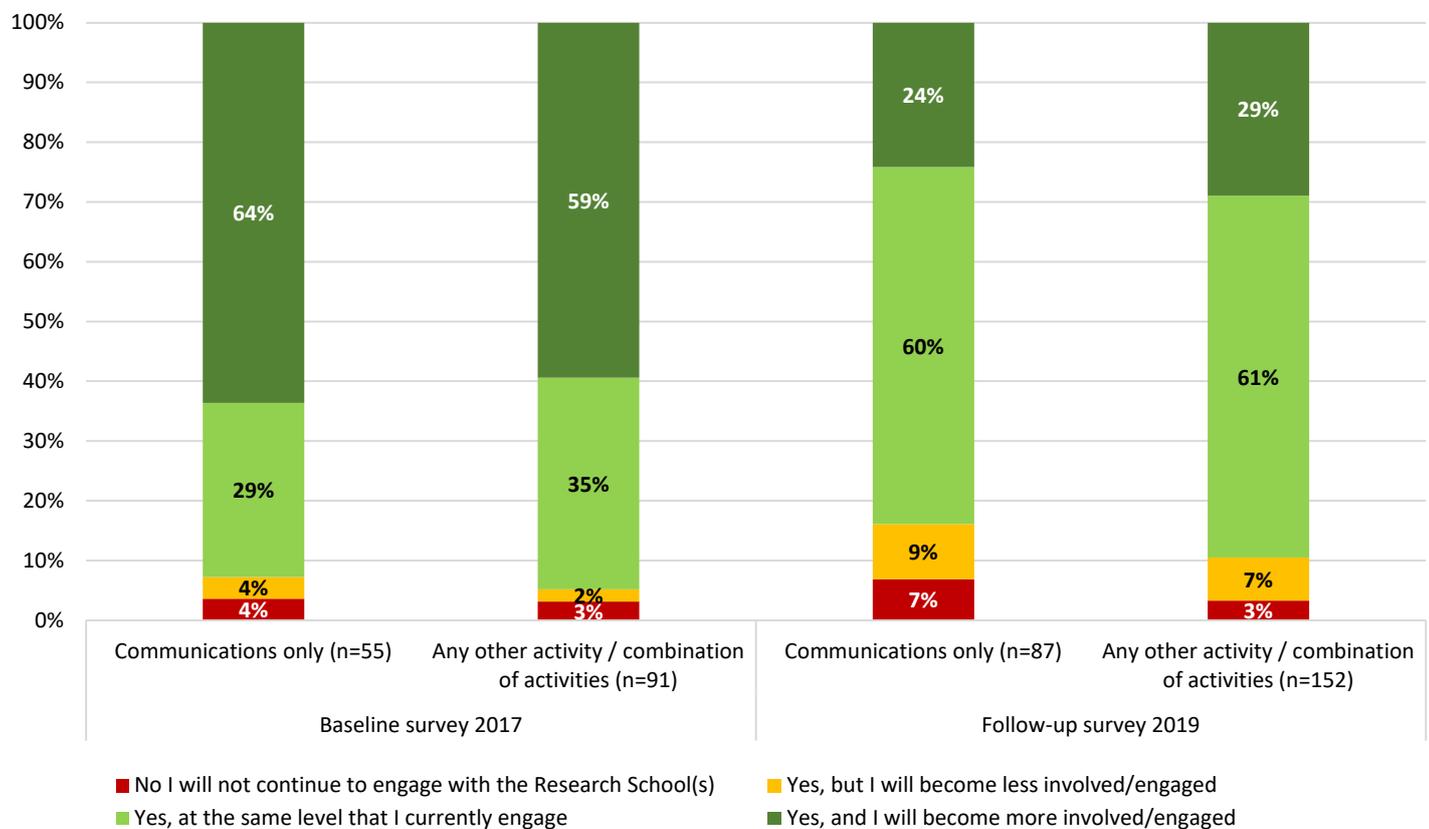
'In terms of my moral purpose, I want to help the schools in most need of support but the reality of what we offer and what is taken up means that we get schools who are in a healthy position in terms of accountability and that equates to the socio-economic status of the children they take. ... So it's a tricky one and there are people that you want to help but they are not able to look outwardly and then there are people who probably need less help but actually they are the ones that are open and looking to deepen their expertise and so I think there are challenges with that.'

(Director, RS)

Planned future engagement with the RSN: Sustained take-up?

Results of the survey analyses **raise questions about the sector's sustained enthusiasm for continued engagement with the RSs**. Although the majority of the respondents to both RSN surveys expressed their intention to continue to participate in RS activities over the next year (95% in 2017 and 85% in 2019), while 61% of respondents to the 2019 survey reported plans to deepen their engagement with RS activities, this reduced to 27% in the 2019. Figure 30 shows RSN survey respondents' intentions according to which activities they reported that they participated in at the time of completing the survey. The activities have been grouped to show those who have participated in the communications strand only (i.e. received RS newsletters), and those who have participated in any other activities (i.e. CPD and training and/or innovation) or combination of activities. There are only marginal differences in the proportions of respondents expressing their future engagement plans relating to their current participation in different types of RS activities.

Figure 30: RSN survey respondents' plans for future engagement with the RS, by current levels of engagement (baseline and follow-up surveys, school staff only)



For those who explained why they decided to continue to be engaged with RSs at the same level or more in the qualitative telephone surveys, the reasons were similar to the motivations for engagement that we presented earlier in this report. A combination of factors were behind individuals' and schools' decision to become less involved with RSs,

including *change of roles and personnel in school, a lack of time or resources, and unsatisfactory experience with the access, relevance and/or quality of support and input* from the RSs. For example,

'I have found the Research School a very closed shop – very happy to tell me what my school should be doing, to use the staff from the research school to show their practice and allow me to facilitate their courses in the area that I work. Yet, they do not appear ready to collaborate with research...or a research-based approach that is happening outside of their institution. I have also found that the guidance documents about metacognition and numeracy that the EEF have produced and the information on the website far too general to pinpoint specific strategies to invest time and effort into in schools.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

'There is very little locally for specialist schools to support them in working with very small teams in all-age schools with a range of complex needs – EEF and most other research seems to be very mainstream driven. X research school only seems to want to work with outstanding mainstream schools. Very disappointed!'

(Headteacher, primary)

The following quotes point to the availability of other better or more relevant provision of support on evidence-based practices in the education landscape:

'Poor quality training and communications from our nearest Research School mean I won't be engaging with them and X [RS] is more difficult to get to. At the same time, I am now confident we can access more effective training and input from other sources (e.g. ResearchEd, Evidence-Based Education, CEM, etc).'

On reflection the main barrier to teaching school involvement is the credibility of the person leading and the rigor of the proposed projects. My school is participating in ICAAMS and the Maths in Context project. Both of these seemed to be well-organized large-scale studies that look (to me) like serious attempts to do proper science. I haven't seen anything like this from the Research School Network that my school is linked to. Having said that, I expect that they have some peripheral involvement and have managed to get their logos on the website...'

(Headteacher, secondary)

Telephone interviews with the survey respondents also highlighted that the **profile of the Research School programme could be greater** within the system. One respondent suggested there needed to be a **stronger, consistent key message** by the Department for Education as to the **role and purpose of RSs** and more publicity on the work they are involved with: *'there are some marvellous things going on [involving Research Schools] but it's not celebrated enough.'* In addition, schools were **overwhelmed with the range of different improvement and support options** currently available: *'I think lots of schools have lots of other partnerships and they're not sure if they can afford research schools.'* This linked to a concern that there was a **lack of coordination of different school improvement initiatives** leaving schools unclear as where to source support:

'We're being bombarded with various initiatives and I think there needs to be some aligning as to where Research Schools fit into these various hubs that are being set up, the English Hub, the National Computing Hub, Science, I understand there is a Music one being established. If Research Schools can align with these hubs and work out where they fit in to the bigger picture that would be helpful ... at the moment schools are confused and it's information overload.'

(Senior leader, secondary)

According to some respondents, this was also an issue for those schools that were members of MATs that provided their own improvement services and might be reluctant to engage with RSs over their own 'in-house' provision. Linked to this was the notion of **consistency of provision and support between RSs** with some receiving very positive feedback from respondents and others less so. Our data suggests that there is work to be done to ensure RSs have the requisite level of capacity and resource to be able to appropriately support schools within their region.

'What you need is an ELE from the Research School, an 'evidence warrior', to go in and support those schools in a practical way. To look at how we can affect behaviour, engage students in learning ... That would be more cost effective than sending someone on a one-off CPD course.'

(Senior leader, primary)

Sustainability to deliver and scale up

Fostering governance and capacity

The RSN initiative experienced a slow start. Because of their different organisational strengths and school improvement histories, the five RSs had different visions about how to fulfil the purpose and potential of the RSN initiative in their own contexts. At the same time, EEF and IEE also went through a steep learning curve to understand the real challenges that had confronted individual RSs on the ground and to be aware that building leadership, organisational and partnership capacity is key to the success and sustainability of each RS.

'We need to plan out what we would like to achieve in three years and work towards that. But there have been different understandings of what success looks like between the partners and the shifting goal posts did not help either, and there was not sufficient time or capacity to respond to the changing directions.'
(IEE personnel)

'I actually think starting something from scratch with just one organisation – the EEF – would have been hard. It is doubly hard when you are doing it with another organisation so I think it took us a long time to appreciate that and to project manage it and to keep an eye on the schools and to engage with them as much as we wanted and then to check that we were on the same page and that was way more time consuming than we thought it would be.'

(EEF personnel)

It is perhaps, then, no surprise that the five RSs reported they were *'building the plane while flying it'*.

As the RSN initiative expanded, it became clear that more structured governance from the EEF and IEE was instrumental in providing clear guidance of goals and directions, ensuring consistency in quality of delivery of the programmes, and creating mechanisms and brokering pathways that would enable the RSs to harness the resources and capacity for impactful change and sustainable improvement.

'... we didn't have those structures in place at the beginning. We did it because we thought it was going to be a school led system but actually that wasn't what the schools ended up wanting and they needed more structure than we gave them.'

(EEF personnel)

In addition to the management team jointly formed by the EEF and IEE, three facilitators were employed in 2017 to assess and oversee the strengths and weaknesses of RSs as well as the quality of their delivery plans. Each facilitator met the RS for which they were responsible on a regular basis and would arrange additional support for the RS from a group of developers employed by the EEF to provide expertise on adult learning.

Related to the above awareness of the need for additional structured governance and expertise input was that the realisation that transforming evidence into a practice in classrooms and schools was a much more challenging task than the EEF had originally envisaged.

'We massively underestimated how much support they [RSs] would need and also they would want. So we picked five fantastic schools and the original intention was this to be a grant fund at quite arm's length and that they would just crack on with it. Anyway, they wanted it to be more of a partnership. So we listened and we responded. It's all about getting that balance between how much are they an autonomous organisations, schools and how much are they part of the EEF dissemination arm. I think we've got it in about the right place and we've worked it out over three years but I think if we were doing it again, I'd have had a greater awareness of how much support they'd need to get to that balance.'

(EEF personnel)

What added to the challenges in the implementation of the RSN initiative was a lack of shared vision about the role of RSs between the two funding organisations. Rather than seeing the RSs as an evidence and knowledge broker of and for the EEF, the IEE's view had a particularly strong focus on enabling teachers and schools to grow the ability to be critically engaged with the use of a wide range of evidence that may be relevant to their work and contexts:

'We were thinking more about empowering schools to be able to use evidence with confidence and integrity, be critical of its quality, and draw on evidence to inform practice. ... It is about skilling people up when you don't have a guidance report.'

(IEE personnel)

It was felt that over time the EEF had moved towards ‘a *more prescriptive view of what the RS should be*’ in terms of talking about the evidence, what evidence to use, and focussing on promoting training in areas that only guidance reports had been used. As a result of the management reshuffling, the IEE decided that they would no longer play a primary role in the RSN initiative from September 2019.

The governance of RSs has evolved and changed significantly over the last three years. When EEF set out on the RS network, there was not sufficient emphasis or investment to support its development as ‘*an organisational initiative*’. Rather, the initial development of the five RSs was seen to have been largely built on **the ‘celebrity’ (RS Lead T) of their senior leaders** – which, although beneficial and necessary at the outset, was not a sustainable systemic model to bring about change and sustained school improvement. The changes in RS directors revealed fairly quickly the **fragility** of the capacity in some RSs.

Although certain elements of the RS work were felt to be more **prescriptive** than others, overall there was still much space of freedom and autonomy for RSs to develop their own programmes and activities which were thought to be fit for purpose. As one RS Lead put it, ‘*actually it kind of grows in an organic way so it is a difficult one to try and control and a difficult one to be strategic about.*’ Nonetheless, all agreed that central support and guidance for the sharing of experiences and expertise was necessary and important for the longer-term sustainability of the RS model:

‘And there is still lots of freedom for us to do our own thing and to run a new programme. But I think what we all want at first is to share the best of what we’ve got and share our expertise, and I think that will be the same when Research Schools are twenty-three and probably more so given the fact that quite a lot of them are in really challenging areas and there will be a turnover of staff in their schools which will likely be higher than in the first five Research Schools. So we need a sustainable and robust model and that will need a lot of central support.’

(RS Lead)

The year 2019 became an important milestone in the EEF’s leadership and governance of the RSN initiative (not just the five RSs). In addition to the investment in facilitators and developers who were appointed in 2017 to support the actions and govern the performance of RSs, the EEF created a **tiered governance structure** to support its ambition to enhance the RSs’ roles and impact on school improvement in a very diverse and fragmented school system. The new appointments of data and communication analyst, content specialists and the national content manager were aimed at strengthening the **quality of the content and resources of the evidence base** that the EEF and RSs disseminate to schools.

‘Just to be clear, that doesn’t mean that we [EEF] wanted more research schools in development. It just means that we recognise that developing materials and resources is an extraordinarily resource intensive thing to do and so this is a way to try and bring the most of the expertise in the research schools that will facilitate that properly.’

(EEF personnel)

To *strengthen the capacity of delivery and support* on the ground within and across different regions, the EEF put in place national and regional delivery leads and officers as well as associate RSs to connect with the local school improvement partnerships, and associated with these, local knowledge, relationships, resources and capacities:

‘So most of our conversations right now come back to capacity to deliver and support all the work. We have a regional investment board [in EEF’s pilot regions in the north of England]... It is to consider all of the potential partnerships with local authorities or MATs to do this work. ... We will expect, probably in each region, have between five and ten partnerships to consider about how this money gets, not to the schools, but to support the schools.’

(EEF personnel)

It is clear that the EEF has taken the execution of the RSN initiative further down the path of **targeted, place-based school improvement partnerships**. The old lessons that we have learned in the past about **the politics, the power, and the relationships** will continue to play a fundamental role in facilitating or challenging the sustainability of the partnerships, delivery and impact in the RS work.

Finances

The second sustainability issue relates to finances. Although there was a clear, shared understanding that RSs were expected to build a sustainable financial model for their work, not all were entirely convinced about the long-term sustainability of the RS role. Some emphasised that the root of concern was not their doubt about the significance or sustainability of the RS work itself. Rather, to make plans for the RS work, they needed to know whether there would

be any ongoing funding from IEE/EEF and whether, in future, the work of the RSs would have to be entirely self-sufficient.

'One of the things that I find hard is in my role is the future uncertainty and ambiguity about funding. ... So, we do as much as we can to plan for I suppose our contingency that if all the funding were to stop right now, I know that I can still employ everybody throughout the teaching school and a research school for between three to six months – during which time we would be seeking other avenues of finance to give us some sustainability. So, we've certainly got an eye to that but yes, I mean, my vision is just that all of us [teaching school and RS] are working as one team, you know, to provide what's needed. ... But I sort of feel like it's our job to rearrange the pieces, rearrange some money, rearrange the commissioning masters of others in whatever way we have to, to get what we need into the schools that need it most, and so we will do, adapt and we flex and we rearrange that infrastructure however is needed.'

(Senior Leader of Teaching School & RS)

The **income from EEF alone was not sufficient to cover all the costs**. Being involved in SSIF projects had brought in additional income for some of the RSs. Other income streams included payments from MATs and schools and funds from LAs, but in some cases, these were quite limited. Almost all RS Leads commented that it could be difficult to disaggregate where additional income had been generated from RS activity alone. They also emphasised that sustained central funding provided RSs with a sense of security and continuity, and enabled them to concentrate their energy and efforts on quality provision, capacity building and infrastructure enhancement, and importantly, to make longer-term, strategic plans for the development of the RS work.

Some felt that if significant, sustainable funding to support school improvement (e.g. SSIF projects, teaching school hubs) continued to come along and if the DfE's focus on evidence-based practice remained unchanged, then RSs who were successful with these grants would continue to be in a good position to generate income for their work. However, those who were not successful could well struggle and find that there was insufficient money in the system to support other teachers and schools. It is beyond this evaluation's remit to assess the new funding model which sees the core funding reducing to £40K and leaving the remaining £20K to be bid for targeted support of priority schools. However, interviews with the RSs suggest that there were reservations about whether expected investment in time, capacity and resources as well as the accountability associated with the 20K were realistic and achievable.

Conclusions and Observations

Key Findings

This formative evaluation was centred upon Research Question 1: *Is this sector-led approach via the Research Schools Network a viable way of supporting schools to develop evidence-based practices at scale?*

1.1 Taken together, the overall evidence suggests that promoting and translating EEF's evidence into practice in schools *at scale* is unlikely to be achieved by the RSN on its own.

1.2 Enacting evidence-informed practice in a classroom requires change in teacher attitude, beliefs and behaviour. To achieve this across a school requires culture change. Two additional factors have been identified as being needed to enable the RSN to scale up the EEF's evidence and programmes in schools of different types, in different contexts and with different needs, especially disadvantaged and hard-to-reach schools:

- the EEF's continuing brokering, engagement (building on their credibility and reputation) and capacity support (Scalability 2 in Key Conclusions, p.8);
- senior leadership within participating schools to drive the culture change and promote evidence-based practice (Feasibility 1 in Key Conclusions, p.8).

In sum, enacting change in teacher behaviour and school culture is not within the control of the RSs. They need help from both EEF to engage schools with different profiles and in different contexts and be brokered in at scale, and then need senior leader champion(s) in the participating school to enact the intended changes.

1.3 The implication of the evidence is that **RSs cannot enact deep change in practice or culture alone**. Scaling up effort needs to consider the variation of school contexts and how the political, cultural and professional and leadership capability of the school shapes the process and outcomes of the evidence use. Thus, to transform the practice, culture and outcomes of disadvantaged and vulnerable schools especially – which tend to struggle with weak and ineffective school leadership (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Day et al., 2011), **RSs' input, support and interventions can only form part of the systemic and policy solution for improvement**.

Reach and engagement

Research Question 2: *What types of schools have been reached and engaged, and how many, within and across the three strands of activity?*

2.1 As of summer 2019, 6,216 individuals from 2,048 schools had signed up to the five RSs' newsletters, representing an increase of almost 50% from the first year of 2016-17. All RSs tended to attract more schools from their local regions, together their mailing lists of newsletters reached schools across the nine regions of England. Such national reach was successfully achieved in the first year of 2017 and has continued to grow over the last two years. The training strand of the RS activities attracted 1,685 participants across 979 schools.

2.2 The three strands of RS activity attracted schools with different profiles. There was wide variation across the different RSs based on which phase of education the engaging schools covered, and in most cases this was linked to the education phase of the RSs.

- *Communication:* The distribution of schools generally reflected the national picture in terms of Ever FSM 6 eligibility and Key Stage 2 attainment results. 'Outstanding' schools (as judged by Ofsted) and higher achieving secondary schools were over-represented amongst newsletter subscribers. The over-representation of higher performing secondary schools was particularly striking for the two primary RSs.
- *CPD and training:* Disadvantaged schools and lower-achieving primary schools were relatively over-represented. Although each RS saw their CPD and training programmes attract considerably more 'outstanding' schools than the national distribution in the first year, there was a trend of gradual decrease in the second and third year.
- *Innovation:* Engagement in the innovation strand was very low in terms of the numbers of different schools involved. However, the profile of participating schools in this strand was broadly in line with the national distribution by level of disadvantage, but 'good' and better schools and higher performing primary and secondary schools were markedly over-represented.

Feasibility (Has the campaign happened as intended?)

Research Question 3: *How have the schools been reached and how has their engagement been sustained (or not sustained)? What network and communication strategies are most effective initially, and over time, within and across different types of schools and across the three strands?*

- 3.1 All five RSs used conferences, newsletters and social media (e.g. Twitter, Blogging – some more established than others) to disseminate evidence from the EEF and IEE (and the wider research literature).
- 3.2 The **mostly low open rates of the newsletters** raise the question about the extent to which individuals and schools were actually ‘engaged’ with the evidence, and related to this, whether the reach has the potential to make a difference to the practice and culture in schools. Key to the question is the extent to which the mailing platform simply serves as **a mailing list** that schools sign up to, or **a network mechanism or resource** that plays a role in supporting schools to effectively access and take up evidence-informed practice.
- 3.3 The RS badge would not ‘*naturally*’ enable the RSs to become ‘*big players*’ in the system. Rather, the use of personal contact and senior leaders’ local reputation attracted, reached and engaged schools – especially in the first year when much effort was required to convince schools how their practice and decisions could be informed and improved by using research and evidence in context.
- 3.4 Early investment in **building trust and relationships** through face-to-face meetings and personalised email communications was perceived to be necessary in enabling all RSs to be engaged with a broader range of school improvement partnerships in the second and third years to develop and capitalise on **project-oriented networks** within and beyond their regions.
- 3.5 However, gaining access to hard-to-reach schools remained a challenge.

Research Question 4: *Is work with schools in depth and sustained? What characteristics of the training are perceived to be effective, and how (e.g. are they monitoring success)?*

- 4.1 In the last two years, all RSs invested in capacity building both in their own schools and in their networks and partnerships. It was not only a key strategy to sustain the expansion, reach and impact of their work, but also a necessary strategy to build in succession planning within RSs.
- 4.2 Using the RS work as professional development opportunities to identify talent and grow research champions and evidence-leaders in education within the RS and its associated multi-academy trusts (MATs), teaching school alliances (TSAs) and other school partnerships emerged as a popular **cascade model of capacity building**.
- 4.3 The **place-based hub model** drew upon collective resources and expertise in ready-made networks and partnerships to broaden and share capacity within a locality. This approach also enabled them to address the challenge of reaching and engaging schools in need rather than ‘good’ schools that were more likely to be attracted to the RSN initiative.
- 4.4 The EEF acted as an important and necessary buffer between RSs and the system. For two RSs, especially in the first two years, the EEF was instrumental in bridging and creating connections for them to tap into school improvement mechanisms outside their immediate locality.
- 4.5 RSs’ training courses were more likely to impact on participants’ professional beliefs and behaviour, especially in terms of using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice, than subject knowledge or quality of teaching practice.

Research Question 5: *What types of interventions are being developed and evaluated, and how?*

- 5.1 The first four innovation grants were awarded in February 2017 and 30 school-led, small-scale pilot projects had been funded by IEE so far. These innovations were primarily developed by schools to test new ideas and practices that they were interested in, and many projects were carried out and evaluated by one school. It is therefore not appropriate to generalise the findings from these interventions. However, as the IEE put it, the benefits of implementing these innovation projects are not necessarily in the findings, but in the process that enabled schools to learn how to design and collect indicative evidence behind real-world initiatives (IEE *website*).

Research Question 6: *How much interaction is there between the three strands?*

6.1 There is limited evidence of interactions between the three strands.

- As the catalyst for culture and practice change in classrooms and schools, the provision of quality CPD and training programmes had been the centre of RSs' attention and effort. Increasingly the communication strand had been centrally managed by the IEE and then the EEF.
- The RSs' role in relation to the innovation strand had been minimal in that they mainly provided advice and guidance to schools at the application stage.

Scalability (*Is the approach affordable, sustainable and scalable?*)

Research Question 7: *To what extent is the funded programme perceived to be affordable?*

7.1 The central funding alone was perceived being insufficient to cover all the costs, especially the leadership time required to develop and expand the remit of the RS work. However, this income gave RSs a necessary sense of security and continuity that enabled them to focus their energy and effort on quality provision, capacity building, infrastructure enhancement and strategic future planning to expand support offers and attract additional projects.

Research Question 8: *How entrepreneurial are the research schools and what different funding models do they use?*

8.1 The first five RSs were pioneers of the RSN initiative – all with extensive experience of successfully attracting external funding and grants to lead school partnerships for collaboration and improvement. Such success and experience provided them with the credibility, relationships, and knowledge and skills to be entrepreneurial.

8.2 Connecting their RS activity with existing regional school-to-school support work and projects was pivotal in securing capacity and efficacy and addressing real concerns over the long-term sustainability of the RS model.

8.3 RSs' entrepreneurial effort was driven by a clear vision to use strategically selected, targeted funding initiatives to continue to strengthen the capacity and capabilities of the staff, and through this, broaden and deepen their collaborative capital for sustained improvement with other schools.

8.4 Almost all RSs commented that in reality, it was difficult to identify where additional income had been generated from the RS activity alone.

Research Question 9: *Can the approach be self-sustaining after the withdrawal of the funding?*

9.1 Concerns remain about the long-term financial affordability of the RS model. This is because, at least in part, the school system was already populated with competing CPD and school improvement offers (e.g. through SSIF projects, TSA training programmes).

9.2 Tapping into existing school improvement relationships and systems to access the local audience and gatekeepers and offer complementary programmes and support was seen as a key strategy for sustainability.

9.3 Some felt that if significant, sustainable funding to support school improvement (e.g. SSIF, teaching school hubs) continued to emerge, then RSs who were successful with these grants would continue to be in a healthy position to generate the necessary, additional income, resources and capacity for their work. Other income streams included funds from MATs and local authorities but they could be rather limited.

Research Question 10: *How many schools are there available that could be research schools? What is the ideal number that is needed to build and embed evidence-based practice in schools?*

10.1 We were unable to identify meaningful evidence to respond to these questions. Rather, the RSs were more concerned about the saturation of school improvement offers in the diverse and fragmented system, and questioned the relevance of the question.

10.2 It was reported that the challenge to engage the hard-to-reach schools and those in need of support would not be resolved by simply adding more RSs to the system.

10.3 Although the majority of the respondents to RSN surveys expressed their intention to continue to participate in RS activities (95% in 2017 and 85% in 2019), only approximately one in four (27%) planned to deepen their engagement with the RS activity in the 2019 survey. The relevance, responsiveness and feasibility of the provision of support should remain the priority in future planning of the RSN initiative.

Research Question 11: *Is there a clearly defined approach including a shared understanding of what constitutes Research Schools' activities and outcomes between all stakeholders including RSs, EEF and IEE?*

- 11.1 The RSN programme experienced a slow start. The challenge was rooted in a lack of clarity, and sometimes misunderstanding, of the roles and identities RSs in the school system. In addition, When EEF set out on the RS network, there was not sufficient emphasis or investment to support its development as '*an organisational initiative*'. Rather, the initial development of the five RSs was seen to have been largely built on the '**celebrity**' (RS Lead T) **of their senior leaders** – which, although beneficial and necessary at the outset, was not a sustainable systemic model to bring about change and sustained school improvement. The changes in RS directors revealed fairly quickly the **fragility** of the capacity in some RSs.
- 11.2 Defining and clarifying the conceptual and operational roles of RSs became an **iterative learning process** as the EEF and IEE were exploring, with the RSs, how to create support structures and systems that would enable RSs to realise their knowledge brokers' role between EEF's evidence and school practice.
- 11.3 Transforming evidence into effective practice in classrooms through the RSN initiative was more complex and comprehensive than the EEF and IEE had originally envisaged. What added to the challenge was the lack of shared understanding between the EEF and IEE of what constituted RSs' roles, activities and outcomes and as funders of this initiative, the respective roles of the EEF and IEE to best support and govern its growth, expansion and impact.
- 11.4 Additional brokering and capacity support would appear to be necessary to enable all RSs to fulfil their roles in the system.
- 11.5 As a result of reflecting on their learning from the first three years of implementation, the EEF increased their central and regional capacity significantly to govern, regulate and support RSs' delivery, and took the execution of the RSN initiative further down the path of targeted, place-based (regional) support for school improvement.

Evidence of promise (Is there evidence of intended impact?)

Research Question 12: *Is there evidence that schools are engaging with the evidence and taking up evidence-based programmes and practices?*

- 12.1 There is evidence from both surveys and interviews suggesting that participation in RSs' activities and CPD and training programmes especially, had contributed to the take-up of evidence-based practices in many schools.
- 12.2 A crucial prerequisite of schools' take-up and engagement is the strong fit between EEF's core programmes and the work and specialisms of the RS. The RS needs to have the relevant specialism (including subject, phase, and school improvement contexts), experience and credibility to present and exemplify the EEF evidence and core material to participating schools.
- 12.3 Participation in CPD and training programmes was found to have had a tangible impact on many participants' *understanding of the value of evidence-based practice, and how to access and use it to inform most decisions about their professional practice, as well as to improve their own practice*. Senior leaders and those who reported to have engaged more '*deeply*' with the RS activities were more likely to indicate positive impacts in these areas.
- 12.4 When the RS provision was perceived to be **aligned with schools' improvement priorities**, then effective and sustained take-up was more likely.

This evidence adds weight to the idea that working with a RS needs to be built on **two pillars**: 1) a senior champion within the participating school to drive the work forward and 2) the work or project is focussed on or supports a school's identified improvement priorities. Thus, the success of the work and support is partly dependent on the skills, knowledge, and expertise of the RS and the quality and accessibility of the EEF materials; and partly on where the participating school is on its journey of improvement (i.e. whether there is a good and timely fit between the improvement priorities and the RS work) and the senior leader capacity within school to champion this way of working.

- 12.5 Results from the RSN follow-up survey and the qualitative telephone survey suggested that high-quality CPD provision *alone* is unlikely to bring about the intended change in practice in schools. The **absence of senior leadership buy-in and support was likely to result in little or no change** in behaviour or culture in participating schools.

Research Question 13: *Is there evidence to support the theory of change?*

13.1 Taken together, there is sufficient quantitative and qualitative evidence in this evaluation to support the theory of change.

- As the EEF's broker of evidence, the EEF and IEE's funding, governance and support had a profound influence on the reach, output and impact of RSs' activities.
- Tapping into the existing school improvement mechanisms, networks and partnerships in the region was perceived by RSs as a necessary strategy to access the required resources, expertise and capacity that would enable them to engage schools to promote the evidence-informed approach for school improvement. Although there were structural, cultural and resource challenges, once achieved, the real success was in the re-energised and enhanced relationships and trust with school partners and stakeholders, and associated with these, a more sustained regional commitment and mechanism for improvement.
- Evidence from the RSN surveys suggests that participation in RSs' activities had a positive impact on their practice for a substantial proportion of participants, especially in terms of their understanding and ability to use research and evidence to improve their practice. A positive impact on support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching and learning, the broader engagement of other in-school colleagues in using research, and pupil engagement in learning was also reported. As research evidence shows (e.g. Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016; Leithwood, 2019), such improved school professional capacity and culture is a necessary condition for pupils' improved academic outcomes.

Research Question 14: *Is there any evidence of non-instrumental impacts?*

14.1 There is clear evidence that as the EEF's evidence and knowledge broker, the RSs were playing a vital role in a **systemic shift towards evidence use**.

14.2 There is also variation in the perceived impacts across different school contexts. Evidence from the RSN survey suggests that respondents from 'outstanding' schools were particularly more positive about the impacts related to *leadership support* and *collaboration between colleagues*.

- In contrast, those from disadvantaged schools were less positive about the impacts on these two areas or the capacity and skills in their schools to use evidence-based practice.
- Such variation offers additional evidence to support the above observation that in-school leadership support and quality is key to ensuring external training and support programmes achieve their intended change in school practice and culture.

What We Have Learned

Three years on, the governance and implementation strategies of the RSN initiative have changed to be profoundly different from how they originally began. Such changes are testament to the deep learning that those who believed in this initiative have experienced. If we use a *research-informed approach* to reflect on the findings and learnings in this evaluation report, we will probably be less surprised with the pace, depth and scale of the changes that we have seen. The reasons are at least twofold.

First, the EEF's efforts to effect change reflect the necessary, *organic developments* that constitute the implementation process of system-wide initiatives – from developing a vision and strategy to promote evidence-informed practice and culture in schools, to communicating the vision, to creating procedures, systems and structures to enable the vision to embed, and to reinvigorating the process with new projects and change agents to expand. These actions largely confirm the findings of research internationally that system change occurs through multiple steps that are unlikely to be linear (e.g. Kotter, 1996; Fullan, 2016).

Second, the process of scaling up innovations is dynamic, messy and contextually related and the pace of change varies. A 'good' 'research-based' product can rarely travel into the day-to-day realities of classrooms on its own merits without seriously considering how the systemic, organisational and individual factors interact to constrain its ability to do so (Elmore, 1996; Hubbard, Mehan and Stein, 2006, Payne, 2011). Effecting deep and lasting change in how schools *conceptualise* their practice and *do* their practice requires time and sustained investments of funding, expertise and capacity in RSs as change agents of the EEF. What the EEF has also learned is the need to strengthen adequate investments in a 'mediating layer' (Mourshed, Chijioko & Barer, 2010) which provides targeted, hands-on specialist support to RSs and acts as a buffer to bridge connections between the EEF, RSs and schools in the system.

Reflections and Observations

The key findings from this evaluation lead to seven evidence-informed observations.

Observation 1: Effective leadership matters. The provision of access to evidence, training and development is insufficient in bringing about intended change in practice and culture. Schools that *can* are led by leaders who know how to use new initiatives as opportunities to enhance *organisational* learning and development in ways that ensure they facilitate the improvement needs of the school and are fit for purpose.

Observation 2: Attracting participation from small, vulnerable, and hard-to-reach schools requires targeted incentives and coordinated interventions. This observation is aligned with our findings in the recent Suffolk evaluation (Gu et al., 2019) and the wider research literature on school reform and improvement (Payne, 2011; Gu et al., 2018) that good schools led by strong leaders are skilled at using external funds and resources to keep getting better.

Observation 3: Tapping into existing school improvement relationships and mechanisms is a necessary strategy for sustainability in the current diverse school system that is populated with competing and overlapping improvement offers. However, achieving this well is sheer hard work which requires clear leadership vision and sustained commitment to invest in trust and relationship building. The **old lessons** that we have learned in the past (e.g. Gu et al., 2016 & 2019) about **the politics, the power, and the relationships** will continue to play a fundamental role in facilitating or challenging the sustainability of the partnerships, delivery and impact in the RS work.

Observation 4: An ongoing challenge confronting RRs has been to make productive links at the local and regional levels (e.g. through gaining support from the Regional School Commissioner (RSC), the regional Teaching School Council (TSC), or local authorities) so that they could play an important role in supporting targeted school improvement activities. In areas where the local authorities had limited capacity to help join up schools and reach schools that need support, the provision of brokering and buffering support for RSs to make contact with key gatekeepers and engage the hard-to-reach schools (especially their leaders) was felt to be particularly relevant and necessary.

Observation 5: This evaluation provides further evidence of the organisational and cultural challenges inherent in promoting research use in schools. Some school leaders in this evaluation felt that engaging with the research evidence could result in a '**sink or swim**' experience – depending on the relevance and trustworthiness of the evidence, the capability of the leadership, and the extent to which the implementation was likely to bring about intended outcomes in their own contexts. What we have learned from this is that until we know '*what works where, when, why, and for whom*' (Gutiérrez and Penuel, 2014, p. 20) and *how*, both the research community and the school community may continue to experience disappointment '*when promised positive results do not readily emerge*' (Bryk, 2015, p. 466) in the complex systems in which schools strive to make a difference.

Observation 6: RSs are intermediaries between evidence and practice. Their subject specialism, phase expertise, and educational profiles, together with schools' 'implementation capacity' (p.14), combine to influence the outcome and sustainability of RSs' reach and impact. Thus, the question on the *ideal* number of RSs that the systems require may not be a pertinent one to ask. An understanding of the variation in the nature of improvement needs (e.g. specialism, phase, organisational capacity) within and across different contexts should precede the concern of the size of support for improvement.

Evidence suggests that RSs are likely to work best if they are well coordinated to maximise the use of their subject and phase specialisms, educational experiences, and organisational expertise. Therefore, the **right question** to consider is probably not *how many* RSs the systems need but *what subject, phase, and education expertise that the systems need*.

Observation 7: The primary outcome of the RS work has not been improvement in pupil outcomes. Rather, it has been about the development of a critical mass of professional expertise in schools (and groups of schools) that not only understands *what works*, but more importantly, knows how to *make what works elsewhere work in their own contexts* and how to capture the evidence of impact on *why it has worked 'here'*.

Limitations

The limitations of this evaluation are summarised as follows:

- We would have liked to collect more interview data from individuals and schools who chose not to be engaged with the RS activity to identify reasons for 'non-engagement' and their implications for the take-up of this scale-up model.
- The data collected during the evaluation was somewhat limited due to poor response rates to the surveys and due to the self-selecting nature of the participants in both the surveys and interviews, which may mean we have

captured information from a sub-set of engagers with the RSs who are particularly positive about the role of the research evidence in teaching practice.

- It would have helped to develop more nuanced measurements to capture evidence of impact (or lack of impact) of the different strands of RS activity on change in behaviour and culture in schools.
- It would also be useful to have a more in-depth research design that allowed the evaluation to capture the processes of implementation of the different strands of RS activity at individual, school and cluster/hub levels.

Future research and publications

It is important that future research on scaling up school improvement campaigns considers a more nuanced research design which is able to capture the variation and complexity of contexts, and importantly, the ways in which they impact on the quality of implementation processes and variability in outcomes. Drawing on Bryk's (2015) critique of the 'what works' approach, perhaps a more productive question to pursue is *what scale-up model is more likely to work where, for which schools and pupil population, and under what conditions*. The findings of this report suggest that using RSs as knowledge-practice brokers to encourage schools to take up evidence-based interventions has promise. There would be merit in evaluating RSs' latest place-based cluster/hub models in the future to explore the impact on the sustainability and impact of school engagement with research use. The evaluation team intends to publish academic papers based on this work in journals such as the *Oxford Review of Education*, and *British Educational Research Journal*.

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Appendix 1: Data protection and privacy statements

Throughout the project, wherever data were collected from participants, an appropriate data protection statement was provided. The statements used are presented below.

Research Schools Network surveys:

Your answers will be treated in the strictest confidence and all findings will be anonymised so that responses cannot be traced back to individuals or their schools.

CPD pro forma surveys:

The survey will be analysed independently by the University of Nottingham / University College London. Please be assured that your answers will be treated anonymously and held with the highest degree of confidentiality and that no individual school or staff member will be identified in any analysis or reporting.

Registration forms for CPD events, suggested wording for RSs to use:

The information provided here will be shared with the research team at the University of Nottingham / University College London, which has been commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation to independently evaluate the Research Schools Network programme, and will treat all the data in strict confidence.

Statement used on the Newsletter sign-up form for new subscribers

I understand that by signing up to receive the Research School newsletter my contact details will be kept by the Research School, EEF and Mailchimp for the purpose of delivering these emails and I agree and accept the privacy terms.

I agree *

Can we share your details with the University College London? They will use this data to evaluate whether the Research Schools Network is being successful in meeting its goal of putting research evidence into practice in classrooms. They may contact you as part of the evaluation.

I agree

Subscribe

Privacy statements for interviews and case studies

All the data obtained will be coded anonymously, be strictly confidential and non-accessible to individuals outside the research team. All research data will be recorded in a durable form with appropriate references. They will be stored securely in their original form, and retained intact for a period of ten years after the study has been completed.

Appendix 2: Management of the RS network database

Composition of the database The databases comprised information as summarised below:

Communications

The only element of the communications activity which it was feasible to collect data systematically from was the distribution of the e-newsletters which was conducted by IEE on behalf of the RSs using the Campaign Monitor mailing platform. Twenty-two newsletters were sent out during the course of the evaluation for each of the five RSs and IEE sent the Evaluation Team the mailing lists for each newsletter alongside information on the number of opens and click-throughs (i.e. how many clickable links within the email were clicked on) for each recipient (where collected). At the point of signing up to a newsletter, subscribers were informed that their data would be shared with the University of Nottingham (and subsequently, University College London) for the purposes of this evaluation, and they were asked to provide some additional (optional) information about themselves including their school name, their role at the school (or other role if they were not school staff). These data were imported into the databases and, where possible, school URNs (six-digit unique reference numbers assigned to each school and used for school identification purposes by bodies such as the DfE and Ofsted) were added against each subscriber from a school to identify which school they represented.

Training

Information on attendees at training courses was requested directly from the RSs. At the beginning of each academic year, the RSs sent the evaluation team details of their planned training and CPD events and then, nearer the time, they were asked to send lists of attendees, ideally in the form of the registration form as provided by the Evaluation Team which included a statement on data sharing. The information from these registration lists was then imported into the databases and URNs were added wherever it was possible to identify which school the attendee was from.

Innovation

Most (but probably not all) of the innovation projects involved an application for funding from the IEE Innovation Evaluation Grant. IEE shared details of all successful applications with the Evaluation Team and the information on lead schools and participant schools was entered into the appropriate databases. There were nine projects represented among the successful applications used for this analysis. The details of the schools involved, either as lead schools or participant schools, were collated in a database and various background information and characteristics of the schools were added to these data as per the communications and training strands databases.

Data management Effort was expended on cleaning the data to maximise its quality.

Challenges There were some issues and challenges imposed by the methods of data collection used to populate the databases.

First, there was a considerable amount of missing data from the early sign-ups. When collecting information for the communications databases, which came primarily from the data individuals submitted about themselves when they initially signed up to receive newsletters, compromises were necessitated to ensure that the amount of information they were asked to provide was reasonable, justifiable and did not deter them from signing up. The IEE was responsible for setting up the sign-up forms on the RSs' websites, and helped by adapting the sign-up form to include a small number of compulsory fields, together with a further section of optional fields (such as school URN and the individual's role). The forms used initially when the RSs first started publicising their newsletters were shorter and gathered less information – which resulted in a considerable amount of missing data, especially relating to school ID. Wherever possible the evaluation team used other information from the subscribers' sign-up forms to establish whether they were from a school and if so, which school (e.g. the domain from their email address) but it was not always possible to establish this.

Second, there were problems with gathering full and standardised data on attendees at training events. The UCL Team provided a standard registration form for RSs to use which collected the data that was needed to facilitate the database analysis. However, many RSs were already using their own registration forms or systems and had not incorporated all of the fields required into this (e.g. participants' role in school). The

exact extent of missing data that this has resulted in is not entirely clear, but based on the fact that of all training records we have in the database, 29% of individuals are missing their 'role', suggests that some fields could be missing between a quarter and a third of the data.

Third, the key limitation of the data on the innovation strand was that the database comprised only those schools who had led or were participating in innovation projects that had successfully applied for the IEE grant funding. There were also projects which were not successful in their applications for funding, and might also be projects which did not apply for funding from the IEE. The innovation database does not cover these eventualities and might therefore underestimate the actual level of engagement with the innovation strand.

Forth, for each phase and for each research school and for each of the five types of activity, a separate spreadsheet was maintained, resulting in around 40 spreadsheets being developed. However, these were largely the same design and therefore relatively easily consolidated. However, data was frequently duplicated. For example, each row of a spreadsheet represented an interaction between one individual and one event but contained complete records of both. Thus, one individual attending two events resulted in two complete records of the same individual. Likewise, many people attending the same event resulted in multiple complete event records.

Data cleaning The first strategy was to restructure the data. A primary question for this analysis was whether individuals were engaging in multiple types of events, and the degree of 'transferral' between types of events, and indeed between research schools. As such, it was critical to identify whether one individual appeared in several of the spreadsheets. However, due to the different ways in which RSs recorded attendance at conferences, twilights and training, this was very challenging. Sometimes email addresses were recorded only, sometimes a first name and last name, and sometimes just a last name. Therefore, the bulk of the data management work was expended on identifying individuals recorded in different ways across the spreadsheets. Despite there being some **73,179 records**, only **8,248 individuals** were identified. Records were identified as being the same individual according to the following rules:

- Having the same email address
- Having the same first name, last name and organisation
- Having the same last name, organisation and role

The data was also compared manually to identify people who were marked as different under these rules but only due to a miss-spelling or typographical error.

Deduping data is the logical equivalent to re-establishing the relational architecture of a database, and therefore the decision was taken that during the deduping the database the relational architecture should be re-created. The databases were consolidated and then separated into four related tables with a further three lookup tables. The purpose of lookup tables is to reduce the size of the database by deduping at a granular scale. The relational database was then supplemented by tables of DfE data comprising Schools Census, Absence, Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 results, as well as data about the schools, such as the type of school, location, size.

Appendix 3: RS Network Survey Questionnaire

The baseline and follow-up survey questions are reproduced below. Please note that the survey was an online survey developed on the Bristol Online Surveys platform, the questions asked are listed below with any routing information presented in blue text, however, this does not represent the final format and look of the online survey.

Content of the baseline RSN Survey:

Introduction

Thank you very much for taking part in this important research. It will gather **much-needed evidence** to help develop successful approaches for promoting research use and evidence-based practice in schools.

The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and all findings will be anonymised so that responses cannot be traced back to individuals or their schools.

If you have any queries about this survey, please contact Kathy Seymour (kathy@seymour-research.co.uk).

Please click on '>>' below to begin the survey.

A: About you

Q1 Do you currently work in a school?

- Yes >> go to Q2
- No >> go to Q3

Q2a Are you..?

(Please select all that apply)

- Classroom teacher
- Middle leadership responsibility
- Senior leadership responsibility
- Teaching assistant
- Other, please specify _____

Q2c How long have you been a teacher (if applicable)?

(Please enter the number of years to the nearest whole number)

Only those who answered 'no' to Q1 are asked this question

Q3 Which of the following best describes your role?

Please tick the one that best fits the role in which you engaged with the Research School(s)

- A researcher / part of a research organisation
- A public sector organisation / body
- A private company / organisation
- A student

- A parent
- Other, please specify _____

B: Your engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q4 Which of the Research Schools have you engaged with (e.g. by receiving communications from them, participating in training/CPD events, etc.)? (Please select all that apply)

- Aspirer Teaching School Alliance, based at Ash Grove Academy, Macclesfield
- Huntington School, York
- Kingsbridge Community College, Devon
- Kyra Teaching School Alliance, based at Mount Street Academy, Lincoln
- Shireland Collegiate Academy, Sandwell
- Don't know

Q5 Which of the following types of activities offered by the Research School have you participated in? (Please select any that apply)

- Communications (e.g. signed up to the e-newsletter, followed on Twitter, attended a conference, etc.)
- Training (e.g. attended a training course or CPD event or completed online training offered by the Research School)
- Innovation (e.g. received support from the Research School to develop innovative ways of improving teaching and learning)
- Other, please specify _____

Q6 Which of the following motivated you to engage with the Research School(s)?

(Please tick **up to three** most important motivations)

- I was interested in finding out more about Research Schools
- I was encouraged to by senior leaders / managers in my workplace
- I work in a Research School
- I wanted to learn more about research evidence
- I wanted to learn more about how to make evidence-informed decisions about my/our practice
- I wanted to reflect on and improve my/our practice through action research
- I wanted to share practice and resources
- I wanted to improve my/our effectiveness as a teacher/teachers
- I wanted to improve my leadership of teaching and learning
- I wanted to learn about using research for improvement in practice from schools with credibility/ experience in this area
- Other please specify: _____

(Anyone who indicated 'no' in response to Q1 (i.e. said that they do not work in a school), will skip to the end of the survey after this question)

Q7 Please indicate the extent to which you agree that senior leaders (SLT) in your school do the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Senior leaders in my school promote evidence-based approaches to teaching.	<input type="radio"/>				
There are incentives in my school which encourage all staff to consider new ideas for their professional practice.	<input type="radio"/>				

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Innovations introduced to my school by senior leaders often result in competing demands and fragmentation of effort.	<input type="radio"/>				
Senior leaders in my school make effective use of wider networks for school improvement.	<input type="radio"/>				
Senior leaders in my school demonstrate high expectations for pupil achievement in everyday activities.	<input type="radio"/>				
School leaders are actively involved in promoting professional learning and development opportunities for staff.	<input type="radio"/>				
There is a clear sense of shared purpose in my school.	<input type="radio"/>				

Q8 Please indicate the extent to which the following have acted as either enablers or barriers to you engaging with the Research School(s) activities:

	A major enabler	A minor enabler	No influence	A minor barrier	A major barrier	Not applicable
My own beliefs /opinions about the value of evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>					
My views about the trustworthiness of the evidence base	<input type="radio"/>					
The time and resources available to me	<input type="radio"/>					
The accessibility of relevant research evidence	<input type="radio"/>					
My understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice	<input type="radio"/>					
The quality of inputs or support from the Research School(s)	<input type="radio"/>					
The relevance of inputs or support from the Research School(s)	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from other colleagues (non-SLT) in my school in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from colleagues in other schools in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Other (please specify): _____	<input type="radio"/>					

C: The impact of your engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q9 Please indicate whether you have noticed any positive impacts in the following areas as a result of your and/or your colleagues' engagement with the Research School(s):

	A major positive impact	A minor positive impact	No/little positive impact	Too early to say	Not applicable
My improved understanding about the value of evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My improved ability to access relevant research evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My improved understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improved support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching and learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Greater use of research evidence by staff to improve teaching and learning in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working more collaboratively with colleagues in other schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More evidence based culture in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More capacity and skills in my school to use evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Greater pupil engagement in learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Better pupil learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10a So far, have you implemented any changes to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s)?

- Yes, I have implemented one or more changes >> [go to Q10b](#)
- No, but I am planning to implement change >> [go to Q10c](#)
- No, and I am not currently planning to

Only those who answer ‘yes, I have implemented one or more changes’ to Q10a will be asked Q10b

Q10b Please detail below up to three changes you have made as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s) and against each, please indicate which type of activity contributed to this change, and what the impact of your change has been.

Briefly describe each change	Which type of engagement with the Research School(s) contributed most to the change?	Has there been any impact as a result of this change? (please tick one)
Change 1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact (things have got better) <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact (things have got worse) <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say
Change 2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact <input type="checkbox"/> No impact

Briefly describe each change	Which type of engagement with the Research School(s) contributed most to the change?	Has there been any impact as a result of this change? (please tick one)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say
Change 3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say

Only those who answer 'no, but I am planning to implement change' to Q10a will be asked Q10c

Q10c Please list below up to three changes you are planning to make to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s) and against each, please indicate which type of activity that contributed to you planning this change

Briefly describe each planned change	Which type of engagement with the Research School(s) contributed most to the change?
Planned change 1.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above
Planned change 2.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above
Planned change 3.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above

D: Your future engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q11a Do you plan to continue to engage with the Research School(s) over the next two years?

- Yes, at the same level that I currently engage
- Yes, and I will become more involved/engaged >> go to Q11b
- Yes, but I will become less involved/engaged >> go to Q11c
- No I will not continue to engage with the Research School(s) >> go to Q11d
- Don't know

Only ask this question if the answer to Q11a is 'yes, and I will become more involved/engaged'

Q11b Which of the following activities do you plan to become more involved/engaged with? (Please select any that apply)

- Communications (e.g. follow e-newsletters, follow on Twitter, attend a conference, etc.)
- Training (e.g. attend CPD events)
- Innovation (e.g. develop innovative ways of improving teaching and learning)

- Other, please specify _____
- Don't know

Only ask this question if the answer to Q11a is 'yes, but I will become less involved/engaged'

Q11c Please tell us why you wish to be less engaged with the Research School(s) and whether anything could be changed about the Research School offering that might encourage you to remain engaged at your current level or to become more engaged

Only ask this question if the answer to Q11a is 'no I will not continue to engage with the Research School(s)'

Q11d Please tell us why you are not planning to remain engaged with the Research School(s) and whether anything could be changed about the Research School offering that might encourage you to remain engaged

Q12a Please use the space below to add any further comments or suggestions about the Research Schools Network

Q12b Please tell us which school you work at (the school name and town / city / area)

School name:	
School town / city / area or postcode:	

This information will help us to assess any overall trends in engagement with Research Schools (e.g. geographical distributions) - it will not be used to attribute any of your survey responses to your school, and individual schools will not be identified in any reports.

E: Further participation in this evaluation

As part of our ongoing evaluation of the Research Schools Network, we would like to conduct a short telephone interview with a sample of people who have engaged with the Network. This would be conducted at a time to suit you and would take approximately 20 minutes.

Q13 Would you be willing to be interviewed by one of our researchers?

- Yes >> [go to contact details section](#)
- No >> [go to end of survey](#)

If yes, please your name, email address and/or telephone number below (please note that this information will be used only for the purposes of arranging and conducting the interviews and your details will be stored securely and will not be passed to any third party).

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

If you are selected for an interview, one of our researchers will contact you by email initially to arrange a convenient time.

Thank you very much for completing this survey.

Content of the follow-up RSN Survey:

Introduction

Thank you very much for taking part in this important research. It will gather **much-needed evidence** to help develop successful approaches for promoting research use and evidence-based practice in schools.

The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be treated in the **strictest confidence** and all findings will be anonymised so that responses cannot be traced back to individuals or their schools. Apologies if you receive this email at more than one email address.

If you have any queries about this survey, please contact Kathy Seymour (kathy@seymour-research.co.uk).

Please click on '>>' below to begin the survey.

A: About you

Q1 Do you currently work in a school?

- Yes >> [go to Q2](#)
- No >> [go to Q3](#)

Q2a Are you..? (Please select the one option that best represents your **main** role)

- Classroom teacher
- Middle leadership responsibility
- Senior leadership responsibility
- Headteacher
- Teaching assistant
- Other, please specify _____

Q2b How long have you worked in schools?

(Please enter the number of years to the nearest whole number)

Q2c. Do you work in a Research School?

- Yes
- No

Only those who answered ‘no’ to Q1 are asked this question

Q3 Which of the following best describes your role?

Please tick the one that best fits the role in which you engaged with the Research School(s)

- A researcher / part of a research organisation
- A public sector organisation / body
- A private company / organisation
- A student
- A parent
- Other, please specify _____

B: Your engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q4 Which of the Research Schools have you engaged with (e.g. by receiving communications from them, participating in training/CPD events, etc.)? (Please select all that apply)

- Aspirer Teaching School Alliance, based at Ash Grove Academy, Macclesfield
- Huntington School, York
- Kingsbridge Community College, Devon
- Kyra Teaching School Alliance, based at Mount Street Academy, Lincoln
- Shireland Collegiate Academy, Sandwell
- Another Research School (please specify): _____
- Don't know

Q5 Which of the following types of activities offered by the Research School have you participated in?

	I currently engage with this	I used to engage but no longer do so	I have never engaged with this	Don't know
Communications (e.g. signed up to the e-newsletter, followed on Twitter, attended a conference, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Training (e.g. attended a training course or CPD event or completed online training offered by the Research School)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Innovation (i.e. involved in a project(s) funded by the Institute for Effective Education (IEE))	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please specify: _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6a Which of the following aims (if any) were you hoping to achieve by engaging with the Research School(s)?

(Please tick **up to three** most important aims)

- To learn more about accessing research evidence
- To learn more about how to make evidence-informed decisions about my/our practice
- To reflect on and improve my practice through action research
- To share practice and resources
- To access evidence-based training programmes
- To improve my effectiveness as a teacher
- To improve my leadership of teaching and learning
- To improve evidence-informed practice across our school
- To learn from schools with credibility / experience about evidence-informed practice
- To improve pupil performance / outcomes
- Other please specify: _____
- I did not have any specific aims in mind when engaging with the Research School(s)

Q6b Overall, to what extent have your aims and expectations been achieved/met?

- Not at all
- Very little
- A little
- Partially
- A lot
- Very significantly
- Don't know

Q6c Please use the space below to comment on *how* your aims and expectations have / have not been met, and to suggest any changes that could have been made to the Research School offering to further assist you in achieving your aims:

(Anyone who indicated 'no' in response to Q1 (i.e. said that they do not work in a school), will skip to the end of the survey after this question)

Q7 Please indicate the extent to which you agree that senior leaders (SLT) in your school do the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree moderately	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree moderately	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Senior leaders in my school promote evidence-based approaches to teaching.	<input type="radio"/>						
There are incentives in my school which encourage all staff to use research and evidence to improve their practice.	<input type="radio"/>						
Innovations introduced to my school by senior leaders often result in competing	<input type="radio"/>						

	Strongly Agree	Agree moderately	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree moderately	Strongly Disagree	N/A
demands and fragmentation of effort.							
Senior leaders in my school make effective use of wider networks for school improvement.	<input type="radio"/>						
Senior leaders in my school demonstrate high expectations for pupil achievement in everyday activities.	<input type="radio"/>						
Senior leaders in my school are actively involved in promoting professional learning and development opportunities for staff.	<input type="radio"/>						
Senior leaders in my school use research and evidence to inform their decisions.	<input type="radio"/>						

Q8 Please indicate the extent to which the following have acted as either enablers or barriers to you engaging with the Research School(s) activities:

In this question, we define 'enabler' as a factor that has encouraged or facilitated your engagement and a 'barrier' as something that has inhibited or prevented your engagement with the RS activities.

	A major enabler	A minor enabler	No influence	A minor barrier	A major barrier	Not applicable
My own beliefs /opinions about the value of evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>					
My views about the trustworthiness of the evidence base	<input type="radio"/>					
The time and resources available to me	<input type="radio"/>					
The accessibility of relevant research evidence	<input type="radio"/>					
My understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice	<input type="radio"/>					
The quality of inputs or support from the Research School(s)	<input type="radio"/>					
The relevance of inputs or support from the Research School(s)	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from other colleagues (non-SLT) in my school in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Support from colleagues in other schools in using research evidence to improve teaching	<input type="radio"/>					
Other (please specify): _____	<input type="radio"/>					

C: The impact of your engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q9 Please indicate to what extent you have noticed any impacts in the following areas as a result of your and/or your colleagues' engagement with the Research School(s):

	Very significantly	A lot	Partially	A little	Very little	Not at all	N/A
My understanding about the value of evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>						
My ability to access relevant research evidence	<input type="radio"/>						
My understanding of how to use research evidence to improve my own practice	<input type="radio"/>						
Support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching and learning	<input type="radio"/>						
Use of research evidence by staff to improve teaching and learning in my school	<input type="radio"/>						
Working collaboratively with colleagues in other schools	<input type="radio"/>						
Evidence based culture in my school	<input type="radio"/>						
Capacity and skills in my school to use evidence based practice	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil engagement in learning	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>						

Q10a So far, have you implemented any changes to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s)?

- Yes, I have implemented one or more changes >> [go to Q10b](#)
- No, but I am planning to implement change >> [go to Q10c](#)
- No, and I am not currently planning to

Only those who answer ‘yes, I have implemented one or more changes’ to Q10a will be asked Q10b

Q10b Please detail below up to three changes you have made as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s) and against each, please indicate which type of activity contributed to this change, and what the impact of your change has been.

Briefly describe each change	Which type of engagement with the Research School(s) contributed most to the change?	Has there been any impact as a result of this change? (please tick one)	Please briefly describe the impacts (positive or negative)

Change 1 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact (things have got better) <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact (things have got worse) <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say	
Change 2 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say	
Change 3 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a positive impact <input type="checkbox"/> No impact <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, a negative impact <input type="checkbox"/> Too early to say	

Only those who answer 'no, but I am planning to implement change' to Q10a will be asked Q10c

Q10c Please list below up to three changes you are planning to make to your teaching practice as a result of your engagement with the Research School(s) and against each, please indicate which type of activity contributed to you planning this change

Briefly describe each planned change	Which type of engagement with the Research School(s) contributed most to the planned change?
Planned change 1 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above
Planned change 2 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above
Planned change 3 description: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications from/with the Research School(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Training or CPD <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement in an innovation project <input type="checkbox"/> More than one of the above

D: Your future engagement with the Research Schools Network

Q11a Do you plan to continue to engage with the Research School(s) over the next year?

- Yes, at the same level that I currently engage
- Yes, and I will become more involved/engaged >> [go to Q11b.i. and Q11.b.ii](#)
- Yes, but I will become less involved/engaged >> [go to Q11c](#)
- No I will not continue to engage with the Research School(s) >> [go to Q11d](#)
- Don't know

Only ask question 11b.i. and 11b.ii. if the answer to Q11a is ‘yes, and I will become more involved/engaged’

**Q11b.i. Which of the following activities do you plan to become more involved/engaged with?
(Please select any that apply)**

- Communications (e.g. follow e-newsletters, follow on Twitter, attend a conference, etc.)
- Training (e.g. attend CPD events)
- Innovation (e.g. seeking external funding to develop new ways of improving teaching and learning)
- Other, please specify _____
- Don't know

Q11b.ii. Please explain what you would like to achieve through your greater engagement:

Only ask this question if the answer to Q11a is ‘yes, but I will become less involved/engaged’

Q11c Please tell us why you wish to be less engaged with the Research School(s) and whether anything could be changed about the Research School offering that might encourage you to remain engaged at your current level or to become more engaged

Only ask this question if the answer to Q11a is ‘no I will not continue to engage with the Research School(s)’

Q11d Please tell us why you are not planning to remain engaged with the Research School(s) and whether anything could be changed about the Research School offering that might encourage you to remain engaged

Q12a Please use the space below to add any further comments or suggestions about the Research Schools Network

Q12b Please tell us which school you work at (the school name and town / city / area)

School name:	
--------------	--

School town / city / area or postcode:	
--	--

This information will help us to assess any overall trends in engagement with Research Schools (e.g. geographical distributions) - it will not be used to attribute any of your survey responses to your school, and individual schools will not be identified in any reports.

E: Further participation in this evaluation

As part of our ongoing evaluation of the Research Schools Network, we would like to conduct a short telephone interview with a sample of people who have engaged with the Network. This would be conducted at a time to suit you and would take approximately 20 minutes.

Q13 Would you be willing to be interviewed by one of our researchers?

- Yes >> [go to contact details section](#)
- No >> [go to end of survey](#)

If yes, please provide your name, email address and/or telephone number below (please note that this information will be used only for the purposes of arranging and conducting the interviews and your details will be stored securely and will not be passed to any third party).

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

If you are selected for an interview, one of our researchers will contact you by email initially to arrange a convenient time.

Thank you very much for completing this survey.

Appendix 4: CPD Pro Forma and Distribution

(1) Example of the three-stage pro forma (for school leaders)

Baseline Survey: Programme Name (Leading Learning)

We would like to find out how this innovative training programme will contribute to change in your leadership of teaching and learning. This is the **baseline** survey which will enable us to identify and track the impact of the training on your understanding and practice upon its completion. Please note that this is a generic instrument designed for all training programmes offered by Research Schools. Please select “Not Applicable” (N/A) if some items do not appear to be relevant to the specific programme you have chosen.

The survey will be analysed independently by the University of Nottingham. Please be assured that your answers will be **treated anonymously** and held with the **highest degree of confidentiality** and that no individual school or staff member will be identified in any analysis or reporting.

We ask for your school name and email address below, so that we can assess whether and how the programme makes a difference to YOUR practice. Your details will not be used for any other purpose or passed to anyone outside of the evaluation team. Should you wish to withdraw your data from this project at any stage, please contact Kanchana Minson (Kanchana.Minson@nottingham.ac.uk). If you agree to participate in this research please complete this survey, if you **do not** wish to participate, please tick this box and do not continue with the survey.

Name of your school: _____

Your email address: _____

Please tick only **one box** for each item throughout.

1. To what extent do you currently feel confident in supporting your staff to *improve* the following:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
a) Understanding of subject knowledge	<input type="radio"/>						
b) Using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Understanding how to teach in a way that makes the subject content accessible to pupils.	<input type="radio"/>						
d) Understanding how to identify typical misconceptions that pupils have about the subject content	<input type="radio"/>						
e) Knowing how to assess pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						

2. To what extent do you currently feel confident in supporting your staff to *improve* the following aspects of their teaching practice:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
a) Knowing how to plan and deliver activities that help pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
b) Knowing how to use pupil assessment and progress data to inform practice	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Meeting the particular demands of the learning needs of each pupil	<input type="radio"/>						

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
d) Providing pupils with a range of feedback that helps them understand what they did well, and how they can improve	<input type="radio"/>						
e) Using questioning skills that challenge and extend pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						
f) Knowing how to scaffold learning in a concrete and meaningful way	<input type="radio"/>						
g) Giving pupils opportunities to take responsibilities for their own learning	<input type="radio"/>						

3. To what extent do you currently feel confident in supporting your staff to *improve* the following aspects of their classroom management:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
a) Creating an atmosphere of caring and trust with the pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
b) Setting clear lesson goals that explain what the students need to understand and what they must be able to do as a result of each lesson	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Setting high standards for academic performance	<input type="radio"/>						
d) Motivating pupils to learn	<input type="radio"/>						
e) Setting high expectations of pupil behaviour	<input type="radio"/>						
f) Ensuring all pupils are engaged with learning	<input type="radio"/>						
g) Managing pupil behaviour with clear and consistent rules	<input type="radio"/>						
h) Allocating resources and space strategically based on pupil needs	<input type="radio"/>						

4. To what extent do you currently feel confident in supporting your staff to *improve* the following aspects of their professional beliefs and behaviour:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
a) Understanding how to monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of changes I make to my practice	<input type="radio"/>						
b) Understanding what adjustments I must make to maximise pupil learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Understanding how pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
d) Understanding the role of teaching in the learning process of pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
e) Working collaboratively with other colleagues in my school	<input type="radio"/>						
f) Engaging parents in their children's learning	<input type="radio"/>						
g) Feeling that I am an effective teacher	<input type="radio"/>						

5. What is your current role in the school? Please select one only.

a. Classroom teacher	<input type="radio"/>
----------------------	-----------------------

b. Middle leadership responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
c. Senior Leadership Responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
d. Support staff	<input type="radio"/>
e. Other (please specify):	<input type="radio"/>

6. What is the total number of years that you have been a teacher? Please enter the number in the box:

7. What is the total number of years that you have been employed in your current school? Please enter the number in the box:

8. If there are any other specific areas of practice that you would like to improve through this training programme, please enter below.

Survey on Completion of Training: Programme Name (Leading Learning)

We would like to find out how this innovative training programme will contribute to change in your leadership of teaching and learning, and the workplace conditions that have facilitated or hindered the impact of the training on change (or lack of change). Please note that this is a generic instrument designed for all training programmes offered by Research Schools. Please select "Not Applicable" (N/A) if some items do not appear to be relevant to the specific programme you have chosen.

The survey will be analysed independently by the University of Nottingham. Please be assured that your answers will be **treated anonymously** and held with the **highest degree of confidentiality** and that no individual school or staff member will be identified in any analysis or reporting.

We ask for your school name and email address below, so that we can assess whether and how the programme makes a difference to YOUR practice. Your details will not be used for any other purpose or passed to anyone outside of the evaluation team. Should you wish to withdraw your data from this project at any stage, please contact Kanchana Minson (Kanchana.Minson@nottingham.ac.uk). If you agree to participate in this research please complete this survey, if you **do not** wish to participate, please tick this box and do not continue with the survey.

Name of your school: _____

Your email address: _____

Please tick only **one box** for each item throughout.

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree that each statement characterises your experience of the training programme:

	Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree strongly	N/A
--	-------------------	---------------------	-------------------	----------------	------------------	----------------	-----

a) I am persuaded that the promoted practice will make a difference to the learning of my pupils.	<input type="radio"/>						
b) I have the opportunity to discuss how I view my existing practice on the training programme.	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Different types of training activity on the programme will enable me to apply new learning in my own workplace.	<input type="radio"/>						
d) The training programme challenges my existing assumptions about effective practice.	<input type="radio"/>						
e) The training programme is based on sound research about teaching and/or student learning.	<input type="radio"/>						
f) I am clear about the theory that informs the new practice promoted in the training programme.	<input type="radio"/>						

2. Indicate the extent to which you agree that senior leaders in your school do the following:

	Disagree strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree slightly	Agree slightly	Agree moderately	Agree strongly	N/A
a) Senior leaders in my school promote evidence-based approaches to teaching.	<input type="radio"/>						
b) There are incentives in my school which encourage all staff to consider new ideas for their professional practice.	<input type="radio"/>						
c) Innovations introduced to my school by senior leaders often result in competing demands and fragmentation of effort.	<input type="radio"/>						
d) Senior leaders in my school are well aware of the research evidence on effective pedagogy.	<input type="radio"/>						
e) Senior leaders in my school demonstrate high expectations for pupil achievement in everyday activities.	<input type="radio"/>						
f) School leaders are actively involved in promoting professional learning and development opportunities for staff.	<input type="radio"/>						

3. To what extent has your experience on the training programme had (or will have) an impact on your ability to support your staff to improve the following?

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
f) Understanding of subject knowledge	<input type="radio"/>						
g) Using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice	<input type="radio"/>						
h) Understanding how to teach in a way that makes the subject content accessible to pupils.	<input type="radio"/>						

i) Understanding how to identify typical misconceptions that pupils have about the subject content	<input type="radio"/>						
j) Knowing how to assess pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						

4. To what extent has your experience on the training programme had (or will have) an impact on your ability to support your staff to improve the following aspects of their teaching practice?

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
h) Knowing how to plan and deliver activities that help pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
i) Knowing how to use pupil assessment and progress data to inform practice	<input type="radio"/>						
j) Meeting the particular demands of the learning needs of each pupil	<input type="radio"/>						
k) Providing pupils with a range of feedback that helps them understand what they did well, and how they can improve	<input type="radio"/>						
l) Using questioning skills that challenge and extend pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						
m) Knowing how to scaffold learning in a concrete and meaningful way	<input type="radio"/>						
n) Giving pupils opportunities to take responsibilities for their own learning	<input type="radio"/>						

5. To what extent has your experience on the training programme had (or will have) an impact on your ability to support staff to improve the following aspects of their classroom management:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
i) Creating an atmosphere of caring and trust with the pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
j) Setting clear lesson goals that explain what the students need to understand and what they must be able to do as a result of each lesson	<input type="radio"/>						
k) Setting high standards for academic performance	<input type="radio"/>						
l) Motivating pupils to learn	<input type="radio"/>						
m) Setting high expectations of pupil behaviour	<input type="radio"/>						
n) Ensuring all pupils are engaged with learning	<input type="radio"/>						
o) Managing pupil behaviour with clear and consistent rules	<input type="radio"/>						
p) Allocating resources and space strategically based on pupil needs	<input type="radio"/>						

6. To what extent has your experience on the training programme had (or will have) an impact on your ability to support staff to improve the following aspects of their professional beliefs and behaviour:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
h) Understanding how to monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of changes I make to my practice	<input type="radio"/>						
i) Understanding what adjustments I must make to maximise pupil learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>						
j) Understanding how pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
k) Understanding the role of teaching in the learning process of pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
l) Working collaboratively with other colleagues in my school	<input type="radio"/>						
m) Engaging parents in their children's learning	<input type="radio"/>						
n) Feeling that I am an effective teacher	<input type="radio"/>						

7. Which one of the following statements best reflects your views on making changes to your practice (or practice in your school) as a result of attending this training programme?

- The training has provided me with what I need to make changes. *[Please go to Question 8 below.]*
- The training has provided me with a good basis for making changes but I will need some additional training before I can implement them. *[Please go to Question 8 below.]*
- I would like to make changes but the training has not provided me with the knowledge and skills to do so. *[Please go to Question 9 below.]*
- I would like to make changes, but I am unlikely to for other reasons. *[Please go to Question 9 below.]*
- I am not planning to make any change to practice as a result of attending this event. *[Please go to Question 9 below.]*

8. If applicable, list up to three areas to which you will make changes as a result of attending this training programme.

9. If applicable, please explain what changes that you would like to make but cannot, and why.

10. If you have any other comments about the impact of the training programme on you and/or your practice, please enter below.

--

11. What is your current role in the school? *Please select one only.*

f. Classroom teacher	<input type="radio"/>
g. Middle leadership responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
h. Senior Leadership Responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
i. Support staff	<input type="radio"/>
j. Other (please specify):	<input type="radio"/>

12. What is the total number of years that you have been a teacher? Please enter the number in the box:

13. What is the total number of years that you have been employed in your current school? Please enter the number in the box:

Follow-Up Survey: Programme Name (Leading Learning)

We would like to find out how this innovative training programme will contribute or has contributed to change in your leadership of teaching and learning, and the workplace conditions that have facilitated or hindered the impact of the training on change (or lack of change). Please note that this is a generic instrument designed for all training programmes offered by Research Schools. Please select "Not Applicable" (N/A) if some items do not appear to be relevant to the specific programme you have chosen.

The survey will be analysed independently by the University of Nottingham. Please be assured that your answers will be **treated anonymously** and held with the **highest degree of confidentiality** and that no individual school or staff member will be identified in any analysis or reporting.

We ask for your school name and email address below, so that we can assess whether and how the programme make a difference to your practice. Your details will not be used for any other purpose or passed to anyone outside of the evaluation team. Should you wish to withdraw your data from this project at any stage, please contact Kanchana Minson (Kanchana.Minson@nottingham.ac.uk). If you agree to participate in this research please complete this survey, if you **do not** wish to participate, please tick this box and do not continue with the survey.

Name of your school: _____

Your email address: _____

Please tick only **one box** for each item throughout.

5. On reflection, what was the impact of the training programme on your ability to support your staff to improve the following?

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
--	------------	-------------	----------	-----------	-------	--------------------	-----

k) Understanding of subject knowledge	<input type="radio"/>						
l) Using research-based evidence to inform most decisions about professional practice	<input type="radio"/>						
m) Understanding how to teach in a way that makes the subject content accessible to pupils.	<input type="radio"/>						
n) Understanding how to identify typical misconceptions that pupils have about the subject content	<input type="radio"/>						
o) Knowing how to assess pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						

6. On reflection, what was the impact of the training programme on your ability to support your staff to improve the following aspects of their teaching practice?

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
o) Knowing how to plan and deliver activities that help pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
p) Knowing how to use pupil assessment and progress data to inform practice	<input type="radio"/>						
q) Meeting the particular demands of the learning needs of each pupil	<input type="radio"/>						
r) Providing pupils with a range of feedback that helps them understand what they did well, and how they can improve	<input type="radio"/>						
s) Using questioning skills that challenge and extend pupils' thinking and learning	<input type="radio"/>						
t) Knowing how to scaffold learning in a concrete and meaningful way	<input type="radio"/>						
u) Giving pupils opportunities to take responsibilities for their own learning	<input type="radio"/>						

7. On reflection, what was the impact of the training programme on your ability to support your staff to improve the following aspects of their classroom management:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
q) Creating an atmosphere of caring and trust with the pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
r) Setting clear lesson goals that explain what the students need to understand and what they must be able to do as a result of each lesson	<input type="radio"/>						
s) Setting high standards for academic performance	<input type="radio"/>						
t) Motivating pupils to learn	<input type="radio"/>						
u) Setting high expectations of pupil behaviour	<input type="radio"/>						
v) Ensuring all pupils are engaged with learning	<input type="radio"/>						
w) Managing pupil behaviour with clear and consistent rules	<input type="radio"/>						

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
x) Allocating resources and space strategically based on pupil needs	<input type="radio"/>						

8. On reflection, what was the impact of the training programme on your ability to support your staff to improve the following aspects of their professional beliefs and behaviour:

	Not at all	Very little	A little	Partially	A lot	Very significantly	N/A
o) Understanding how to monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of changes I make to my practice	<input type="radio"/>						
p) Understanding what adjustments I must make to maximise pupil learning outcomes	<input type="radio"/>						
q) Understanding how pupils learn	<input type="radio"/>						
r) Understanding the role of teaching in the learning process of pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
s) Working collaboratively with other colleagues in my school	<input type="radio"/>						
t) Engaging parents in their children's learning	<input type="radio"/>						
u) Feeling that I am an effective teacher	<input type="radio"/>						

9. To what extent do you consider that these things have changed since you completed your training:

	Too early to say	Much worse now	Worse now	No change	Better now	Much better now	N/A
My approach to learning	<input type="radio"/>						
The engagement of pupils in learning	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil attainment	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil progress	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil behaviour	<input type="radio"/>						
Pupil motivation for learning	<input type="radio"/>						
Relationships with pupils	<input type="radio"/>						
Parental involvement in pupil learning	<input type="radio"/>						

10. Since completion of the training, have you made any changes to your practice (or practice in your school) as a result of what you learned during the training?

- Yes [Please go to Question 7.]
- No [Please go to Question 8.]

11. a) List up to three major changes that you have made as a result of attending the training programme.

b) List up to three factors which you consider have enabled you to make the changes outlined in 7 (a).

c) Please state if any of the above changes have had a positive impact on pupil learning and achievement, and why/why not.

12. If applicable, please explain what changes that you would like to make but cannot, and why.

13. If you have any other comments about the impact of the training programme on you and/or your practice, please enter below.

14. What is your current role in the school? *Please select one only.*

k. Classroom teacher	<input type="radio"/>
l. Middle leadership responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
m. Senior Leadership Responsibility	<input type="radio"/>
n. Support staff	<input type="radio"/>
o. Other (please specify):	<input type="radio"/>

15. What is the total number of years that you have been a teacher? Please enter the number in the box:

16. What is the total number of years that you have been employed in your current school? Please enter the number in the box:

(2) CPD Pro forma distribution and responses

Figure 3.1 below details the number of surveys sent out and the number completed for each course on each occasion. For the 2016-17 academic year, unique links were created to the survey for each attendee, and to comply with the UK Data Protection Action 2018 (DPA) the RSs emailed the personalised links to individuals on behalf of the evaluation team. It emerged during this first year that RSs were sometimes unable to dedicate the required time to emailing out individual links to the survey to all attendees. From September 2017 the same link to the survey was used for all attendees to avoid the RSs having to either mail merge in the right link, or manually copy and paste the links into individual emails. Unique identifying questions were added to the survey to allow data to be matched at an individual level.

Figure 4.1: CPD pro forma distribution and responses for each course

Course	No. of attendees	No. of completed baseline surveys	% response rate for baseline	No. of completed on completion surveys	% response rate for on completion	No. of completed follow-up surveys	% response rate for follow-up
Leading Learning 2016-17	47	37	79%	30	64%	15	32%
Metacognition & Self-regulated Learning 2017-18	40	26	65%	19	48%	17	43%
Leading Learning Summer 2018	23	23	100%	19	83%	11	48%
Metacognition: Developing effective learners	53	34	64%	3	6%	16	30%
EAL Strategies for Maximising Progress	25	20	80%	22	88%	4	16%
The Literacy Challenge at Transition	26	20	77%	18	69%	9	35%
Leading Learning	34	15	44%	4	12%	15	44%
Teacher Led Research Programme	22	16	73%	1	5%	5	23%
Building firm foundations for GCSE Maths	12	11	92%	5	42%	2	17%
Disciplinary Literacy at Huntington Research School	22	13	59%	1	5%	5	23%
Building Confident Research Leads for a local authority	7	7	100%	4	57%	2	29%
Leading Learning	5	4	80%	2	40%	2	40%
Total	316	226	72%	128	41%	103	33%

Appendix 5: Telephone Qualitative Survey Questions and Analysis Recording Framework

1. Confirm name and role(s) interview participant in their school. Make changes in the interview template if necessary.
2. In your view, how important is evidence-informed practice to leadership, teaching and learning? To what extent do you currently apply this approach in your workplace? Ask for examples. Is there an evidence-based culture in your school? Why/why not?

Feasibility: barriers and enablers

3. Confirm which Research School(s) they have been engaged with, and in what capacity.
 - a. Have you or your school/Trust been engaged with any of the Original 5 Research Schools? If so, why did you choose to work with this particular Research School(s)? Did you (or your school) have any formal or informal connections/partnerships the Research School before? If YES, please provide details (i.e. nature of activities; duration; impact)
4. What Research School activities have you been engaged with (re: the three strands)? **How** and when did you get involved and what **motivated** you to be involved? Are you intending to continue to be involved with activities and programmes provided by the Research School(s) next academic year? Why/why not?

Evidence of promise: take-up by schools/individuals and delivery by RSs

5. *About the newsletters:* Did you find the newsletters a useful resource for you (and/or your school)? How? Why/why not? Please provide examples to clarify.

About CPD and training programmes: Which CPD programme(s) have you (and/or your school) been involved in that were offered by the Research School(s)? How did you decide to attend the training? How useful was the training experience to you (and/or your school)? Ask for examples.

For all: Were you able to **implement** the evidence that you have learned from the Research School(s) in your own practice? Why/why not? Ask for main enablers and barriers to effective implementation.

6. What do you (or your school) expect to gain from participating in the Research School activities? To what extent has the **quality of the provision** met your prior expectations? Why and why not? Ask for examples of evidence.
7. On reflection, what have been the key factors that have enabled or prevented you (and your school) from **benefiting** from participating in the Research School Network activities?

Or for those who lead Research Schools, ask them:

How important is it that your school/Trust benefit from being a Research School? In what ways? On reflection, what have been the key factors that have enabled or prevented your school/Trust from **benefiting** from leading and offering the Research School activities?

SCALABILITY

8. In your view, what are the main roles that Research Schools play in the current school system (or what does it mean to be a Research School)? Do you believe the Research School model as a whole has the potential to improve the practice of leadership, teaching and learning in schools in your area, and/or nationally? Why/why not? Ask for examples.
 - a. *In your view, what might be preventing some schools from engaging with the RSs?*
 - b. *Would non-engaged schools benefit from accessing the resources and training programmes provided by RSs? Would particular types of schools benefit more than other from such engagement?*

- c. How can different stakeholders in the system (e.g. Local Authority, DfE representatives, Regional School Commissioner, and other local school improvement brokers) better help vulnerable schools to engage with Research Schools?
- d. How can Research Schools themselves better engage vulnerable schools in their work?

9. What could the Research School(s) with which you have been involved done better to facilitate your (or your school's) *engagement* with evidence-informed practice? What could the Research School(s) have done better to facilitate your (or your school's) *implementation* of the evidence-based practices?

OR for those who lead Research Schools:

What could your Research School with have done better to facilitate other schools' *engagement* with evidence-informed practice? What could your Research School have done better to facilitate other school's *implementation* of the evidence-based practices?

10. Have you consulted the EEF toolkit? If so, how useful has it been in helping to improve your practice and/or the practice and outcomes of teaching and learning in your school? To what extent did the outcome meet your original expectations? Ask for examples.

Analysis Recording Framework

Schools and Interview Participants:

Research School(s) involved	
Strand of Research School Activity involved	
School Name	
School Contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary // Secondary // Special School • FSM Band: • Ofsted: • In the same Local Authority as Research School: Yes // No
Role(s) of interview participant (delete as appropriate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headteacher • Senior Manager/Leader/Coordinator • Head of Department/Faculty (Secondary) • Key Stage/Subject Leader (Primary) • Teacher • Teaching Assistant • Other (please specify):
Participant's role in relation to Research School activities	

1) Participants' views and experiences of research and evidence use

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2) Feasibility of the implementation of the RS activity/model: barriers and enablers

Prior engagement with research school	
Participation:	

Motivation to be engaged with RS activity	
Participation: Conditions for effective take -up	<i>Enablers:</i>
	<i>Barriers:</i>

3) Evidence of promise: take-up (participation) by schools/individuals and delivery by RSs

Experience of participation in RS activity	<i>Dissemination of information: e-newsletters; conferences; one-off twilight sessions; Twitter</i>
	<i>CPD training programmes</i>
	<i>Innovation (i.e. involved in a project(s) funded by the Institute for Effective Education – designed to explore the effectiveness and impact of a new intervention in teaching, learning or leadership)</i>
Implementation	<i>The extent to which, and how, the information and evidence-based practiced that they have accessed/learned has been implemented by participants <u>or</u> in their schools; and why/why not (e.g. constraints in own contexts; quality of evidence and/or provision)</i>
Impact	<i>Perceived impact in terms of changes in practice, attitudes and culture</i>
	<i>Factors that have enabled or prevented change to take place in their own practice and/or in their schools</i>

4) Scalability

Roles of the Research Schools Network model in the education system	
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Fulfilling the potential	<i>What could have they done better?</i>
Use and usefulness of EEF toolkit	<i>Any evidence of making a difference to practice?</i>

5) Other comments and reflective remarks by interview participants and/or the researcher

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Appendix 6: Example of Case Study Interview Schedules

Selection of Participants We would like to interview the following key stakeholders of your Network during my one-day visit, or as many of these that are available on the day:

- Headteacher/Executive Headteacher of your school
- Director and/or lead co-ordinator of the research activity (main interview participant)
- A focus group of other members of the senior leadership team who have been/will be involved in the Research School activity
- A focus group of middle leaders who have been/will be involved in the Research School activity
- Where possible, a focus group interview (or individual interviews) with senior leaders of selected schools from the Network that are to be involved in Strands 2 and 3 of the Research School activity, i.e. 'Training and Modelling' and 'Innovation'.
- Where possible, other key strategic partners within and beyond the membership of the Network that might be working with you on research schools activity (e.g. HEI partners, regional TSA coordinators, local authorities).

We are suggesting to each of the research schools we are visiting that the individual interviews might last approximately 45 minutes, and if possible that we have slightly more time (60-90 mins) with you and also the Headteacher.

Questions for RS Leaders

Capturing major developments in strategies, practices and activities

- 1. What have been the major developments and successes since our previous conversations?**
 - i. Have there been any key personnel or other capacity changes?
 - ii. How have your strategies and practices to develop the RS network and deliver the RS activities changed? Why? Please could you provide one or two examples?
 - iii. What have been the major achievements? Please tell us about the most effective two or three examples of projects or activities led by the RS and their associated changes or impact in the schools that you have been working with.
- 2. What have been the key issues and challenges in the delivery of the RS work this year?**
 - i. Are there any structural (e.g. local school improvement mechanisms) and/or cultural (e.g. relationships between schools) enablers or barriers to engaging schools with evidence-based practices in your locality, and beyond?
 - ii. What are the three main reasons why schools have not engaged with your RS offer?
 - iii. How are you managing the workload, organising yourselves internally, and finding capacity and resources in order to deliver the plans? How has this changed over time?
- 3. How has your RS responded to local or regional school improvement needs?**
 - i. How does your RS learn about SI needs locally and regionally?
 - ii. How have you been able to respond? What work have you undertaken (explore difference with CPD provision and research-based projects)
 - iii. How have you managed to move beyond the 'good' schools that want to get better, to the schools that are in need of support but are not yet engaged or have chosen not to engage?
 - iv. How have you utilised local and regional partnerships to help you (explore work with local TSAs, MATs, LA/school strategic partnerships, or LAs)?
 - v. What have been the main barriers that you have needed to overcome?

- vi. What evidence do you have of changes in practice?

Leadership and governance of the RSs and the programme

4. What are views about the **key roles and responsibilities of the RS Lead, and the compatibility of this role with other school-based responsibilities?**
 - i. How has the role developed and changed over time? Is the workload manageable?
 - ii. How does the role work in support of, or in conflict with, other school-based responsibilities?
 - iii. How have you changed or expanded the capacity to lead the RS?
 - iv. Where the RS Lead has changed, how effectively has the transition been supported and managed? What has been the impact on relationships and the work of the RS?
5. How would you describe the **roles that EEF and IEE have played** in relation to the delivery of your Research School work?
 - i. How has support for RSs changed over time?
 - ii. Is there anything that they could have done differently or better to support the development and impact of a) your own Research School work; and b) the broad Research School programme?
6. How has your own **governance structure for your RS** changed and developed over time? What does it look like now?
7. To what extent **should RSs grow and develop organically over time?**
 - a. How much consistency should there be between the RSs in terms of their identities, how they engage schools, and how they deliver the RS work? Has this been achieved?
 - b. How have you worked with other RSs either formally as part of a role or informally in supporting the delivery of some of their RS offer?
 - c. What sort of differentiated support and facilitation might be needed for RS with different starting points, expertise and capacity?

Roles of Research Schools and their Networks

8. Has your **view of what a Research School is changed over time?**
 - i. What outcomes would your RS like to achieve? How confident are you about achieving these outcomes?
 - ii. How are you balancing the need to deliver EEF national programmes with the need to respond to local schools' priorities?
9. In your view what **outcomes should the RS programme seek to achieve** in the school-led system? Are you confident that these outcomes will be achieved?
 - i. Should there be differences in terms of strategies, practices and outcomes between your RS and the RSs in Opportunity Areas?
10. **What does it mean to be in a RS Network?** Are there any particular challenges in terms of engaging partner schools? How have these challenges been overcome or could be overcome? One RS has said the network feels looser and more fluid than a TSA network: would you agree?

Reach and engagement with schools and others

11. Who is the **main target audience for your RS work** (school leaders, teachers)? Please give examples.
12. Have you **worked with any other RSs** to deliver programmes or offer support?

13. Is there a **place for HEIs** to play in the programme? Does your RS have the necessary expertise and capacity to lead and evaluate the progress and impact of the CPD work and innovation work?
14. How are you **working with or engaging local authorities**?
15. How are you **working with or engaging other Teaching School Alliances**?

Future: sustainability and impact, and the future of the programme

16. Has becoming a Research School **made a difference within your own school** (in terms of culture, capacity, school improvement priorities etc.)?
17. Is there a **strategy in place to sustain the legacy and impact of the RS model** when the funding terminates? What do you hope to go on to achieve?
18. What are your views, and the views of others at your RS, about the **plans for the future of the national RS programme**? (Explore **focus on 80 vulnerable schools** and role of regional leads)
 - i. How achievable/difficult do you think it will be to work with hard-to-reach schools?
 - ii. What will you need to do differently to reach 80 vulnerable schools? How might you need to change your capacity or internal structures? How might you need to adapt what you offer to schools?
 - iii. How effectively do you think the national EEF offers will meet the school improvement needs of the schools you will work with? What else will be needed?
 - iv. How do you expect the regional leads to be able to help? What other support will you need?
 - v. What evidence do you have from your RS work to date that this approach can improve practice in targeted schools? How confident are you that you can make a difference for these schools?
19. Finally, **anything we haven't covered** that you wanted to say about...
 - i. *what is working well*
 - ii. *what could you or your school have done better*
 - iii. *if the RS programme is going to make a strong contribution to improving practice in some of the vulnerable schools, what internal and external support would your school need?*

Questions for Research School Partners

- 1) What do you understand to be the role of being a Research School? In your view, why did your school/academy decide to become a partner of the Research School Network? What is the role of your school in the Network?
- 2) How have you and your school been engaged by the Research School? How does this build on existing relationships?
- 3) Please describe what and how your school will be contributing to the delivery of the Research School activity.
- 4) What have been (or in your view, will be) the key benefits of becoming a partner in a Research School Network? Is there (or are you expected to see) any discernible change in your school's culture and practice as a result?
- 5) Are there any particular challenges that your school may face in order to participate in Research School Network activities? What have been the key achievements?

- 6) In your view, how important is it to promote a research-literate culture in schools? Why?
- 7) In your view, does the Research School model provide value for money in terms of promoting the use of research is an *effective* and *efficient* (in terms of value for money) way of scaling up evidence-based practices in schools? How?
- 8) On reflection, could you identify: *what is working well*, *what could your school and/or the Research School have done better*, and *what internal and external support* would be necessary to make the Research School Network work in terms of changing the practice and culture in schools?
- 9) How do you think the Research School project might make a difference to your day-to-day work in the future?

Appendix 7: Individual RSs' Email Newsletter Reach by Geographical Location

Figure 7.1: Density map of schools (2019) – RS1

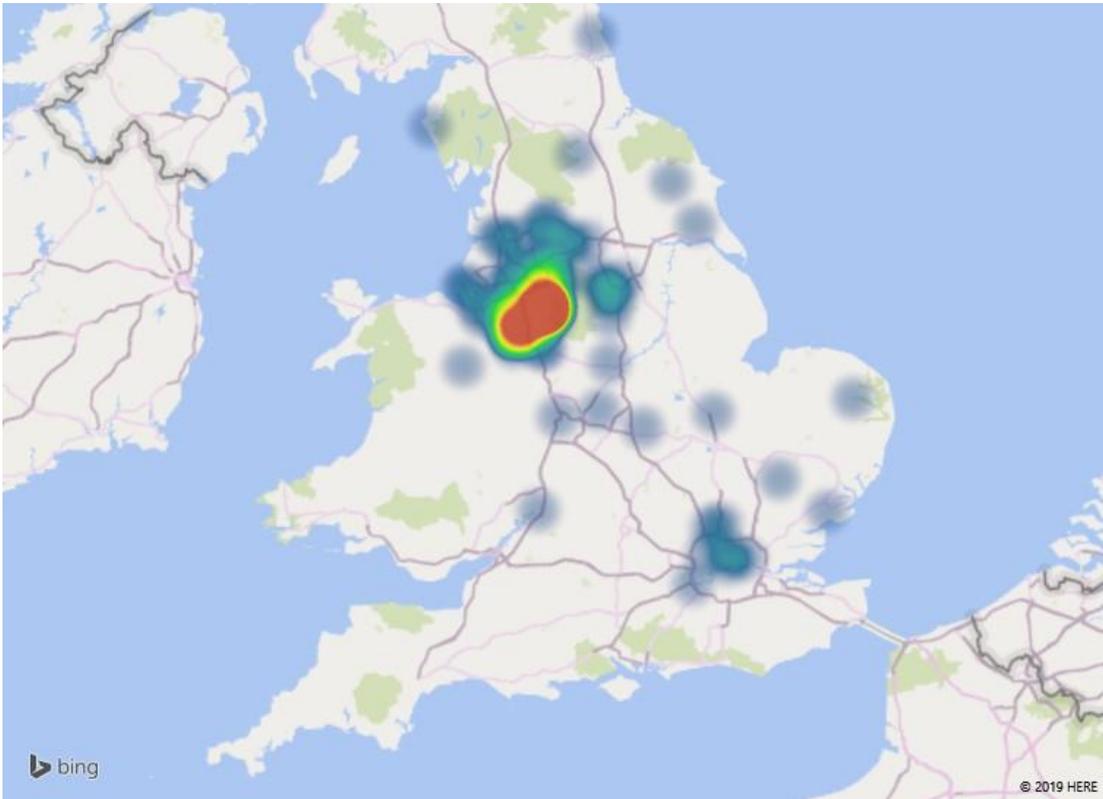


Figure 7.2: Density map of schools (2019) – RS2

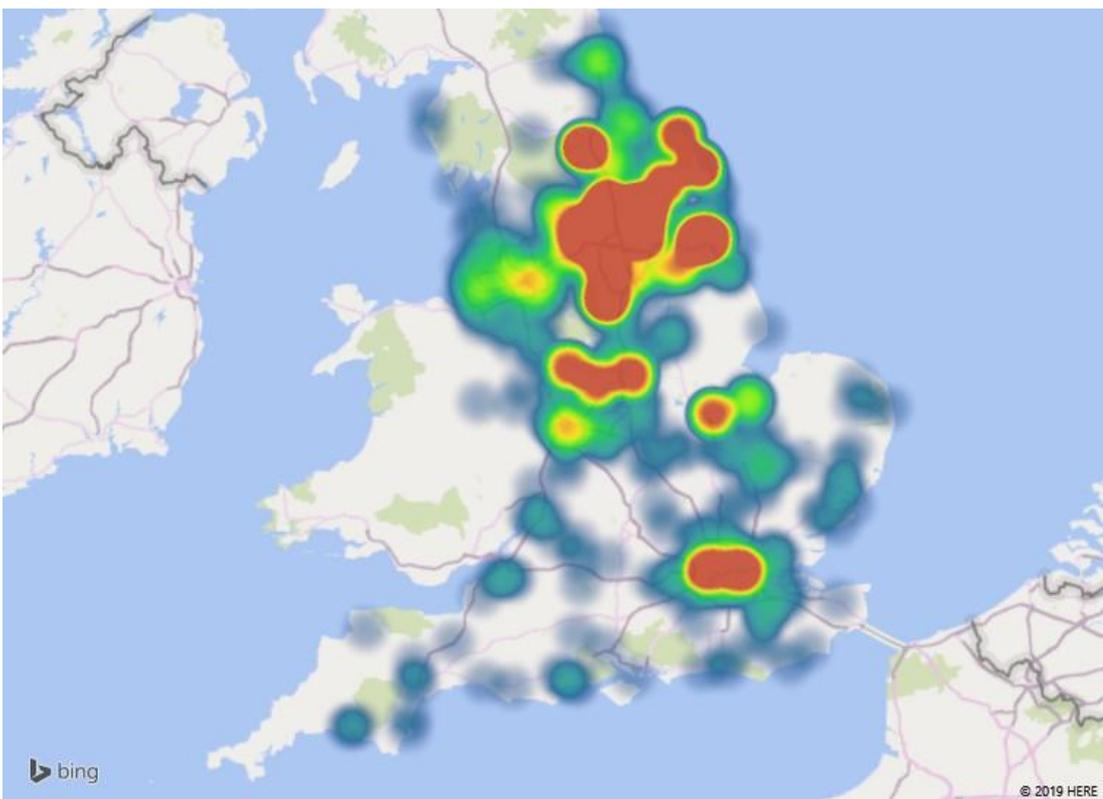


Figure 7.3: Density map of schools (2019) – RS3

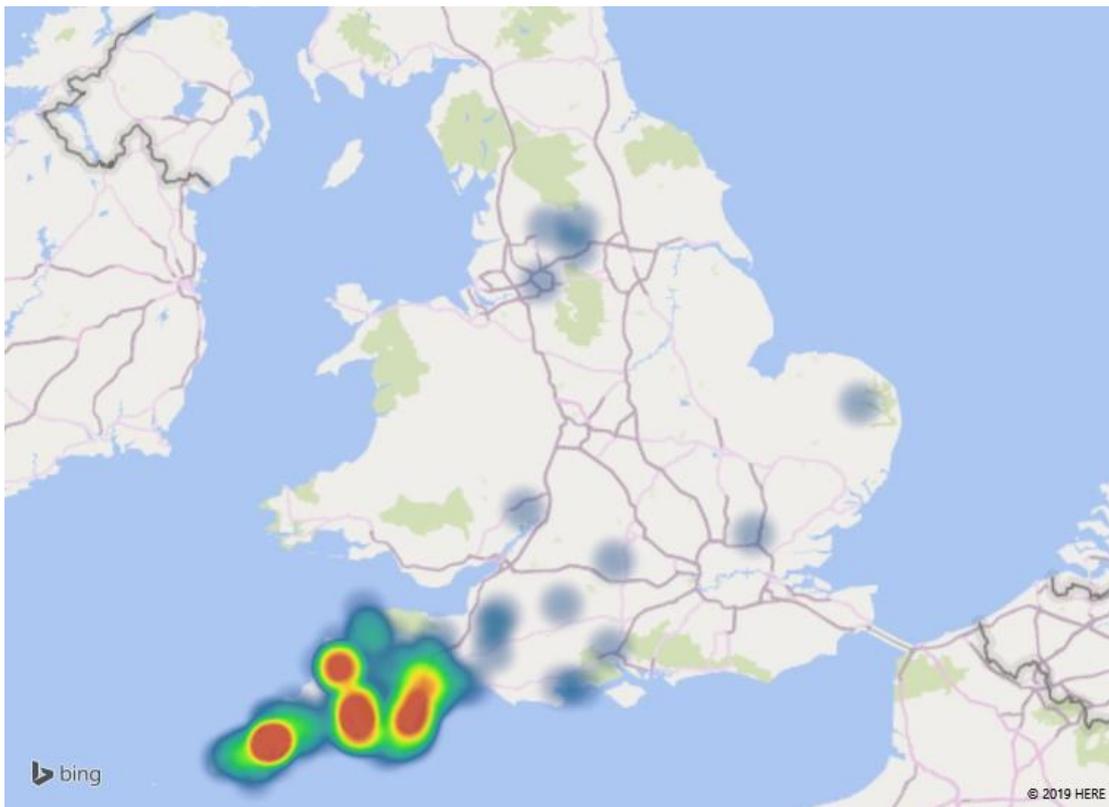


Figure 7.4: Density map of schools (2019) – RS4

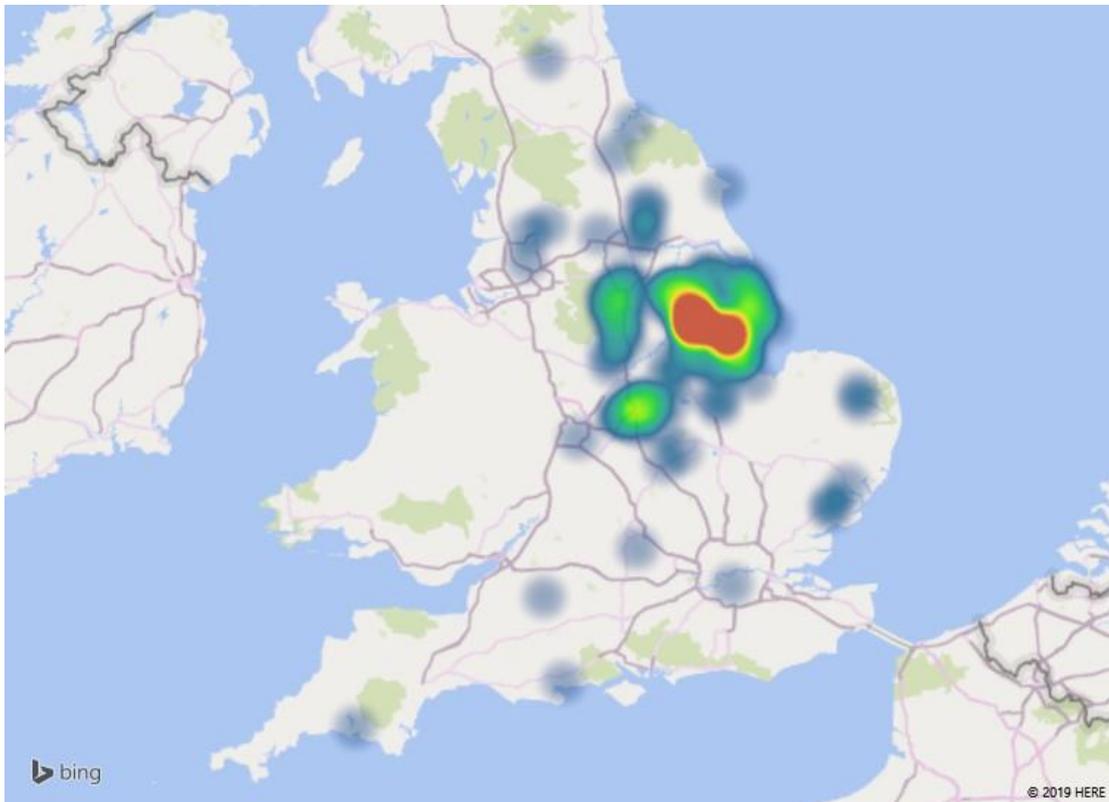
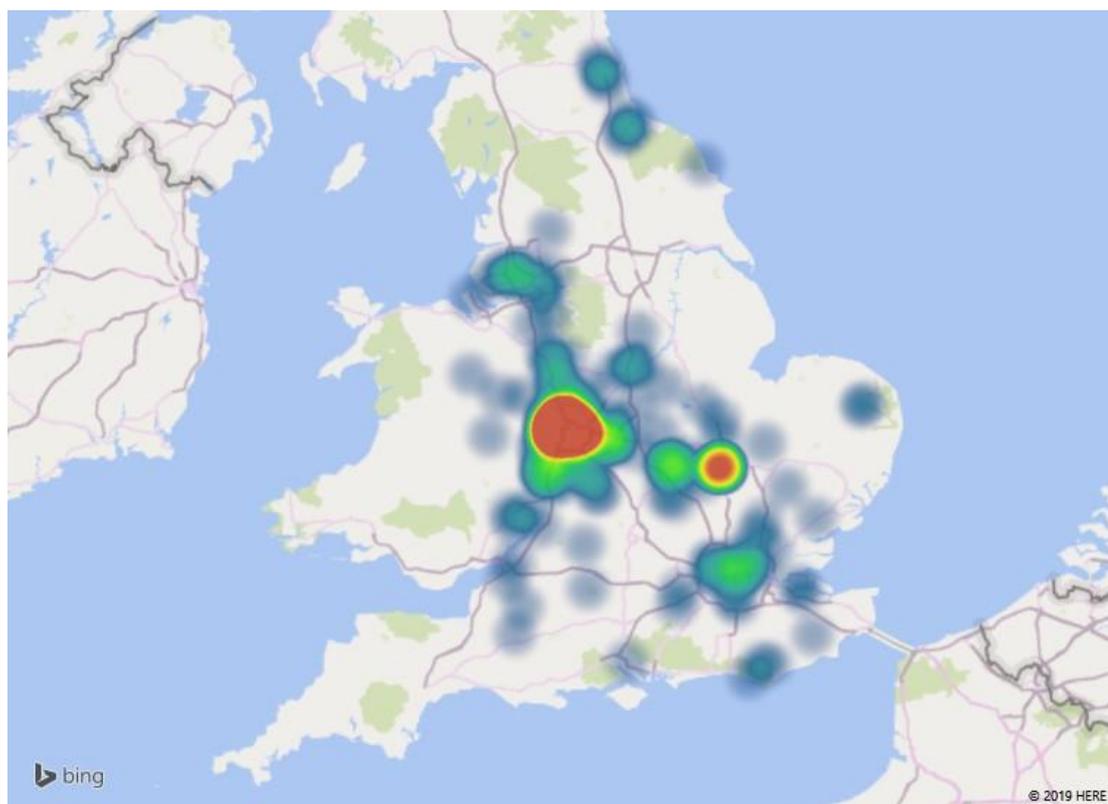


Figure 7.5: Density map of schools (2019) – RS5



Appendix 8: Factor analysis outputs

A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted for 17 items of Q7 & 8. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO= 0.85, and all KMO values for individual items were greater than 0.64 which is above the acceptable limit of 0.5. **Four factors** had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 64.40% of the variance. Factor scores are saved as factor score 1 - 4. The table below shows the factor loadings after rotation. The all four factors had moderate to high reliabilities (between 0.61 and 0.93).

Table 8.1 Rotated component matrix (Questions 7 and 8 in the follow-up survey)

Rotated Component Matrix ^a	Component				Communalities
	1	2	3	4	
Sense of shared purpose in my school	.86				.77
Senior leaders promoting evidence-based approaches	.85				.74
Senior leaders involving in promoting professional learning opportunities	.82				.69
Senior leaders making effective use of wider networks	.79				.64
Senior leaders demonstrating high expectations for pupil achievement	.76				.63
Support from SLT in using research evidence to improve teaching	.73	.33			.69
Incentives encouraging staff to use research and evidence	.73				.60
Support from other colleagues (non-SLT) in my school in using research evidence	.52	.45		-.32	.58
Innovation resulting in demands and fragmentation of effort	.52				.31
The accessibility of relevant research evidence		.75			.67
The time and resources available to me		.74			.57
My understanding of how to use research evidence		.63			.49
Support from colleagues in other schools in using research evidence	.33	.38	.34		.45
The quality of inputs or support from the Research School(s)			.93		.92
The relevance of inputs or support from the Research School(s)			.93		.92
My own beliefs /opinions about the value of evidence based practice				.79	.65
My views about the trustworthiness of the evidence base		.37		.70	.64
Eigenvalues	6.10	2.34	1.38	1.13	
% of variance	35.87	13.77	8.12	6.65	
α	.90	.66	.93	.61	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Table 8.2 Correlations between the four factors (Qs 7 and 8)

		Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Factor 1	Pearson Correlation		.019	.017	.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.786	.815	.464
	N		203	203	203
Factor 2	Pearson Correlation			-.031	-.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.660	.954
	N			203	203
Factor 3	Pearson Correlation				.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.659
	N				203

Table 8.3 Factor analysis outputs (Question 9 in the follow-up survey)

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.925
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2674.031
	df	45
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared ..	
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance
1	7.413	74.133	74.133	7.413	74.133
2	.834	8.335	82.468		
3	.492	4.924	87.393		
4	.362	3.624	91.017		
5	.256	2.556	93.572		
6	.187	1.869	95.442		
7	.145	1.451	96.893		
8	.138	1.384	98.277		
9	.117	1.172	99.449		
10	.055	.551	100.000		

Component Matrix^a

	Component 1
Pupil learning outcomes	.899
Use of research evidence by staff	.894
Pupil engagement in learning	.886
My understanding of how to use research evidence	.875
Evidence based culture in my school	.874
Capacity and skills to use evidence based practice	.873
Support from SLT in using research evidence	.872
My understanding about the value of evidence based practice	.833
My ability to access relevant research evidence	.805
Working collaboratively with colleagues in other schools	.791

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

Table 8.4: Correlations between factor scores of Q7, 8 and 9

	F1	F2	F3	F4	Q9
F1	Pearson Correlation	.019	.017	.052	.426**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.786	.815	.464	.000
	N	203	203	203	182
F2	Pearson Correlation		-.031	-.004	.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.660	.954	.005
	N		203	203	182
F3	Pearson Correlation			.031	.542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.659	.000
	N			203	182
F4	Pearson Correlation				.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.071
	N				182

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8.5: Correlations between factor scores of Q 7, 8 and 9 in relation to the three change groupings (Q10a)

Have you implemented changes			F1	F2	F3	F4	Q9
Yes, I have implemented one or more changes (n=175)	F1	Pearson Correlation		-.001	.002	-.076	.553**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.991	.980	.376	.000
		N		139	139	139	129
	F2	Pearson Correlation			-.134	-.024	.213*
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.117	.778	.016
		N			139	139	129
	F3	Pearson Correlation				-.034	.466**
		Sig. (2-tailed)				.688	.000
		N				139	129
	F4	Pearson Correlation					-.015
		Sig. (2-tailed)					.868
		N					129
No, but I am planning to implement change (n=46)	F1	Pearson Correlation		-.291	.481**	.280	.645**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.119	.007	.133	.001
		N		30	30	30	22
	F2	Pearson Correlation			.054	-.118	.149
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.777	.535	.507
		N			30	30	22
	F3	Pearson Correlation				.037	.485*
		Sig. (2-tailed)				.846	.022
		N				30	22
	F4	Pearson Correlation					.252
		Sig. (2-tailed)					.257
		N					22
No, and I am not currently planning to (n=48)	F1	Pearson Correlation		.282	-.458**	.349	.279
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.118	.008	.050	.143
		N		32	32	32	29
	F2	Pearson Correlation			-.241	-.037	-.043
		Sig. (2-tailed)			.184	.841	.824
		N			32	32	29
	F3	Pearson Correlation				-.240	.326
		Sig. (2-tailed)				.185	.085
		N				32	29
	F4	Pearson Correlation					-.087
		Sig. (2-tailed)					.654
		N					29

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix 9: CPD and Training Impact (CPD Pro Forma)

(1) Table 9.1 Summary of enablers to making the changes (follow-up survey)

Enablers of the change	No. of enablers	No. of respondents who described an enabler	% of respondents who described an enabler (n=75)
Knowledge, understanding and / or skills developed during the course	58	42	56
Evidence from the research (and being able to engage with this)	23	21	28
Well structured / purposeful training programme	17	16	21
Collaborating / networking with others on the course	15	13	17
EEF guidance / toolkits	14	13	17
Time to plan / reflect	12	12	16
Support / understanding from department / SLT	8	7	9
General support	7	6	8
CPD focused / awareness of good CPD strategies	6	6	8
Sharing knowledge / resources (on / off line)	3	3	4
Staff motivation / effort	3	2	3

(2) Tracking the same respondents over time

Analysis methods: *Developing positivity and improvement scores*

Across the four main themed sections of the surveys (knowledge, teaching practice, classroom management and professional beliefs and behaviours), a 'positivity' score was calculated for each respondent. This was calculated by awarding the following values to each possible response:

- Not at all / very little = 1
- Partially = 2
- A lot = 3
- Very significantly = 4

For each survey, the scores were then totalled across each themed section to give an overall score against each respondent. Total scores were only calculated for an individual where a response had been recorded against *all* statements in that section, if any were blank, the individual did not get a score for that section. Higher scores represent more positive responses and lower scores denote less positive responses. For each themed section the maximum scores achievable were as follows:

- Knowledge 20 (five statements)
- Teaching practice 28 (seven statements)
- Classroom management 32 (eight statements)
- Professional beliefs and behaviours 28 (seven statements)

It should be noted when viewing the data by course type, that only three of the individuals included in this analysis attended research courses, the minimum and maximum number of respondents included in the analyses is listed below. This is variable across the four different sections of the survey because respondents must have answered all questions within a section to generate a valid mean positivity score:

- Teaching courses max n=32, min n=22
- Leadership courses max n=20, min n=15
- Research courses max n=3, min n=2
- Total (all respondents) max n=55, min n=39

Using the calculated scores, an ‘improvement’ score was generated for each respondent by calculating the difference in scores between the baseline and follow-up survey. This measured how many points respondents’ positivity score had increased or decreased by between the survey points. An average (mean) was calculated across each section for all respondents, and according to whether they attended teaching, leadership or research courses.

Table 9.2: Mean improvement scores against each statement where individual respondents were matched across surveys and between different survey occasions

		Mean 'improvement' scores			Minimum n	Maximum n
		Baseline to on completion	On completion to follow-up	Baseline to follow-up		
Subject knowledge	Understanding of subject knowledge	-0.2	0.0	-0.3	40	54
	Using research-based knowledge to inform most decisions about professional practice	0.9	-0.3	0.7	42	57
	Understanding how to teach in a way that makes the subject content accessible to pupils	0.0	-0.3	-0.1	41	58
	Understanding how to identify typical misconceptions that pupils have about the subject content	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3	40	57
	Knowing how to assess pupils’ thinking and learning	0.1	-0.2	0.0	41	57
Teaching practice	Knowing how to plan and deliver activities that help pupils learn	0.0	-0.2	-0.3	39	55
	Knowing how to use pupil assessment and progress data to inform practice	-0.3	-0.3	-0.8	38	56
	Meeting the particular demands of the learning needs of each pupil	0.0	-0.2	-0.2	40	55
	Providing pupils with a range of feedback that helps them understand what they did well, and how they can improve	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	37	57
	Using questioning skills that challenge and extend pupils’ thinking and learning	-0.1	-0.3	-0.4	37	57
	Knowing how to scaffold learning in a concrete and meaningful way	-0.1	0.1	-0.1	37	55
	Giving pupils opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning	0.2	-0.1	0.1	38	55
Classroom management	Creating an atmosphere of caring and trust with the pupils	-0.9	-0.1	-1.2	16	46
	Setting clear lesson goals that explain what the students need to understand and what they must be able to do as a result of each lesson	-0.6	-0.1	-0.8	16	47
	Setting high standards for academic performance	-0.4	-0.1	-0.4	19	49
	Motivating pupils to learn	-0.3	0.0	-0.4	19	46
	Setting high expectations of pupil behaviour	-0.7	0.0	-1.1	16	44
	Ensuring all pupils are engaged with learning	-0.2	0.0	-0.4	18	45
	Managing pupil behaviour with clear and consistent rules	-0.9	0.1	-1.3	15	43
	Allocating resources and space strategically based on pupil needs	-0.3	-0.4	-0.5	17	47
Professional beliefs and behaviour	Understanding how to monitor and reflect on the effectiveness of changes I make to my practice	0.5	-0.1	0.1	41	56
	Understanding what adjustments I must make to maximise pupil learning outcomes	0.4	-0.1	0.1	40	56
	Understanding how pupils learn	0.4	-0.1	0.2	39	56
	Understanding the role of teaching in the learning process of pupils	0.3	-0.2	0.0	41	56
	Working collaboratively with other colleagues in my school	0.1	-0.3	-0.1	40	55
	Engaging parents in their children’s learning	0.0	-0.3	-0.4	34	53
	Feeling that I am an effective teacher	0.2	-0.4	-0.1	38	55

Appendix 10: Cost Analysis of the RNS Initiative

(1) Analysis of EEF and IEE management and support costs for Wave 1 RSs

Wave 2 RSs are not relevant to this evaluation and were excluded from the analysis. Then the EEF and IEE's management and support costs were reduced *proportionately* based on the funding allocation for Waves 1 and 2 RSs:

EEF funding: Wave 1 received £500k and Wave 2 received £600k. So of the total £1,100K available, Wave 1 received approximately 45%, and Wave 2 received approximately 55%. 'Management and support' costs for EEF for Wave 1 were calculated as 45% of the available £100K, which is £45K.

IEE funding: Management and support costs for IEE were allocated 50:50 across Waves 1 and 2. Thus, the recalculated cost of this for Wave 1 only is 50% of £100K, i.e. £50K.

The cost of the evaluation has been excluded from all cost calculations.

(2) Analysis of other expenses costs for Wave 1 RSs

There were other expenses costs towards marketing, data management, travel and developer support for Waves 1 and 2 RSs, as well as the OA RSs over three years:

- Website, events, Google Drive, travel expenses: £150K shared between EEF (2/3) and IEE (1/3)
- Developer support: £250K

Because these costs cover all the RSs, we estimated **what proportion of these costs would be applicable to Wave 1 RS only**. The basis for allocating these total costs across the three waves was the number of RSs in each wave, although it is possible that Wave 1's costs were higher because it was the first wave and some initial set-up costs might have been higher. The allocation of the costs according to the number of RSs per wave was as follows: Wave 1 – 5 RSs; Wave 2 – 6 RSs; OAs – 11 RSs. With a total of 22 RSs, the percentage allocation across the three waves was: Wave 1 – 23%; Wave 2 – 27%; and OAs – 50%

Based on the assumption that Wave 1 RSs account for 23% of the funding requirement, we estimate that this wave required the following funding to cover the direct costs and developer support:

- Website, events, Google Drive, travel etc: **£34.5k over three years** (23% of £150k)
- Developer support: **£57.5k over three years** (23% of £250k)

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