

Centre for Evidence and Implementation

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Experience in Educational Data Collection

CEI (Centre for Evidence and Implementation) has extensive experience designing and delivering qualitative data collection in education settings, with a particular focus on capturing the perspectives and lived experiences of children and young people. Specialising in implementation science, we enable evaluations to move beyond whether an intervention worked to understanding how, why, and under what conditions it was implemented effectively

As an organisation, CEI has substantive experience delivering high-quality impact and implementation and process evaluations (IPEs) across early years, primary, secondary and post-16 settings. For the purposes of the data collection panel, we offer partnerships and collaboration in specialised IPE design and delivery. We have extensive experience with implementation science frameworks and tools, offering robust and rigorous theory-based approaches. We lead and support a range of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations, reflective tools, and open-ended surveys with pupils, students, educators, school leaders and families. We are experienced in tailoring methods and instruments to different developmental stages, ensuring approaches are age-appropriate, engaging and accessible for young participants across early years, primary, secondary and post-16 settings.

Working directly with children and young people is a core part of our qualitative practice. CEI places strong emphasis on ethical, trauma-informed and inclusive approaches to qualitative data collection, ensuring that young people feel safe, respected and able to express their views freely. Data collection tools are designed to minimise burden, use clear and accessible language, and incorporate participatory techniques where appropriate to support meaningful engagement.

CEI has experience capturing qualitative data on a wide range of implementation and process dimensions, including pupil engagement, socio-emotional development, classroom experiences, practitioner behaviours, and perceptions of programme relevance and feasibility.

We are also experienced in collecting qualitative feedback from under-served groups and adapting approaches to reflect diverse needs and contexts.

Field Force Capacity and Expertise

CEI maintains a core team, complemented by a scalable pool of associate field staff recruited by demand. This blended model ensures both quality assurance through permanent staff oversight and flexibility to meet project-specific requirements. Our team have a range of backgrounds, and typically have undergraduate or postgraduate training in social science, psychology, education or a related discipline, as well as individuals with doctoral level experience in applied research, and researchers with extensive practitioner experience.

All staff receive training, supervision and support in qualitative research methods, implementation and process evaluation principles and techniques, and equity in evaluation, as well as ethical research practice, safeguarding and data protection. We offer tailored support for administration of interviews, focus groups and observations, ethical conduct in qualitative research including consideration of context-specific challenges and robust processes for secure data handling and data quality assurance.

CEI can offer UK-wide geographical reach, with team members experienced in working across urban, suburban, and rural settings. We also offer online methods of engagement if preferred, or a combination of in-person and remote data collection as needed.

Communication Systems

CEI communicates with schools and settings primarily via named email contacts, using clear, consistent email protocols and standardised templates. Telephone or video calls are used where appropriate for follow-up, briefing or troubleshooting. Data sharing is managed via secure file-transfer platforms in line with GDPR, with clear protocols for data receipt, checking and follow-up with schools/settings as needed. Each project has a dedicated CEI project lead who acts as the primary liaison for schools/settings, ensuring continuity, responsiveness and clear lines of communication throughout the evaluation.

When working with partners, or other evaluation teams, we maintain regular, structured communication through regular meetings, email briefings, and shared documentation. This ensures alignment on timelines, early discussion of challenges and mitigation strategies, enabling rapid decision-making and minimising disruption to planned timelines and activities.

Quality Assurance Strategies

CEI uses a combination of clear communication, careful scheduling, and relationship-based engagement to maximise response rates. Our strategies include: early engagement with participants and settings to explain purpose, burden, and value of data collection, streamlined, piloted instruments to minimise burden, flexible data collection modes (online, phone, in-person where appropriate), timely reminders and follow-ups using structured email protocols and a key named contact point for each project.

Quality in our data collection is supported through clear protocols, detailed guidance for staff, and ongoing monitoring during fieldwork. We track completeness in real time, provide regular updates to partners and follow up promptly where feasible. We pro-actively raise challenges and agree with partners and funders to agree proportionate mitigation strategies.

Quality assurance in all qualitative and IPE work is achieved through robust tracking methods, calibration of tools and frameworks through double extraction where appropriate, structured team-wide triangulation, synthesis and sense-making workshops to discuss findings and agree interpretation, including participatory approaches where desired.

Project Leadership

Overall responsibility for data collection sits with CEI's senior leadership and project directors, who act as project leads and oversee all aspects of fieldwork, data quality, and compliance. Our staff have extensive experience managing large-scale mixed-methods evaluations, including complex data collection across early years, school, and post-16 settings. Our teams' expertise includes working directly with schools and settings, ensuring high standards of ethical practice, safeguarding and data protection.

CEI has significant experience working with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and similar national funders, including roles as an evaluator or implementation partner. Further details on our leadership team and experience are available on our website <https://www.ceiglobal.org/>.

Additional Data Services Offered

We offer partnerships and collaboration in specialised IPE design and delivery, encompassing everything from initial design through to synthesis and reporting. We have expertise in qualitative and mixed methods data collection frequently utilised in IPE including individual and group interviews, focus groups, observation, surveys, document analysis and administrative data capture/analysis.

Cost Model and Pricing Structure

CEI does not operate a standard pricing model for data collection or evaluation support, as costs vary significantly depending on the design, scale, risks and practical requirements of each project. When developing costings, CEI considers a range of project specific factors, including: number and type of schools or settings; number and age of pupils; nature, length and complexity of assessments or data collection activities, safeguarding, consent, and logistical complexity, geographic spread and travel requirements, and assumptions around challenges of recruitment.

CEI is experienced in working within EEF funding frameworks and is committed to providing proportionate, high value solutions aligned with EEF expectations. CEI would be very happy to discuss indicative costs, assumptions, and options in more detail. We find that a short scoping conversation is the most effective way to develop clear, accurate and defensible costings and can produce transparent tailored estimates for a specific project.

Data Protection

CEI is fully compliant with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Data are processed lawfully and securely for defined evaluation purposes, with data-minimisation, controlled access and appropriate retention periods applied. All projects operate under agreed data controller/processor arrangements, with DPIAs completed where required, overseen by our DPO. CEI maintains documented data handling policies covering secure collection, encrypted storage and transfer, anonymisation or pseudonymisation, and procedures for data breaches and subject access requests. All team members receive mandatory training covering data protection, confidentiality, secure data handling, informed consent, safeguarding, and correct assessment administration, reinforced through supervision and guidance.

Safeguarding

Research staff involved in qualitative data collection with young people are trained in safeguarding, consent and assent procedures, confidentiality, and appropriate response protocols. CEI routinely works within school safeguarding frameworks and in close coordination with school staff to ensure qualitative activity is conducted responsibly and in line with institutional and regulatory requirements. We develop bespoke safeguarding protocols for each project, aligning with local procedures and policies within educational environments. All staff have training in safeguarding and we have a trained designated safeguarding lead.

Project Examples

Project	Partners	Phase/Year Group	Data Collection <i>(test name/s and type/s)</i>	Description <i>(including number of learners tested)</i>
Fluency Focus – pilot (EEF)	Charles Dickens Research School	Primary, Year 5	-Focus groups with primary age pupils -Interviews with staff -Observations -Surveys -Administrative data	20 schools, 1082 pupils, qualitative data collection was purposively sampled to represent ranges as appropriate
SPACE -pilot (EEF)	University of Surrey	Primary, Year 2	-Observations of training, support sessions, intervention delivery, and pupil assessments; -staff interviews -focus groups with the delivery team and school staff surveys	15 schools, 415 pupils, qualitative data collection was purposively sampled to represent ranges as appropriate
Multi-Site Trial: Short-Term Mentoring (YEF)	The Centre for Youth Impact at YMCA George Williams College; Bryson Purdon Social Research	School and community settings, aged 10-17 years	-Mentee survey -Mentor survey -In-depth interviews with managers, mentors and mentees	744 children from across England and Wales in 16 delivery organisations
Early education entitlements for disadvantaged	Centre for Education Policy and Equalising	Early years	Surveys, focus groups, interviews and workshops with parents and staff	Investigated drivers of take-up among disadvantaged families, identifying barriers like complex systems and provider business models

children (Nuffield Foundation)	Opportunities, UCL; Coram		Secondary analysis of national datasets	
Excluded initiative (The London Community Foundation, John Lyon's Charity, the Evening Standard)	<i>n/a</i>	Secondary school	School administrative data Qualitative interviews with teachers and pupils National datasets	Evaluation of 8 London schools' inclusion hubs, reaching 500 vulnerable children Comprehensive administrative data capture, supplemented with purposive qualitative sampling

For more examples of our research projects and experience, please see our website:
<https://www.ceiglobal.org/>