

AlphaPlus Consultancy Ltd. (part of AQA Global)

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Experience in Educational Data Collection

The AlphaPlus team has securely managed more than 60 data collection projects across a range of educational settings, delivering assessments to over a quarter of a million learners. We support assessment delivery for learners aged 4-19. As members of EEF's data collection panel, we have supported seven EEF evaluations for a range of clients with assessment delivery, collecting data from over 20,000 learners.

AlphaPlus has been appointed to deliver the International Early Learning Study (IELS) on behalf of the Department for Education and OECD, an international comparison study of children's learning and development at age 5. As National Centre, we were responsible for the direct assessment of 3,000 Early Years learners in 200 schools in England on tablets. Data from this study is used to inform government policy. We have also managed trials with a total of 30,000 learners on behalf of the Standards and Testing Agency.

In addition, we have delivered trials on behalf of:

- National governments, e.g. trialling national assessments with 85,000 learners on behalf of the Welsh Government
- Publishing clients to inform calibration of their standardised assessments, e.g. 140,000 on behalf of GL Assessment
- International trials, e.g. 5,000 learners as part of a national moral education programme in the UAE
- UK awarding organisations, e.g. 1,500 learners as part of a trial for OCR

All trialling work is undertaken with child safety and data security as the highest priorities.

We are able to deliver a wide range of assessment types in various subjects for learners aged 4-19, from traditional literacy and numeracy assessments delivered to a whole class simultaneously (PIRA, NGMT, etc.) to more technical, one-to-one assessments (BAS3, WIAT-III, KTEA-3) and focus groups. We also support schools through self-administration of assessments or surveys, providing technical support for digital assessments and organising shipping for paper measures.

Field Force Capacity and Expertise

- Number available - Database of over 1000 educational experts that we use for data collection projects. Recruited on demand and supported by permanent team (see above).
- Recruitment – All field staff have experience of in-school delivery (typically former teachers) and receive Enhanced DBS certification. Additional criteria depends on the project but could include experience with specific age groups, experience with SEND, experience with the assessment, or specific qualifications.
- Training & support - All field staff receive in-depth training before delivery (either virtual or in person, depending on project requirements). Attendance is mandatory and paid. In our experience, robust and comprehensive training is one of the most critical success factors for data collection projects. Training covers topics including role and expectations, details of assessment delivery, safeguarding, data security and GDPR, and contact information for our Service Desk team. Support from the service desk is available Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5pm. During the test administration window, the service desk team check in regularly with fieldworkers. Any questions are answered quickly and updates disseminated to all fieldworkers to ensure learning is shared.
- Geographical reach – We provide national coverage across the UK.

Communication Systems

Schools and settings:

Communication with schools – School communications are undertaken by our dedicated, permanent Service Desk team. Many of this team are former teachers – we understand in great detail the issues facing schools and how to support teachers. Our team is experienced at recruiting, supporting and sustaining participation of schools – initial contact, providing information, dealing with objections, explaining benefits, and giving the schools the confidence they will be properly supported.

Systems –

- We use the AlphaPlus-developed Microsoft Dynamics CRM to manage all aspects of school communication. All inbound and outbound communication by phone or email is initiated by and logged in CRM, providing school-level audit trail and reporting. Emails are accessed directly from CRM, along with notes from contact via other media, system-notes etc., to provide a timeline of communication with a school. Proforma template and mailmerge emails speed up communication.
- Data is shared via secure SharePoint site or via Wonde.

Evaluators:

- Communication – AlphaPlus has delivered over 500 projects for customers including DfE, STA and the Welsh and Scottish governments. We have robust processes for communicating with customers. We schedule weekly keep in touch (KIT) meetings during the test administration window. Our regular reports highlight how many assessments have been delivered and where, flagging any issues or concerns. Reports containing all key data are submitted weekly throughout the project and this can be increased to daily reporting during busy trialling periods.
- Issues – Issues are flagged and resolved quickly by the AlphaPlus team or escalated to partners for immediate action as required. We are typically able to resolve the vast majority of queries via our Service Desk function.

Quality Assurance Strategies

Almost all our trials are non-statutory, so minimising burden, and making the trials teacher- and pupil-centric, is critical. To improve response rates and prevent dropout:

- We begin communication with schools as early as possible.
- We reduce administrative burden via simple data forms or using software like Wonde
- We overrecruit fieldworkers so we can schedule data collection days to suit settings' availability.

Missing data/complications in data collection –

- Comprehensive training before delivery
- Give fieldworker opportunity to rectify
- Go back and re-deliver assessments
- Share issue and mitigation with all fieldworkers to prevent future issue

Data quality & accuracy –

- Make clear expectations for quality & accuracy, including explaining purpose of data collection
- Pay fieldworkers for their time spent on data entry
- Requirements for double marking/double data entry will be discussed with the customer but we can provide this

Capacity –

- We over-recruit and train fieldworkers so we have sufficient in case of last-minute drop out.

- We ensure geographic coverage with recruitment.
- We have a team of nine full time Service Desk members to manage trials. However we occasionally recruit and train staff on temporary contracts to support busy periods. We also draw on the wider AlphaPlus and AQA teams.

Project Leadership

We have a team of nine full time Service Desk members to deliver data protection projects. Pen portraits of key staff are included below.

Name & role	Experience
<p>Andy Lewis Deputy Director of Service</p>	<p>As AlphaPlus' Deputy Director of Services, Andy is a skilled field research manager and business professional, with over 20 years of experience in education in the UK and abroad. His key skills are organisational, communicative, logistical, commercial, marketing, staff recruitment and training, linguistic, team-building, welfare, people management and statutory regulation.</p> <p>Andy is an adaptable, determined and confident individual who embraces new challenges and thrives in a results-driven environment. He is currently managing service delivery of the National Standardised Assessments for Scotland. He is also leading a team to deliver a range of field research projects in the UK and abroad, including large-scale standardisation trials of new materials for GL Assessment and data collection for EEF research interventions. Andy also played a key role in the development and piloting of a new Moral Education Standardised Assessment in the UAE.</p>
<p>Gerallt Hughes Trials Manager</p>	<p>As Trialling Manager, Gerallt leads the Trialling team to ensure that projects are implemented to time, budget and quality, supporting a range of projects over their lifecycle. He has worked across a range of projects in an educational and vocational setting.</p> <p>Gerallt joined AlphaPlus in January 2018, having previously worked in a variety of project management and programming roles within the cultural sector. While at AlphaPlus, Gerallt has worked on the Welsh Government's National Literacy and Numeracy Program, playing a key role in recruiting schools to trial paper-based and online assessments in English, Maths and Welsh. He has been responsible for several successful trials for organisations such as GL Assessment and Standards and Testing Agency - coordinating with schools and delivering on the recruitment targets set by the client.</p>

Name & role	Experience
	<p>Gerallt is also skilled in design and illustration packages and has worked on a variety of images and layouts for online questions and materials for the Moral Education Standardised Assessment, UAE, British Council, India and for the Scottish National Standardised Assessments, Scottish Government.</p>
<p>Sophie Woodall Service Desk Manager</p>	<p>Sophie joined AlphaPlus in September 2021 as the Service Desk Manager. She leads a high-performing service desk team which supports schools and local authorities across Scotland to access online assessments as part of the National Standardised Assessments (NSA). She delivers exceptional customer service and develops continual improvements to the service desk as well as the online assessment platform which are tailored to queries raised by users.</p> <p>Users have consistently praised the service desk experience: the service desk achieved a 94% satisfaction rating in the last academic year.</p>
<p>Serena Idris Trialling Project Manager</p>	<p>As Trialling Project Manager, Serena delivers a range of data collection projects including several as part of EEF evaluations. She was also central to the delivery of the International Early Learning Study on behalf of OECD and DfE. Serena's role involves recruiting and training fieldworkers, overseeing assessment delivery and quality assurance. Serena has vast experience in the education sector having previously worked as a Secondary School Science teacher with a wide range of students.</p>

Additional Data Services Offered

Additional services include:

- Marking & data entry
- Support for self-administration of tests by schools
- Data cleaning
- Sampling
- Research support – we have a team of eight qualitative and quantitative researchers in house

Cost Model and Pricing Structure

All quotes and proposals are created in discussion with customers. As a commercial organisation, we understand the need to deliver value for money. We provide detailed quotes with a breakdown of task costs, man days, day rates and expenses, and clearly list out any assumptions we have made. Key considerations in the development of costs include:

- Number of schools/settings and location
- Assessment type – amount of testing time per learner/school, whether any specific qualifications or experience is needed for delivery
- Paper-based or digital delivery
- Length of assessment delivery window – a shorter window means more fieldworkers need to be recruited and trained
- Whether mop-ups are needed – we often cost for a fixed proportion which we can use as necessary e.g. doing mop-up days for schools in specific areas.

We charge VAT.

Data Protection

AlphaPlus is:

- registered with Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) as data controllers and processors
- Cyber Essentials Plus certified
- ISO27001 accredited
- approved by national organisations in UK and overseas for processing personal data of students (e.g. Our team has ONS Safe Researcher accreditation and our office is approved as a remote access site for ONS Secure Research Service)
- approved for projects involving secure pupil and school data processing for clients such as DfE, STA, Scottish Government, Welsh Government, WJEC, IBO and SQA.

Our Information Systems and Data Security (ISDS) Policy meets GDPR requirements for volume processing of sensitive personal data (a high threshold of security) and relevant projects are reviewed as a Management Board agenda item. All staff are

- trained on ISDS and Privacy Policy (at induction and periodically)
- DBS cleared and sign to confirm understanding of their role and responsibilities.

All data is stored on our secure SharePoint site. All fieldworkers are trained on data security and GDPR at project outset.

Safeguarding

Our safeguarding policy (provided on request) has been reviewed and signed off by the EEF. This is the same process used in the delivery of high stakes data collection including DfE's International Early Learning Study. Andy Lewis, Deputy Director of Service, is our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

All TAs read the safeguarding policy and receive training on the process to follow in case of a disclosure or any concerns arising from interactions in schools or when reviewing written responses.

Project Examples

Project	Partners	Phase/Year Group	Data Collection (test name/s and type/s)	Description (including number of learners tested)
International Early Learning Study (IELS) on behalf of OECD and DfE		Early Years	Bespoke assessment, delivered 1:1 via tablet	Direct assessment of 3,000 Early Years learners in 200 schools in England on tablets
EEF evaluation with Manchester Metropolitan University – PALS second trial		Year 5	WIAT-III UK-T: reading comprehension and oral reading fluency subtest Multi-dimensional Fluency Scale (MDFS) Support with school self-administration of PIRA tests and questionnaire on children’s feelings about reading and reading self-efficacy	1060 (ten learners per school in 106 schools)
EEF evaluation with NatCen - Focus4TAPS		Year 5	Administration and marking of a science assessment, including double marking	7,500 learners in 300 schools
Standards and Testing Agency - KS1 and KS2 Technical Pre Tests, and KS2 Item Validation Trials	Civica, SCD	KS1 & KS2	Administration of paper-based tests, plus marking, to support trialling of SATs	26,000 learners in over 1,000 schools
Trials for GL Assessment		Primary and secondary	Supporting paper-based and digital trials of reading, numeracy and science assessments, plus marking services	Over 140,000 learners
Recruitment of FE learners for OCR		FE	Recruiting FE learners to trial functional skills tests on behalf of OCR and supporting test completion	8,100 learners

<p>Help desk support for national assessments in Wales & Scotland</p>	<p>WJEC (Wales only)</p>	<p>Primary and secondary</p>	<p>The AlphaPlus service desk team provide support for onscreen national assessments to teachers, learners and school leaders in Wales and Scotland</p>	<p>3 million assessments are taken each year by students in over 4,000 schools. In 21-22, the team delivering this service received (and swiftly resolved) over 10,000 calls and emails.</p>
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