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Evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination

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Achievement for All

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Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Research aim

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation commissioned by the Department for Education into the effectiveness and impact of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination ("the Award") on Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), school leaders, teachers, pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their parents/carers.

Research design and data collection

- The study was designed to access the maximum number of views on the National Award for SEN Coordination within the short project timeframe. To comply with survey distribution data protection requirements, which do not allow unsolicited approaches, invitations to complete the school survey were sent to 57,616 individuals who had subscribed to a database of school contacts set up by Achievement for All, and invitations to complete the parent/carer survey were sent to those who had given permission to be contacted in over 500 schools that were running the Achievement for All programme. The invitation was then publicised through social media, with a link to the survey. This means that the research does not claim to be representative of those groups, but reflects the views of those who were included in and/or motivated to respond to the survey invitation.

- Data were collected through online surveys and telephone interviews. We received 1,109 responses to the school survey sent to SENCOs, school leaders and teachers. A total of 532 parents/carers responded to the parent survey, and a total of 90 pupils responded to the two pupil surveys. The latter were designed to enable pupils of different ages and with different communication needs and levels of reading confidence to participate in the research. All surveys included rating tasks, which were subject to quantitative analysis, and open-ended comments, which were analysed thematically.

- Twenty SENCOs were interviewed to allow the research team a greater understanding of the process of undertaking the Award, including the challenges and any wider facilitating factors for and/or impacts of completing the Award.

- Fifteen parents/carers were interviewed about their knowledge of the Award, and were asked if their child's school SENCO had achieved the Award. They were then invited to share their experiences about the type of support they and their child had received from the school.

- Data analysis was framed around the Award Learning Outcomes of Professional Knowledge and Understanding; Leading and Coordinating Provision; and Personal and Professional Qualities.

- There is statistically-significant evidence that a majority of Award-holders and trainees felt that the Award increased their confidence in some aspects of all three domains of Professional Knowledge and Understanding; Leading and Coordinating Provision; and Personal and Professional Qualities.

- The aspects where the highest proportion of respondents reported increased confidence were:

Professional Knowledge and Understanding
- understanding the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND
- understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning

Leading and Coordinating Provision
- coordinating provision for pupils with SEND
- working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos
- ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND.

Personal and Professional Qualities.
- ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing

- In a further seven aspects, concerned mainly with more practical aspects of the SENCO role, about half of respondents reported that that the Award had made them either 'a lot' or 'quite a lot' more confident. This includes ratings of confidence in 'ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing'.

- The Award's apparent greater effectiveness in increasing confidence in working with parents, in comparison with developing pupil voice, merits further investigation. Both aspects of practice are prominent in the current Code of Practice and, as shown below, these aspects of provision were adjudged deficient by around a third of parents and pupils in our sample.

- Although still rated highly by a third or more of respondents, the lowest ratings overall were given to 'modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practices for pupils with SEND'. These both require the SENCO to work directly with teachers in their schools to change their practice.

- Analysis of the open-ended survey questions from SENCO Award-holders confirmed and illuminated the findings of the statistical analysis. The diversity of the responses reflected the number and diversity of the Award's Learning Outcomes and the range of different professional contexts from which respondents undertook the Award training. Four case studies, drawn from telephone interviews with SENCOs, illustrate the complex interaction of factors on their Award experiences. These include policy

and school context, Award delivery, the timing of the Award in their professional career, and the personal attributes that they brought to the training.

- Award-holding survey respondents commented on aspects of course delivery that allowed them to reflect on their SENCO role. These included discussion and sharing practice with other SENCOs, academic study and tasks, and the taught sessions. Some commented on the challenges of completing Master's level study with their employment in school and, in the light of the extra workload, a few respondents questioned the need for the Award to be at Master's level.

- Trainees reported that they valued Award training specifically for broadening their policy and theoretical knowledge of SEND, giving them specific information that was relevant to the practical elements of the SENCO role, and focusing their attention on strategic leadership. The aspects of course delivery that were reported as the 'most helpful' were networking and sharing practice with other SENCOs, the quality of the taught sessions, and the usefulness of assignments in enhancing their professional learning and practice.

- Trainees reported that the 'least useful' aspects of Award training were managing the combined workload of employment and the Award requirements, writing assignments, and an emphasis on theory. In some cases these three challenges were interlinked, particularly if respondents were unable to see a connection between the task they had been set and the nature of their SENCO role.

- Issues that SENCOs thought should be addressed in the Award in future included practical advice that was applicable to the SENCO role; budget management and funding training; working with outside agencies; supporting pupils; training, supporting and managing staff; and understanding/implementing current legislation.

Key findings: school staff

- School staff who were not SENCOs were asked for their views of the support provided to them by their SENCO. The majority of respondents knew if their school SENCO had achieved the Award or not. A large majority reported that their SENCO supported them in almost all aspects of Professional Learning and Understanding; Leading and Coordinating Provision; and Personal and Professional Qualities. The SENCO's role in working with parents/carers was the aspect most often highly rated by school staff respondents; other highly-rated aspects were concerned with working strategically to develop support systems, both within and beyond the school, followed by supporting pupils' learning and progress.

- The two aspects that received the lowest ratings overall from school staff were 'modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers

to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND'. These reflect the two aspects of the Award that were given the lowest ratings by SENCOs.

- Although there were no consistent differences in responses from staff reporting that their SENCO did or did not have the Award, this is not surprising because of the great variation in levels of experience between non-Award-holding SENCOs. This group includes SENCOs new to the role and currently undergoing training but also highly experienced and well-qualified SENCOs in post since 2008 and therefore not required to achieve the Award.

- SEND issues that school staff thought should be addressed in the Award in future included financial management and funding training; supporting pupils; up-to-date evidence based interventions and strategies; teaching and learning for pupils with SEND; and encouraging parent, carer and pupil voice.

Key findings: parents/carers

- The majority of parents/carers who responded to the survey did not know if their child's school SENCO held the Award. Most parent interviewees reported that they had not heard of the Award before completing the survey.

- The aspects of the SENCO role most often identified as helpful by parents/carers were related to their experiences of their child's SENCO organising review meetings, involving external agencies and organising classroom support. These mostly mirror those that were highly rated by school staff, namely 'ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND', 'drawing on external sources of support' and 'coordinating provision for pupils with SEND'. There was less agreement over the SENCO's role in working with parents/carers; while about a half of the parents/carers in our sample felt that they were considered an equal partner, over a third felt that they were 'hardly/not at all' considered as an equal partner in supporting their child's achievement or wellbeing.

Key findings: pupils

- Around half of the pupils in our sample felt that they were able to get help at least some of the time at school, and that this help came mainly from staff at school or from family.

- The majority of responding pupils had some opportunity to talk about their learning and their plans. However, about a third of pupils in our sample did not feel supported, and did not have opportunities to have their voices heard. This was an aspect of the Award which was rated highly by relatively few Award holders and trainees.

Recommendations

Research participants have reported challenges with undertaking and completing the Award, and it is from these that we make the following suggestions.

Government

We suggest that government might consider:

- A ring-fenced element in the funding formula for schools that includes funding for Award training and continuing professional development for SENCOs. This will assist schools in establishing secure succession plans for their SENCO.
- Finding ways to ensure that the SENCO is part of the school senior leadership team. Currently this is not a requirement.
- Funding for national and local SENCO networks to provide:
  - support for potentially isolated SENCOs
  - up to date information on external agencies
  - up to date guidance on interventions to support a wide range of pupil needs in schools.

Award providers

We suggest that Award providers might consider:

- Providing the Department for Education and schools with a realistic estimate of the time needed to complete the Award training.
- Offering a personalised Award delivery that could include opportunities for specialist modules, take account of trainees' previous experience and offer flexible dates for assignment submission.
- Monitoring course content regularly to ensure balanced coverage of the Award Learning Outcomes, particularly in those areas identified as less confidence-building by survey respondents
- Designing course assignments so that trainees can link the academic study directly to their own school practice.
- Embedding opportunities in the course for SENCOs to develop/maintain networks of SENCOs and of local external agencies.

Schools

We suggest that schools might consider:

- Automatically appointing the trained SENCO to the senior leadership team.
- Ensuring that trainees have sufficient time allocated to undertake the work involved in training for the Award.
- Setting up effective mentoring support for Award trainees.
- Supporting potential trainees to identify a feasible time in which to undertake the training.
- Encouraging a potential SENCO to shadow an experienced SENCO before commencing training for the Award.

- Encouraging a potential SENCO to spend time in a range of different types of school to broaden their experience of SEND.
- Ensuring the opportunity for further professional development following achievement of the Award by including aspects of the Learning Outcomes (e.g. managing staff and resources) in SENCO appraisals.
- Working with SENCOs to develop an awareness from all teachers that responsibility for SEND starts in every classroom and includes enabling parent, carer and pupil voice.
- Protecting time for the SENCO to engage in SENCO and external agency networks.

Individuals

We suggest that individuals might consider:
- Planning ways to manage the extra workload in advance of commencing training.
- Being prepared to be a strategic leader, who enters into equal partnership with parents and carers, and ensures pupils are able to influence decisions about their learning and wellbeing.
- In the school context, working closely with senior leaders to organise the Award training and subsequent development of the SENCO role.
- Adopting a professional enquiry approach that encourages regular reflection on the effectiveness of SEND provision in school.
- Looking out for opportunities to network with other SENCOs and people from external agencies.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a large-scale evaluation study of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination, commissioned by the Department for Education as part of the project to *Support the National Award for SEN Coordination and Review the SEN Coordination Role in the Early Years and Post-16 Sectors.* Plymouth University, one of the leading modern universities in the UK, conducted this phase of the study as part of the consortium led by Achievement for All.

The aims of this introductory section are to:
- Set out the objectives of the evaluation
- Provide an outline of the research design
- Provide a summary of the data analysis.

1.1 Research objectives

The objectives of the research, as outlined in the tender document, were to:
- conduct an independent evaluation of the effectiveness and impact of the National Award for SEN Coordination (hereinafter 'the Award') on SENCOs, school leaders and teachers, pupils with SEND and their parents/carers
- make recommendations for improvements.

1.2 Research design

The research was conducted between June – November 2016 and consisted of three online surveys and interviews with a small number of SENCOs and parents. Ethical approval was granted for the research by the Plymouth Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee.

In collaboration with Achievement for All, the Award provider group and the Department for Education, we designed surveys for:
- i. schools, that aimed to capture the views of SENCOs, headteachers, school leaders who were not headteachers, and teachers who were not members of the senior leadership team on the Award
- ii. parents/carers, designed to capture the views of parents who had children with SEND
- iii. pupils, for respondents with SEND. These allowed for two different levels of communication ability, and were to be completed with familial support.

All surveys were piloted with school staff, with parents of children with special educational needs and disability (SEND), and with children with SEND, and appropriate changes made to the surveys before they were opened.

The study was designed to access the maximum number of views on the National Award for SEN Coordination within the short project timeframe. To comply with survey distribution data protection requirements, which do not allow unsolicited approaches, invitations to complete

the school survey were sent to 57,616 individuals who had subscribed to a database of school contacts set up by Achievement for All, and invitations to complete the parent/carer survey were sent to those who had given permission to be contacted in over 500 schools that were running the Achievement for All programme. The invitation was then publicised through social media, with a link to the survey. This means that the research does not claim to be representative of those groups, but reflects the views of those who were included in and/or motivated to respond to the survey invitation.

School surveys

School survey respondents were divided into Award-holders, non-Award holders and trainees; into SENCOs and non-SENCOs; and by the role of headteacher, senior leader or teacher. Respondents were also asked if their school was obliged to employ a SENCO. Each group had a separate pathway through the survey to allow a wide range of views to be accessed, as we anticipated that the responses of a SENCO Award-holding headteacher could be very different to those from a non-SENCO teacher in training for the Award. Survey respondents were asked to complete a number of rating tasks on a Likert-type scale that related to the three different domains of the Award's Learning Outcomes: Professional Knowledge and Understanding (PKU), Leading and Coordinating Provision (LCP), and Personal and Professional Qualities (PPQ) (NCTL, 2014[1]). Questions for Award-holders and trainees focused on the effectiveness of the Award in making the respondent more confident in these three domains; questions for non-Award-holders invited respondents to rate the support of their SENCO in the same domains. We have not included a copy of the school survey in the Appendices because of the number and complexity of the different pathways[2].

These rating tasks were followed in all cases by one or more open-ended questions that asked about a variety of different aspects of the Award:

- Headteachers' succession plans (if any) and funding policy relating to the Award.
- Award-holders' views on how/if the Award had enabled them to reflect on their role; if/how the Award had resulted in career progression; if the Award reflected the needs of SENCOs working in academies and multi-academy trusts; the most important SEND issues that should be included in the training.
- Non-SENCO Award holders were asked why they achieved the Award, and if they wished to become a SENCO in the future; SENCOs who did not hold the Award were asked if they would consider training and the reasons for their decision.

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[1] National College for Teaching and Leadership (2014) *National Award for SEN Coordination Learning Outcomes*, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-award-for-sen-co-ordination-learning-outcomes.

[2] If you would like a copy of the school survey, please email a request either to Rowena Passy R.Passy@plymouth.ac.uk or Jan Georgeson janet.georgeson@plymouth.ac.uk.

- Non-SENCO respondents who did not hold the Award were asked if they would consider taking the Award in future and the reasons for their decision.
- Award trainees were asked why they were training for the Award; the most/least helpful part of their training thus far; if the Award reflected the needs of SENCOs working in academies and multi-academy trusts; the most important SEND issues that should be included in the training.
- Respondents whose school did not employ a SENCO and had not achieved the Award were asked if they had any comment to make about the Award.
- All participants were asked if they had any final comments.

Figure 1: Distribution of school survey respondents
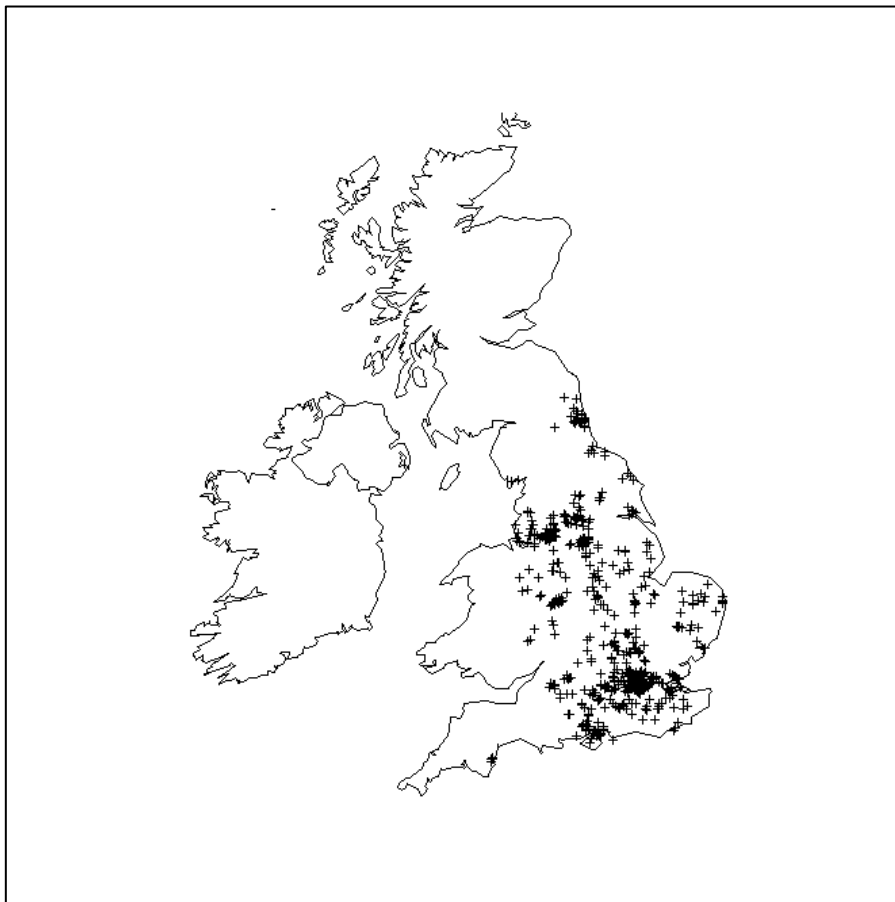
All rating tasks and almost all open-ended questions were compulsory in order that we could access the maximum amount of information possible about the Award.

The database supplied by Achievement for All provided information on the individual's email, their school's unique reference number (URN) and type, enabling us to divide responses into four school groups for analysis purposes (primary/secondary/special/other; 'other' included all-through schools, pupil referral units and alternative provision), and to track the number of responses from each school. Respondents completed the survey anonymously, and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. We anticipated that the survey would take

around ten minutes to complete, but estimate from the level of detail in many responses that a high number of respondents took longer.

Two further invitations to participate were sent at an interval of one week. To maximise response rates, the survey was publicised through Achievement for All's website, the SENCO forum and a Twitter campaign run by Achievement for All. Plymouth University is part of the South West Consortium providers so, to ensure independence of the respondents, invitations were not sent to schools in West Country local authorities. We assume that the very small number of respondents (n=5) from the West Country completed the survey because of the publicity on these media.

The survey was open from 4th July – 2nd August, although there were very few responses after 21st July (end of term). Altogether we received 1,109 responses. Figure 1 below shows the geographical distribution of these responses.

Parent/carer survey

The parent/carer survey (see Appendix 1) mirrored the school survey questions on the domains of PKU, LCP and PPQ, but had a stronger emphasis on the practical role of the SENCO in their child's school. Respondents were asked the type of school their child attended; the category of the child's SEND[3]; whether they knew if the school's SENCO had achieved the Award; the level of knowledge that the SENCO displayed; the practical arrangements that had supported their child (or not); and about opportunities for parent/carer and pupil voice. The final questions invited respondents to comment on what the school needed to understand to support their child's learning, whether this was well understood already, and to leave any final comments. Respondents completed the survey anonymously, and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

In order to maximise the number of responses, the survey was designed for mobile devices and so had simple multiple choice questions with all options visible at the same time, and questions that were distributed over multiple, short pages. It could be completed in ten minutes. Invitations to complete the surveys were sent to parents/carers who had given permission to be contacted in over 500 schools were running the Achievement for All programme; surveys were publicised through Achievement for All's website and the SENCO forum, and a Twitter campaign run by Achievement for All was set up to encourage parents/carers to respond. A total of 532 parents/carers responded between 18th July – 11th September.

Parents/carers were asked in the survey invitation email if they would support their child/ren with SEND in completing a pupil survey. Detailed guidance was attached to the email to support parents/carers in this process (see Appendix 2). In summary, the guidance suggested that the parent/carer should:

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[3] Department for Education (2016) *Statistical educational needs in England: January 2016*, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2016.

- Prompt but not lead (when talking about the answers)
- Emphasise there were no right or wrong answers
- Keep telling the child that their views were important
- Stop if the child became upset.

Pupil surveys

The aim of the pupil surveys was to access students' views on the levels of support that they were experiencing in school. In order to accommodate different communication abilities, we designed two surveys; one had a greater number of more detailed questions for more confident readers, and the other had straightforward questions with Widgit© symbols for those who were less confident or preferred to use symbols (see Appendices 3 and 4). Once again, respondents completed the survey anonymously, and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Fifty-eight young people responded to the first survey, and 32 to the second between 18th July – 11th September.

SENCO interviews

In order to provide further detailed information on Award experiences, we conducted 20 interviews with SENCOs. Potential interviewees were invited to leave their contact details through a secure link that was separate from their survey responses. In total, 82 survey respondents submitted their contact details.

We contacted those who responded immediately, in waves of five, until we filled the quota of 20. Respondents were emailed to set up a time and date for the interview, which was then conducted on the telephone. Interviewees were asked if they would give permission for the interview to be recorded, and were then invited to tell us in detail about their experiences of the Award including the challenges and any wider facilitating factors and/or impacts (see Appendix 5). All interviews were then transcribed. Those who gave us their details but we did not interview were thanked through email for their interest.

Parent/carer interviews

At the end of the survey, parents/carers were invited to send us their contact details if they were prepared to discuss any issues relating to the SENCO role with us; 57 responded, and we contacted the first 15 to set up an interview, using the same procedures as with SENCO interviewees. Parents /carers were asked about their knowledge of the SENCO Award, if their child's SENCO had achieved the Award, and then to tell us about the support that they and their child received from the school. The final question concerned interviewees' expectations of a 'good SENCO' (see Appendix 6).

1.3 Analysing the data

Data analysis examined the views of different groups of research participants within the framework of the three Learning Outcomes domains of PKU, LCP and PPQ. For SENCOs who had achieved the Award, we considered the effectiveness of the Award in increasing confidence in particular aspects of these domains. We examined the data from SENCOs who had not achieved the Award and school staff in the same way, but the focus of the

questions was first, on the potential benefit for SENCOs in achieving the Award and secondly, for the extent to which they felt supported by their SENCOs. Parent/carer surveys were analysed to explore their perspectives on SENCO practice within the same broad domains.

For the rating task data, we undertook quantitative analysis on those survey responses that were complete; for the analysis of the qualitative data from open-ended survey questions, we included all responses to each question (regardless of whether the survey had been completed or not), and coded responses thematically. Interview data were transcribed and coded thematically. This approach has enabled us to report by group and sub-group and, where salient, we have made comparisons between groups.

Each of the following sections begins with a description of the type of data used together with the analysis methods for that part of the dataset.

2. Effectiveness of the SENCO Award: SENCO views

In this section we examine survey responses about the effect of the Award on SENCOs' professional development. We focus on responses from SENCOs with the Award and those in training for the Award, and who were working in schools that employed a SENCO.

2.1 Description of survey rating task data

We received 1,109 responses to the online survey for school staff, 986 of which were complete. Only complete responses were used in the quantitative analysis that follows in this section of the report. A further 52 responses were removed because they were from staff working in schools that did not employ a SENCO. Quantitative analysis was therefore carried out on 934 completed responses from mainstream schools in England that employed a SENCO.

Of these 934 responses, 111 were headteachers, 524 were members of the school leadership team but not headteachers (senior leaders), and the remaining 299 were teachers not in the school leadership team. Six hundred and ninety-one respondents were SENCOs and 243 were not. Table 1 below shows respondents' distribution across these three school roles.

Table 1: Survey respondents' school role

Role/SENCO status	SENCO	Non-SENCO	Total
Headteachers	29	82	111
Senior leaders	434	90	524
Teachers	228	71	299
Total	**691 (74%)**	**243 (26%)**	**934**

N=934

Of the 691 SENCOs who responded to the survey, 405 (59 per cent) had already gained the Award, 118 (17 per cent) were currently training for the Award and 168 (24 per cent) did not have the Award. Table 2 below shows their distribution across school roles.

Table 2: SENCO survey respondents' Award status

Role/Award status	Yes	Training	No
Headteachers	6	1	22
Senior leaders	266	75	93
Teachers	133	42	53
Total	**405* (59%)**	**118 (17%)**	**168 (24%)**

N=691

*Note that one respondent replied that they did not hold the Award. However, they answered all questions relevant to both Award holders and non-Award holders. These responses are included in the following calculations for both categories, and as a result the total number of responses for Award holders in the following is taken to be 406. The inclusion of the individual, who in one of the open-ended responses explained why they had started but not completed their training for the Award, does not affect any of the conclusions drawn (we ran a sensitivity analysis with and without the individual included).

2.2 Analysis of rating task responses

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the Award had made them more confident in different aspects of the three domains related to the Learning Outcomes addressed by the Award, namely:

- professional knowledge and understanding (five aspects);
- leading and coordinating provision (seven aspects);
- personal and professional qualities (two aspects),

using a Likert-type rating scale of 'a lot', 'quite a lot', 'a little', 'not at all' or 'not sure' (or, in the case of Award trainees, 'not yet covered'). This produced rating profiles for each aspect of each domain, showing how many respondents had selected each point on the rating scale.

In each of the three domains, we combined responses to look for indications of differences between groups in the effectiveness of the Award in improving SENCOs' confidence. We compared responses between SENCO Award-holders and trainees, between school types (primary/secondary/special/other) and between staff category (headteacher/senior leader/ teacher); there was no evidence of a statistically significant difference between computed means/medians in any of the three domains (all p-values >0.05 using ANOVA and Kruskal Wallis tests). This suggests that effectiveness of the Award is not affected by school type or school staff category, and that Award-holders and trainees agreed on the effectiveness of the Award in increasing their confidence.

To decide whether there was evidence of positive effect of reported improvements in Award holder/trainee confidence in each domain, we performed a one sample t-test for the mean rating in each domain, where the null hypothesis was that this mean was equal to 2.5 (i.e. at the midpoint between 'a lot'/'quite a lot' and 'a little'/'not at all') and the alternative was that the mean was higher than 2.5. In the instances where evidence against the null hypothesis was found, an increase in confidence was concluded. The Wilcoxon Signed rank test, comparing the median of a sample to a hypothesised median value was also used, as the non-parametric equivalent of the t-test. This, in all cases, confirmed the robustness of our conclusions to the assumption of normality of the scores. The results of these tests are reported at the beginning of sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.3 below.

There were, however, variations in response profiles for individual aspects within each domain covered by the Award. The analyses below focus on ratings of confidence in each aspect of the Award by SENCOs with the Award (n=406) and by SENCOs training for the Award (n=118). Our analysis was designed to consider variations in the rating profiles in a simple but statistically valid way. We aimed to discover which aspects of the Award were effective by identifying those aspects where the majority of respondents reported that it had made them 'a lot' or 'quite a lot' more confident. We amalgamated frequencies of 'a lot' and 'quite a lot' responses and compared these with amalgamated frequencies of 'a little', 'not at all', 'not sure' and 'not yet covered' rating points, using Chi square tests. There were very few 'not sure' (15 from 406 participants) or 'not yet covered' (52 from 118 participants) responses overall, so for brevity we will refer to 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' in the

comparisons that follow. Rates of 'not sure' and 'not yet covered' responses are mentioned when there was more than one instance of such a response; these tended to occur in aspects that were not rated as increasing confidence 'a lot' or 'quite a lot' by a majority of respondents, that is in aspects which were rated as less effective in increasing confidence.

Where proportions of 'a lot'/'quite a lot' and 'a little'/'not at all' were not significantly different, we carried out a second comparison between 'a little' and 'not at all' responses, to ascertain whether the Award was leading to 'a little' more confidence or none at all for the majority of these respondents.

2.2.1 Professional knowledge and understanding

The data show **statistically-significant evidence** that overall **the Award has a positive effect** on self-reported confidence in **professional knowledge and understanding** (PKU) for Award-holders and for trainees (one sample t-tests; $p=0.000$ in both cases).

Respondents were asked, 'To what extent has the Award made you more confident in the following aspects:

    i.   Understanding the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND?
    ii.   Understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning?
    iii. Developing strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND?
    iv. Supporting the identification of pupils' special educational needs?
    v.   Developing effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND?'

Approximately **two-thirds of Award-holding respondents** reported that the Award **increased their confidence 'a lot'/'quite a lot' in two aspects** of this domain in comparison with those reporting 'a little'/'not at all':

- Understanding the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND (71.4 per cent vs. 28.6 per cent; $p=0.000$: n=406)
- Understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning (63.1 per cent vs. 36.9 per cent; $p=0.000$: n=406).

There was **similarly clear evidence from trainees** that the Award was increasing their confidence in these two aspects:

- Understanding the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND (72.0 per cent vs. 28.0 per cent; $p=0.000$: n=118)
- Understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning (67.8 per cent vs. 32.2 per cent; $p<0.001$: n=118).

These two aspects represent the underpinning theoretical and legislative knowledge that is needed to carry out the SENCO role.

Roughly **equal proportions of SENCOs** reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' or 'a little'/'not at all' more confident in **three further aspects**:

- Developing strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND (53.0 per cent vs. 47.0 per cent; p=0.107: n=406*)*
- Supporting the identification of pupils' SEN (52.0 per cent vs. 48.0 per cent p=0.292: n=406)
- Developing effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND (53.0 per cent vs. 47.0 per cent; p=0.107: n=406).

However significantly higher proportions of SENCO Award-holders reported that the Award made them 'a little' more confident in these three aspects than reported 'not at all':

- Developing strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND (33.3 per cent vs. 13.0 per cent; p=0.000: n=191)
- Supporting the identification of pupils' SEN (35.5 per cent vs. 15.0 per cent p=0.000: n=195).
- Developing effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND (35.8 per cent vs. 15.9 per cent; p=0.000: n=191).

The **rating profiles for trainees** in these three aspects were **broadly similar** to Award-holders, in that roughly equal proportions reported that the Award training made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' or 'a little'/'not at all' more confident. However, in the case of:

- 'Developing strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND', a larger proportion of trainee respondents reported that the Award was making them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' more confident than reported 'a little', 'not at all' or 'not yet covered' (57.6 per cent vs. 42.4 per cent; p=0.013: n=118).
- 'Supporting the identification of pupils' SEN', there was no evidence of a difference between the proportions of respondents who reported 'a little' and no effect (26.3 per cent vs. 19.5 per cent; p=0.896: n=54).

These three aspects can be related more directly to practical aspects of the everyday work of the SENCO in comparison with the more abstract aspects of understanding statutory responsibilities and how SEND can affect pupils' learning.

For each item in PKU, three or four trainees (three to four per cent) reported that that particular aspect had not yet been covered on their course.

2.2.2 Leading and coordinating SEND provision

The data also show **statistically-significant evidence** that overall the **Award has a positive effect** in self-reported confidence in **leading and coordinating SEND provision** (LCP) for Award-holders and for trainees (one sample t-tests; p=0.000 in both cases).

Survey participants were asked, 'To what extent has the Award made you more confident in the following aspects:

    i.   Working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos at your school?'

    ii.   Modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND?'

    iii.   Managing staff to ensure efficient use of resources to improve SEND pupils' progress?'

    iv.   Encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND?'

    v.   Drawing on external sources of support when appropriate for pupils with SEND?'

    vi.   Ensuring that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND?'

    vii.   Coordinating provision for pupils with SEND?'

In this domain, there were **three aspects** in which a **substantial majority** of **Award-holding SENCOs** reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' more confident in comparison to 'a little'/'not at all'. These were:

- coordinating provision for pupils with SEND (64.8 per cent vs. 35.2 per cent; p=0.000: n=406)
- working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos (62.1 per cent vs. 37.9 per cent; p=0.000: n=406)
- ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND (60.6 per cent vs. 39.4 per cent; p<0.001: n=406).

We found **similar patterns** of responses from **Award trainees** in these three aspects, in which a substantial majority reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' more confident in comparison to 'a little'/'not at all'*:*

- coordinating provision for pupils with SEND (64.8 per cent vs. 35.2 per cent; p<0.001*: n=118)*
- working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos (60.2 per cent vs. 39.8 per cent; p=0.001: n=118)
- ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND (65.3 per cent vs. 34.7 per cent; p<0.001: n=118).

These can be related to the more strategic elements of the SENCO role and are underpinned by the two aspects of PKU (see Section 2.2.1) in which a large majority of Award-holder and trainee respondents reported an increase in confidence.

A **small majority** of **Award-holding SENCOs** reported that the Award had increased their confidence 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' in:

- managing staff to ensure efficient use of resources SEND (54.2 per cent vs. 45.8 per cent; p=0.010: n=406)

- drawing on external sources of support when appropriate (54.2 per cent vs. 45.8 per cent; p=0.010: n=406).

Trainees responded in a similar manner in these two aspects:
- managing staff to ensure efficient use of resources (52.5 per cent vs 47.5 per cent: p=0.515: n=118)
- drawing on external sources of support when appropriate (55.9 per cent vs. 44.1 per cent: p=0.045: n=118).

Both of these aspects draw on interpersonal skills, for example managing teaching assistants or seeking advice from other professionals, where self-confidence plays an important role.

Roughly equal proportions of **Award-holding SENCOs** reported that the Award had made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' more confident in:
- modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND (47.8 per cent vs. 52.2 per cent; p=0.233: n=406).

However significantly more SENCO Award-holders reported that the Award made them 'a little' more confident in this aspect than reported 'not at all' (36.3 per cent vs.15 per cent; p=0.000: n=212), while two respondents (0.5 per cent) were not sure.

Fewer **trainees** reported that the Award had made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' more confident than reported 'a little' or 'not at all' (42.4 per cent vs. 57.6 per cent; p=0.010), with five trainees (4.2 per cent) reporting that this aspect had not yet been covered. Again, this aspect of practice entails performance in front of colleagues and the need for a high level of confidence is understandable.

One-third of **SENCO Award-holders** reported that they felt 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' confident in:
- encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practices for pupils with SEND (34.0 per cent vs. 66.0 per cent; p=0.000: n=406), while six respondents (1.5 per cent) were not sure.

Trainees reported similar proportions for this aspect of the training, with 32.2 per cent indicating that they felt that the training had increased their confidence 'a lot'/'quite a lot', compared with 67.8 per cent reporting that it had increased their confidence 'a little' or 'not at all' (p=0.000: n=118). This was also the aspect with the highest percentage of trainees reporting that the training had helped 'not at all' (22.8 per cent; n=27) with their confidence. Five trainees (4.2 per cent) reported this aspect had not yet been covered.

Discussion with providers of training for the Award suggests that their emphasis during Award courses was more on professional enquiry than action research, so this pattern of responses is perhaps not surprising.

For each LCP item except 'encouraging teachers to use action research …' (see above), between two to five trainees (two to four per cent) reported that that particular aspect had not yet been covered on their course.

2.2.3 Personal and professional qualities

As with the previous two domains of the Award, the data show **statistically-significant evidence** that the **Award has a positive effect overall** in improving self-reported confidence in selected aspects of practice related to **personal and professional qualities** (PPQ), for Award-holders and for trainees (one sample t-tests; p=0.000 in both cases).

Participants were invited to respond to the question, 'To what extent has the Award made you more confident in:
>   i.   ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing?
>   ii.   ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing?'

The majority of **Award-holding SENCOs** reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' more confident in:
- ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing (60.6 per cent vs. 39.4 per cent; p=0.000: n=406).

A similar majority of **trainees** reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all' more confident (58.5 per cent vs. 41.5 per cent; p=0.007: n=118) in this aspect of their role.

Roughly **equal proportions of SENCOs**, both Award-holders and **trainees**, reported that the Award made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' or 'a little'/'not at all' more confident in:
- ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing: Award-holders 51.5 per cent vs. 48.5 per cent; p=0.440 (n=406); trainees 54.2 per cent vs. 45.8 per cent; p=0.241 (n=118).

However, more respondents reported 'a little' effect on their confidence in this aspect of provision than thought that the Award had had no effect at all (34.6 per cent vs. 13.1 per cent of Award-holders (p=0.000: n=197) and 33.1 per cent vs. 8.5 per cent of trainees (p=0.000: n=54).

Trainees and Award-holders therefore demonstrated similar patterns in their responses to these two aspects, which suggests that factors other than levels of experience / training (such as variation in school ethos with respect to pupil voice and parental engagement) might account for different responses to these two items.

For both items in PPQ, either five or six trainees (between four and five per cent) reported that that particular aspect had not yet been covered on their course. For both items three (0.7 per cent) Award-holders were 'not sure' that the Award had made them more confident.

2.3 Views of SENCOs without the Award

We asked SENCOs without the Award and not in training for the Award (n=168) for their views on the potential benefit to SENCOs of the same aspects of the qualification outlined in Section 2.2 above. The overwhelming majority responded that each domain would benefit SENCOs 'a lot'/'quite a lot' (one sample tests for the mean score equal to 2.5 (neutral); p=0.000). As before there was no difference in patterns of responding between school type or school role.

For each of the five aspects of PKU, around 95 per cent respondents (between 156 and 161) reported that they thought the Award would benefit SENCOs 'a lot'/'quite a lot'. For LCP, percentages rating each aspect as benefitting 'a lot'/'quite a lot' ranged from 95 per cent (n=159) for 'Ensuring that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND' to 68 per cent (n=115) for 'Encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practices for pupils with SEND'. The latter was also rated lower by SENCOs with the Award and by trainees. Finally 86 per cent of SENCOs without the Award (n=144) rated 'Ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing' as benefitting SENCOs 'a lot/'quite a lot', and 81 per cent (n=136) thought that 'Ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing' would benefit SENCOs 'a lot'/'quite a lot' in developing the required PPQ.

Ratings of benefit were consistently higher than the ratings of increase in confidence made by SENCO Award-holders and trainees, but the pattern of responding mirrored these confidence ratings. This suggests that there is a broad consensus among SENCOs about which aspects should be included training for the Award.

2.4 Summary and key points

There is statistically-significant evidence that a majority of Award-holders and trainees felt that the Award increased their confidence in all three domains: PKU, LCP, and PPQ.

However the number of respondents reporting that the Award had increased their confidence 'a lot'/'quite a lot' varied across aspects within each domain. The aspects where most respondents reported increased confidence (i.e. a majority reported 'a lot'/'quite a lot') were:

Professional Knowledge and Understanding
- understanding the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND
- understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning

Leading and Coordinating Provision
- coordinating provision for pupils with SEND
- working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos
- ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND.

Personal and Professional Qualities.
- ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing

With the exception of 'ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing', these aspects are concerned with more strategic, abstract aspects of the SENCO role. These appear to represent the strongest aspects of the course for the majority of respondents.

Six out of the 14 aspects, which included the more practical aspects of the Award such as 'developing effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND' and 'managing staff to ensure efficient use of resources SEND' had lower ratings. However over half of respondents reported that the Award had increased their confidence 'a lot'/'quite a lot', and very few participants reported that it had had no effect at all in these aspects.

One further aspect with similar results to the six above was 'ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing'. The Award's apparent greater effectiveness in increasing confidence in working with parents, in comparison with developing pupil voice, merits further investigation, as both aspects of practice are prominent in the current Code of Practice.

Although still rated highly by a third or more of respondents, the lowest ratings overall were given to 'modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practices for pupils with SEND'. These both require the SENCO to work directly with teachers in their schools to change their practice.

In conclusion, the overall message reported by our respondents was that, for the majority of Award-holders and trainees, undertaking the Award increased their confidence in some aspects associated with the SENCO role. However in any aspect of the Award, there are many possible reasons affecting why individuals might report that their confidence had or had not increased as a result of undertaking the Award: they might already be very confident in this aspect, especially if they have considerable experience as a SENCO; their course might not have covered this particular aspect in depth; they might not be able to implement what they have learned when they return to their schools; or that particular aspect might not

feature strongly in the SENCO role in their particular school. **The extent to which any increase in confidence can be realised in practice is therefore likely to vary.**

3. Effectiveness of the Award: content and delivery

In this section, we examine the qualitative data from open-ended survey questions that related to SENCO Award-holders' and trainees' views on the content and delivery of the Award. It is worth noting at this point that each individual has a unique experience of the Award; respondents completed the Award at any time over the past eight years, bringing a variety of knowledge, experience and expectations to a training that is delivered by different providers in different formats. All work from a common set of Learning Outcomes that comprises ten separate areas of knowledge with up to seven components in each.

3.1 Award-holders: course content

There were 441 respondents to the school survey's open-ended question 'How, if at all, has the National Award for SEN Coordination helped you to reflect on your role?'. Of these, 354 were broadly positive about their experiences, agreeing that the Award had helped them to reflect on their role (five headteachers, 232 senior leaders, 117 teachers), while 87 (four headteachers, 57 senior leaders, 26 teachers) were broadly negative. Responses were diverse; there was no overall pattern in which a majority of respondents cited particular aspects of the Award training as helpful, and comments made reference to a wide range of course content areas. As was the case with the rating tasks, there were no particular patterns of response according to school type (primary, secondary, special or other) or school role (headteacher, senior leader or teacher). In addition, some responses were short and succinct (e.g. 'Enormously' or 'It hasn't'), while others offered fuller information. Data from comments that included information on why/how the Award had helped respondents to reflect on their role (or not) were analysed and coded thematically. In the sub-sections that follow, we report on respondents' views, organised into three areas of Award content that correspond broadly to the Award's Learning Outcomes domains of PKU, LCP and PPQ.

3.1.1. Professional knowledge and understanding

A total of 156 respondents (two headteachers, 94 senior leaders, 60 teachers) commented specifically on the way that course content increased their knowledge and/or assisted with understanding the nature of their role as SENCO. These included:

    i.   Providing **clarity** about the SENCO role: 'It has made me aware of the full range of responsibilities of a SENCO and made me consider how best to support students and their parents/carers, putting them at the centre of decision making' (teacher, special school).

    ii.   Understanding the **statutory requirements** of the role: 'I have been more aware of the necessity of the abiding by the Code of Practice and have ensured that the school's policy and practice reflects the changes in the law' (senior leader, primary school).

    iii.   Keeping **up to date**: 'Having the opportunity to look at current research, and getting up to speed with modern ways of thinking about effective provision for SEND' (teacher, secondary school)

iv. Encouraging **research-informed practice**: 'It encouraged me to reflect on what and why I was doing so that I could better meet the needs of the children. I undertook research on what I was doing, and it made me make judgements on this and be more succinct about interventions rather than just using interventions for the sake of it' (senior leader, 'other' school).

v. Learning about **specific areas of SEND**: 'To understand the science behind some of the medical conditions and how this impacts on pupil progress e.g. retaining information, cognitive processing, auditory delays' (teacher, 'other' school). This, in turn, could support high quality teaching for children with SEND: 'It has helped me to become more knowledgeable about the requirements of teaching pupils with SEN' (senior leader, primary school).

vi. Offering a **foundation for future practice** as SENCO: 'I reflect on my role and my responsibilities on a daily basis. The knowledge gained from the course along with the reflective nature of the assignments provided a sound foundation which is underpinning my work' (teacher, primary school).

vii. Encouraging **questioning** of current school practice: 'Makes me question deeper, reflect on individuals and strive for the best' (senior leader, secondary school).

viii. Clarifying **personal views**: 'I found the course great for focusing on my own view of inclusion and understanding of exactly what it means' (senior leader, secondary school).

ix. Encouraging **further study**: 'It led me to further opportunities to continue studying and gain a masters' qualification specializing in Dyslexia' (senior leader, primary school).

These comments suggest that the Award training gave these participants a greater understanding of the SENCO role and allowed them the time to reflect on their own approach to SEND when in post. A few comments alluded to the high levels of expertise needed to undertake the role effectively: 'It has made me realise how much I still need to learn about SEN' (senior leader, primary school), and some referred to the importance of support from the school's senior leaders if they were to carry out the role effectively: 'The Leadership teams need to come up to date with the pivotal role of a SENCO in school. They do not give the role enough credibility' (teacher, secondary school). We return to the importance of the context within which SENCOs work in Section 5, and focus in the next sub-section on the Award's effectiveness in developing respondents' capacity for leadership.

3.1.2 Leading and coordinating SEND provision

Seventy-one respondents (two headteachers, 46 senior leaders and 23 teachers) commented on the ways in which Award training developed their understanding and awareness of the leadership skills needed for the SENCO role. These comments illustrated the four main areas in which Award participants found the training helpful:

i. **Giving confidence**. In some cases the knowledge and understanding gained from the Award training was directly linked to respondents' confidence in changing school practice: 'The Award gave me the confidence to challenge existing practice and the confidence to implement change' (senior leader, 'other' school). Both senior leader and teacher respondents commented that the Award gave them the confidence to approach senior leaders more effectively: 'The NASENCO has helped me to demonstrate to school leaders how and why structures and systems have needed to change' (teacher, secondary school), with some citing the authority that the Award carried: 'It gave me more status and autonomy in school to be able to influence decisions, especially when I was not on [the] senior leadership team' (senior leader, primary school). Others, however, focused on their greater confidence in advocating for pupils with SEND: 'Empowered me to be an advocate for SEN pupils' (senior leader, secondary school).

ii. Understanding the need for a **strategic approach to SEND**. Comments in this area emphasised the strategic nature of the training: 'It has clarified that the role of the SENCO is about being able to lead the provision for children with SEND more strategically. This strategic focus within a whole school vision was highlighted' (senior leader, primary school). Some respondents focused on the practical aspects of a strategic approach: 'It has made me more aware of having procedures in place for identification, communication with stakeholders, interventions and tracking progress' (teacher, secondary school), while others drew attention to the opportunity to reflect on and plan how they could change school practice: 'It has given me the space to strategically rethink provision and practice' (senior leader, primary school).

iii. Offering the opportunity to consider **leadership and management styles.** Some respondents reflected on the effectiveness of their leadership and how this might be improved: 'The whole process was about reflective practice, and it made me take a strong look at the provisions in place and analyse the effectiveness of my knowledge and leadership' (teacher, secondary school). Others considered their own style of leadership: 'Helped me to reflect on my management style and on how I want to lead SEND provision throughout the school' (teacher, secondary school), while for some the Award training demonstrated the importance of prioritising: 'It has made me consider what my priorities should be. I only work two days, so prioritising is key as there's so much to do' (teacher, primary school).

iv. Understanding the importance of **supporting staff:** 'It has helped me realise the need to ensure that staff take responsibility for the SEND children in their class and not just assume it is the SENCO's role' (senior leader, primary school).

3.1.3 Personal and professional qualities

Sixty respondents (one headteacher, 41 senior leaders and 18 teachers) reported on the ways in which the Award training had influenced their SENCO practice. These comments focused on the following areas:

i. **Working with parents/carers and pupils.** Some respondents focused on ensuring these stakeholders were involved in school decision-making: 'I do consider all opportunities to strengthen pupil and parent voice which, prior to the course, I didn't know much about. I do think about myself as a school leader now leading staff, parents and children through SEND provision available' (senior leader, primary school). Others wrote of the importance of balancing different needs while ensuring that parents/carers and pupils had a voice within school: 'I think it has taught me to be objective, to listen to the child, the parent, the needs of the school' (teacher, secondary school). Yet others commented on changing school practice: 'Through reflective practice, the National Award has enabled me to look deeper into our school's practice and ethos of SEN pupils, developing strategies in which to ensure children progress as learners and individuals' (senior leader, primary school).

ii. **Working with staff.** Responses related to working with staff focused on developing an inclusive school culture: 'I became more aware of the different perspectives regarding the models of disability which were key in helping to develop inclusive cultures amongst staff in school' (senior leader, primary school') and on supporting/training staff to work with pupils with SEND: 'Ensured better engagement with parents, better staff training' (senior leader, primary school).

iii. **Linking training with practice.** Some respondents made clear links between their assignments and their practice in school: 'The most important aspects of the course were the action research and the intellectual rigor via the essays. Because I chose areas that would directly support and influence my educational setting, they made me much more ambitious about strategic planning' (senior leader, special school). Others found that the time allocated to assignments enabled greater understanding of their school: 'The child centered research was really effective, as was the investigation of your setting, as it allowed time to investigate the school's inner workings and costings' (senior leader, primary school).

iv. **Influencing change.** Other respondents focused on particular changes they had made in school as a result of their training. Some focused on the way that this influenced school strategy: 'Through researching and writing assignments, it forced you to reflect on your own and your school's practice and then [this] influenced future action planning' (senior leader, primary school). Others gave specific examples of how the Award had encouraged them to instigate change: 'The qualification included an Action Research element which encouraged me to reflect on practice in my school and make changes. I was able to argue for an increase in literacy support and

curriculum time for English using the evidence from my research' (headteacher, special school).

The scope of these comments reflects the number and diversity of the Award's Learning Outcomes (NCTL, 2014), and the diversity of people training for the Award; they worked in different settings, and trained with different providers at different stages of their career at any time between 2009 and 2016, during which time there were significant policy changes to SEND in schools. These different considerations mean that the Award training held a wide variety of expectations for participants with different needs, some of whom found the Award, or different parts of the Award, unsatisfactory. In the next sub-section we report on the issues raised by respondents in relation to the Award training.

3.1.4 Issues raised about the Award training

Eight-seven respondents (four headteachers, 57 senior leaders, 26 teachers) raised three particular issues with the Award training. These were:

     i.   **Timing of the Award training**. This related first, to the timing of the training in relation to the respondent's professional career; some who had several years of experience in SEND and/or leadership reported that the Award did not necessarily help them to reflect on their role: 'I had already completed a postgraduate diploma in the psychology of SEN prior to the award - it was a hoop I had to jump through to do the job I was already equipped for and had specialised in' (teacher, primary school). Others who participated in the training before or as the new Code of Practice (DfE/DoH 2014[4]) was introduced reported that the information they had gained through the Award could be quickly out of date: 'I gained my award before the new SEND regulations came into force, so most of that is out of date now' (teacher, secondary school). Yet others commented on the difficulty of taking on multiple roles as well as training for the Award: 'Management time reduced and role impossible in the time allocated' (senior leader, primary school), again highlighting the importance of senior leadership understanding of the SENCO role.

    ii.   **Perceived high levels of theoretical content**. Some respondents reported that the Award focused on theoretical and/or historical issues rather than on practical information that was immediately applicable to participants' school settings. The following quotation illustrates the majority view of these comments: 'It has developed my knowledge about what researchers and psychologists have to say about SEND, but it would have been nice to have more a realistic approach to what being a SENDCO means in a school' (senior leader, secondary school). Suggestions for course content included

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[4] Department for Education and Department of Health (2014) *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years*. Ref: DFE:-00205-2013, www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25.

information on managing workload, improving quality first teaching, selecting interventions, identifying SEND and details on the day-to-day SENCO role.

iii. **Relevance to the participant's setting**. In these comments, participants showed a preference for undertaking the course with candidates from similar settings. The example here is drawn from a secondary teacher's comments, but participants from primary schools made similar observations about course relevance to secondary colleagues when primary staff were in the minority: 'The action research was useful. Much of the other input was less helpful as it was more relevant to primary colleagues' (teacher, secondary school).

Taken together, respondents' comments in the sub-sections above illustrate the complexity of delivering training for a wide range of participants with different levels of experience and who work in a range of different settings. We now turn to focus on respondents' views on Award training delivery.

3.2 Award-holders: training delivery

There was no specific request for Award-holding SENCO respondents to tell us what they found useful (or not) in the training; in order to keep the questionnaire to a manageable length for busy professionals, we limited the number of open-ended questions and focused them on SENCOs' views on the future development of the Award. As trainees' experience of the Award training was current, however, we asked them to tell us the most helpful and least useful aspects of their training, the results of which are reported in Section 3.3. Nonetheless, in part of their answer to the question 'How, if at all, has the National Award for SEN Coordination helped you to reflect on your role?' 109 SENCO respondents (three headteachers, 68 senior leaders, 38 teachers) commented on ways in which the Award delivery enabled them to reflect on their role.

3.2.1 Sharing practice

A key part of the training was reported as **meeting others in the SENCO role,** which enabled participants to share practices and ideas either formally within seminars or informally at break and other times. Respondents saw the value of this for a number of reasons. One was that the SENCO role can be isolating, and that the reassurance gained from learning about others' experiences could give confidence, particularly when starting to undertake the SENCO role:

> 'Being a SENCO can be very isolating and the training gave me an opportunity to develop theories and get to grips with all the legislation alongside daily practice with a group of professionals in the same situation' (senior leader, primary school).

'Came at the right time for me. Would have found the role even more confusing without that monthly input and opportunity to network with colleagues' (senior leader, primary school).

A second reason related to the type of learning afforded by discussion and practice-sharing. Some respondents commented on learning about the diversity of school approaches to SEN, and a few commented on the value of observing SENCOs' activities in other schools. This could lead directly to improved SEND provision in their own:

'Meeting other SENCOs enabled me to see how diverse the role is between schools' (senior leader, special school).

'Increased opportunity to observe another school. Used the same interventions as them for speech and language, justified the cost through an essay for my SENCO award. Used this as a case study to show positive impact and to train a new member of staff' (teacher, primary school).

SENCOs also reported valuing the mutual support found through the Award training. In some cases this enabled participants to set up or join local networks in which they could continue their relationship beyond the duration of the course:

'It has given me the opportunity to develop a good local network who still regularly meet and develop practice in our schools. We have used continuing professional development time to support and enhance each other and be able to develop our roles' (senior leader, secondary school).

3.2.2 Reading, research and assignments
One comment provided a succinct overview of the academic aspects of the course that enabled participants to reflect on their practice:

'The award programme provided many opportunities for reflective practice including: written assignments, collaborative presentations, evaluative research, colleague and parental feedback, and discussions with fellow students' (senior leader, primary school).

Others focused on:
   i.   **Reading:** 'It does encourage reflection and encouraged me to read widely around SEND. It was good to have the time and space to think about provision when I attended the taught days' (senior leader, primary school).
   ii. **Taught sessions:** 'The Award provided a strategic overview and case histories to help me review provision, policy and practice in my own setting. The interaction with lecturers and fellow students helped me to appreciate

the complexity and challenges of special needs provision' (senior leader, primary school). A few respondents cited high quality teaching: 'Our key lecturer was extremely knowledgeable and we learned an awful lot from him which made the course much more enjoyable and informative' (teacher, secondary school).

    iii.   **Research:** 'The various modules have enabled me to undertake school based research to positive effect, especially in terms of teaching assistant role development and interventions' (teacher, primary school).

    iv.   **Assignments:** 'During the course I found the portfolio the most useful thing as it was linked to the work I was actually doing in school and allowed me time to reflect on my own practice' (senior leader, primary school).

Some comments, however, drew attention to the difficulties of completing Master's-level work at the same time as undertaking the SENCO role and teaching: 'I didn't have enough time to do so [reflect] whilst completing the course. Knowing the theory is great, but if you don't have time to put it into practice it is not so helpful' (teacher, 'other' school). Others reported that the time spent writing assignments could have been spent more productively in developing SEND practice in school: 'Was very useful regarding statutory obligation and making me more reflective; however the assignments were time consuming and I felt that the time could have been better used developing practice in school' (senior leader, primary school).

3.3 Award trainees: the 'most useful' aspect of the training

In this section, we examine the data relating to Award trainees' views on their training. As was the case with the data presented in the previous section, there were no particular patterns of response according to respondents' school type (primary, secondary, special, other), school role (headteacher, senior leader, teacher) or appointment (or not) as SENCO.

A total of 120 trainees (79 senior leaders, 41 teachers) responded to the school survey's open-ended question 'What has been the most useful part of your training for the National Award for SEN Coordination so far?'. Of these, 116 were already in post as SENCO. Once again the comments varied considerably in range and level of detail. Comments were analysed and coded thematically, and we have grouped responses into the three categories that correspond broadly to the Award Learning Outcomes of PKU, LCP and PPQ.

3.3.1. Professional knowledge and understanding

Around half of responses to this question related to the domain of knowledge and understanding (46 senior leaders, 22 teachers). The following comments illustrate the aspects of the training in this area that respondents found 'most helpful':

    i.   Providing **an understanding of SEND**. This was seen to underpin trainees' support for pupils with SEND: 'Beginning to understand the broad spectrum of special needs and beginning to understand and learn some strategies to

support children' (SENCO teacher, primary school). Others focused on knowledge gained through 'finding out about the most recent research' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

ii. Engaging with **political and theoretical aspects** of SEND. Some trainees reported that they appreciated learning about the political and legal frameworks that shaped SEND provision in schools: 'Understanding the background history of the Code of Practice and how the combination of this plus the Equality Act provides a framework within which to work. There was a lot of reading but it has all been useful' (SENCO teacher, secondary school). Engaging with theory helped respondents to reflect on SEND issues in a way that had implications for their practice: 'Thinking about inclusion and what it means for our school' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

iii. Developing a clear understanding of the role's **legal responsibilities:** 'A good understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a SENCO and legal responsibilities' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

iv. Encouraging a **questioning of current school practice**. 'Being required to carry out an audit of current SEND provision at school as part of the first assignment helped me to identify what we did well and what needed to be done differently' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

v. Facilitating **reflection on own practice**: 'Action research project has been very interesting and helped me examine my own practice' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

vi. Offering **practical solutions**. Examples included 'ideas about provision mapping and monitoring pupils' progress' (SENCO senior leader, primary school) and 'insights into recording and monitoring systems' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

These comments suggest that responding trainees valued the course for the provision of information that both broadened their political and theoretical knowledge of SEND and gave them specific information that was relevant to practical elements of the role.

3.3.2 Leading and coordination SEND provision

Twenty-five trainees (17 senior leaders, eight teachers) reported that, for them, the 'most helpful' aspects of the training related to leadership. The following comments illustrate the two main areas to which these Award trainees referred:

i. Understanding the need for a **strategic approach to SEND**. Respondents commented that the training enabled them to look at 'SEN provision from a more strategic view as opposed to focusing on individuals' (SENCO senior leader, primary school) and to explore 'the strategic aspects of the job' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

ii. Reflection on **leadership and management.** Comments included: 'How to support staff' (SENCO senior leader, primary school) and 'covering the

management side of the role and working with senior leaders' (SENCO teacher, primary school). A few respondents cited a leadership exercise as a helpful part of the training: 'We had to do a 'Change' Project where we had to make sure a change happened in SEN in school' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

3.3.3 Personal and professional qualities

Three trainees (two senior leaders, one teacher) highlighted aspects of the training that related to this part of the Award. One respondent commented that '[name] has been superb and helped me think through some issues in my school' (SENCO teacher, secondary school), while both the others referred to reflection related to working with parents or families: 'Ensuring practice is inclusive for all students and working collaboration with partners and agencies' (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

3.3.4 Award training delivery

Seventy-three trainees (52 senior leaders, 21 teachers) commented on training delivery. Key issues that were regarded as 'most helpful' included opportunities to network and share ideas/experiences with other SENCOs; the nature and quality of the teaching; and the usefulness of assignments to enhance trainees' professional learning and practice.

i. **Networking and sharing practice.** The majority of comments in relation to course delivery focused on respondents' appreciation of the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation. Specific aspects found 'most helpful' were: 'Training sessions with other SENCOs in the same position as me so that we can share ideas and difficulties. Stops me feeling quite so isolated in the role' (SENCO teacher, secondary school) and 'Meeting others and gaining an insight into SEND and the provision in other schools. And seeing models of good practice from experienced SENCOs' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

ii. **Quality of taught sessions.** Trainees commented on the SEND expertise of teaching staff: 'Covering a wide range of different SEND needs that are delivered from professionals that specialise in that area' (SENCO teacher, 'other' school). Some respondents also appreciated the practical application of the sessions to their own settings: 'The teaching sessions have been really useful and practical. I have taken a lot of ideas away with me that I hope to trial/implement' (SENCO senior leader, primary school). Others valued the supportive atmosphere that was generated in the taught sessions: 'Attending the training days has also been extremely useful especially as we are able to discuss how other people have approached the problems that they face on a daily basis. It was very positive and supportive' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

iii. Particular **assignments or modes of assessment.** Respondents referred to a variety of tasks as helpful, including action research projects: 'Planning

action research that is relevant to my setting' (SENCO teacher, primary school), compiling portfolios: 'the portfolio tasks are extremely appropriate to practice and helpful in ensuring we have correct documentation etc.' (SENCO senior leader, primary school), and evidencing standards: 'Evidencing the standards has helped to ensure all the necessary paperwork is up to date' (SENCO teacher, secondary school). Some commented positively on the reading that was undertaken to complete assignments, and the value of discussing the research that had been read: 'Discussing academic research and policies' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

3.4 Award trainees: the 'least helpful' aspects of the training

A total of 102 trainees (67 senior leaders, 35 teachers) responded to the question 'What has been the least helpful aspect of your training for the Award so far?'. Ninety-nine of these were in post as SENCO. For this question, comments were more narrowly focused and coalesced around three main areas of managing the workload, writing assignments and an emphasis on theory rather than practical advice. A few respondents commented on course delivery. Below we illustrate these points in more detail.

3.4.1 Managing the workload

An issue for a large number of respondents was managing the workload arising from training for the Award as well as undertaking the everyday demands of the role in school. This was particularly the case for senior leaders and/or teachers with limited time for the SENCO role, and who found this the 'least helpful' aspect of the training:

'The amount of time and research needed to complete the module whilst doing the job of a deputy head, full time class teacher and SENCO' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'With a class and a small amount of SENCO time, the amount of work that has to go into completing the learning outcomes can at times be challenging' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

Another concern was the timing of assignments, which added to the workload at particular times of the year:

'Assignment deadlines falling at key times during the academic year' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Workload could also be increased as trainees endeavoured to implement their learning when back in school:

'Finding the time to complete the reading/assessments alongside my normal workload and trying to implement new processes and protocols' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

One respondent commented that this was the major difficulty with the Award training, partly because of the different constraints experienced in school:

'I think everything has been useful in different way. The hardest part is being able to put what I've learnt into practice due to workload, time constraints and limited funding' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

3.4.2 Writing assignments

Issues related to writing assignments were often linked to that of workload, particularly when respondents were unable to see a connection between the task and either their SENCO role or their understanding of this role:

'Assignments are largely unrelated to my day to day job, making a lot of additional workload' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'Expectation of the completion of specific tasks which don't necessarily have a great impact on the role of SENDCO …[I] have had to create a 'wordcloud task' that took up a disproportionate amount of my time in relation to the importance of this activity to the development of my knowledge of SEND' (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

In some cases these challenges were also linked to the timing of the Award training for the trainee:

'Having to do the three 4,000 word assignments. Far too time-consuming in the first year of post when there was so much to learn and do anyway … I would rather my research was led by my own interest and search for knowledge rather than being constrained by the assignment' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Other issues related to the nature and expected structure of the assignment:

'How prescriptive the essays are; at odds with other academic work I have undertaken - MA and first draft of PhD' (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

In the light of difficulties with workload, a few respondents questioned the need for the Award to be at Master's level:

'Do not think Master's level is necessary … The time taken to study has taken me away from my role and now I have a massive backlog of work to catch up on. I have been able to have some study time to complete assignments, but I know many of my cohort have not; many are paying their own fees. When I complete I will have credits towards a Master's I will never have time to complete or study for ... More stress' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

This comment alludes to the importance of in-school support for Award trainees who, as we have seen, can find it challenging to combine their everyday workload with Award requirements.

3.4.3 Emphasis on theory

A minority of respondents argued that the emphasis on theory led to insufficient practical advice on managing the day-to-day role of the SENCO:

'The academic stuff, although very interesting and helps to deepen your understanding, it does not help you to get on with the practical day-to-day problems faced by SENCOs and that's the stuff we really want to solve' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

A few provided examples of the types of information that they would have appreciated:

'For example, knowing who to contact when you need external support; knowing your entitlements and when to push for more from external agencies …; knowing which forms to fill in; knowing what funding is available for children with an Education and Health Care Plan; knowing which assessments to use to help decide the type of support a child needs' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

Once again, concern for practical advice could be linked to issues relating to workload:

'The first essay was needless ... I need to know what works, not critically analyse the history of SEND. I am too busy in my job for this!' (SENCO teacher, secondary school)

3.4.4 Course delivery

A few respondents reported that the 'least helpful' aspect(s) of the training related to course delivery. Concerns related to:

     i.   **Tutor support**: 'Having no tutor face-to-face input for the final module' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

ii. **Taught session focus**, again related to the issue of time: 'Some day sessions have been a little vague in their focus, and not a totally productive use of time' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

iii. **Promotion** of other courses: 'promotion of [named] courses rather than including the information in the Award e.g. how to conduct an annual review of an Education and Health Care [Plan] … An hour of the course was spent promoting this rather than telling us how to do it' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

iv. The value of **discussion: '**Anecdotal 'chat' gathering from the participants. I am sure this is useful for really new SENCOs, but I have been working in SEN for 13 years and it felt a waste of time' (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

v. One comment focused on the large amount of information delivered through the Award, arguing that a longer time for training might help pressures with workload and information assimilation: 'It is very condensed which can be overwhelming at times given the other pressures SENCOs are under. If content could be delivered over a longer period that would have helped' (SENCO teacher, primary school)

One respondent to this question commented that it had 'not been particularly useful training at all' (SENCO senior leader, 'other' school); 13 respondents, however, commented that all of the course had been useful.

3.5 SENCOs: issues the Award should address in the future

A total of 394 SENCO Award-holders (six headteachers, 261 senior leaders, 127 teachers) responded to the question 'What do you think are the most important SEND issues that the Award should address in the future?'. Data were analysed and coded thematically, and in Table 3 below we show all those suggestions from SENCOs that were mentioned by at least 20 respondents.

A recurring theme in responses to this question was that the Award should contain **practical advice** that was **immediately applicable** to the SENCO role. Examples of such suggestions included:

> 'Actual on the job skills. How to complete paperwork, deal with parents and other staff, details of the different SEND needs and how to support those pupils. Where to look for help when the school is having trouble meeting the child's needs … Which tools/assessment programmes to use to assess need' (senior leader, secondary school).

> 'I think that the Award should address the following: how to analyse data and measure the impact of effective interventions, compiling and updating a useful provision map, strategies for supporting those learners who require additional

funding but have been refused, writing to professionals and writing effective support plans or Education and Health Care (EHC) applications etc - basically a more hands on, useful resource for those new to the role' (senior leader, primary school).

This may be for a number of reasons; survey comments suggest that significant policy changes over the last two years are continuing to impact upon SENCO work and the context within which they are working, and many comments allude to respondents' already heavy workload. We return to these issues in Section 5, but focus in this sub-section on providing illustrations of the five main themes from Table 3 below.

Table 3: SEND issues that the Award should address in future (SENCOs)

Suggestions / staff role	Head teacher	Senior leader	Teacher	Total
Budget management and funding training	2	54	31	**87**
Working with outside agencies		57	25	**82**
Supporting pupils	3	36	38	**77**
Training, supporting and managing staff		46	31	**77**
Understanding/implementing current legislation	2	42	22	**66**
Education and Health Care Plans		41	17	**58**
Up to date/evidence-based interventions and strategies		35	17	**52**
SEND leadership within school	1	26	25	**52**
Identifying and assessing SEND		36	15	**51**
Parent/carer and pupil voice		28	13	**41**
Managing workload		26	9	**35**
Monitoring and assessing pupils with SEND		19	16	**35**
Responsibilities and expectations of the SENCO role	1	20	11	**32**
Teaching and learning for SEN pupils		14	10	**24**
Collection, management, analysis and use of data		10	11	**21**

Headteachers n=6; senior leaders n=261; teachers n=127

Concerns over diminishing funding prompted a high number of responses to include **budget management** into the Award training. Suggestions included:

'How to best manage resources and provision in the face of cuts to funding' (teacher, primary school).

'Give examples of how to put together funding bids. I recognize each funding bid may ask for slightly different information from county to county, but some questions are still generic' (senior leader, primary school).

'Finance; how to get hold of the figures and check that the money for SEND is actually being spent on SEND' (teacher, secondary school).

Similarly, changes to SEND provision offered by local authorities (LAs) and external agencies led to suggestions relating to **accessing support**:

> 'It would also be useful to get SENCOs networking more within their areas to talk about how they have sought support from external agencies' (senior leader, primary school).

> 'How to manage a wide variety of agencies and needs whilst keeping the need of the student central to all of the processes' (teacher, secondary school).

> 'Making the most of outside agencies' (teacher, primary school).

Suggestions about **supporting pupils** were generally focused on the numbers of pupils with SEND and the wide scope of their differing needs:

> 'Social, Emotional and Mental health, the links and overlap between health and special educational needs' (senior leader, secondary school).

> 'Being able to deal with what appear to be increasing numbers of pupils entering mainstream with profound learning needs' (teacher, primary school).

> 'Actual strategies for autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, trans gender pupils' (teacher, secondary school).

The combination of the above circumstances led a number of respondents to focus on **training, managing and supporting staff**:

> 'To suggest a range of ways/the best approaches to up-skill all staff in all areas of SEND ... I could fill all INSETs which is simply not possible. Suggestions here would be useful!' (senior leader, primary school).

> 'How to manage teaching assistants and teachers to ensure the best possible provision for SEN. Management of staff is vital if the role is to make a meaningful difference' (senior leader, 'other' school).

> 'Training teaching staff about the essence of quality first teaching' (senior leader, secondary school).

Finally, respondents offered a range of suggestions relating to **understanding and implementing current legislation**:

'What are the legal requirements of a SENCO i.e. what should they fulfil each year?' (senior leader, secondary school).

'How the theories surrounding SEND and legislative framework impact on what happens in schools AND how schools can use these to make their setting as inclusive as possible' (senior leader, primary school).

'The legal expectations of parents and the LA of provision required for SEN students' (teacher, secondary school).

These suggestions show, again, the wide variety of responses to questions posed in the survey and the diversity of opinion among respondents. Once again there is no discernible pattern in the responses to this particular question, and suggestions are more or less proportionately spaced across respondents from the three roles of headteacher, senior leader and teacher.

3.6 Summary and key points

Analysis of the open-ended survey questions from SENCO Award-holders showed that a high number of respondents found that Award to be effective in increasing their confidence in many aspects of all three domains of Professional Knowledge and Understanding; Leading and Coordinating Provision; and Personal and Professional Qualities. The diversity of the responses reflected the number and diversity of the Award's Learning Outcomes and the range of different professional contexts from which respondents undertook the Award training.

Award-holding survey respondents commented on aspects of course delivery that allowed them to reflect on their SENCO role. These included discussion and sharing practice with other SENCOs, academic study and tasks, and the taught sessions. Some commented on the challenges of completing Master's level study with their employment in school.

Trainees reported that they valued the course specifically for broadening their political and theoretical knowledge of SEND, giving them specific information that was relevant to the practical elements of the SENCO role, and focusing their attention on strategic leadership. The aspects of course delivery that were reported as the 'most helpful' were networking and sharing practice with other SENCOs, the quality of the taught sessions, and the usefulness of assignments in enhancing their professional learning and practice.

Trainees reported that the 'least useful' aspects of Award training were managing the combined workload of employment and the Award requirements, writing assignments, and an emphasis on theory. In some cases these three challenges were interlinked, particularly if the respondent was unable to see a connection between the task they had been set and the nature of their SENCO role.

Issues that SENCOs thought should be addressed in the Award in future included practical advice that was applicable to the SENCO role; budget management and funding training; working with outside agencies; supporting pupils; training, supporting and managing staff; and understanding/implementing current legislation.

4. What impact has the Award had on SENCO practice?

In this section we examine data from all those research participants who were not SENCOs. These include survey responses from school staff, parent/carers and from pupils, and interview data from 15 parent/carers. While our main aim in analysing these data is to find out about the impact of the Award on provision, we are also interested in stakeholder experiences of provision to inform Award content.

4.1 School respondent survey data

We asked school staff who were not SENCOs about their views of the support provided to them by their SENCO. We added 'prefer not to say' to the 'not sure' option in case respondents felt uncomfortable about answering this question; however, this option was rarely selected and it has been omitted from the account of the analysis that follows, except where the number of 'not sure'/'prefer not to say' responses exceeded one per cent of total responses for that item. The range of options for each question was 'a lot', 'quite a lot', 'a little', 'not at all', 'not sure/prefer not to say'.

A total of 243 school staff who were not SENCOs responded to the survey. Out of these, 129 (53.1 per cent) were aware that their SENCO had achieved the Award, 57 (23.5 per cent) knew that he or she did not have the Award and the remaining 57 (23.5 per cent) did not know whether their SENCO had the Award or not. Fourteen of these school staff respondents had achieved the SENCO Award but were not SENCOs, and nine non-SENCOs were currently training for the Award. These 23 respondents are not included in the analysis below because we asked them instead about their views on the effectiveness of the Award on their own professional development.

We refer to school staff respondents who were not SENCOs and did not have the Award and were not in training for the Award (n=220) simply as 'school staff'.

A **large majority of responding school staff** (between 72.3 per cent and 88.2 per cent; n=159-194 respondents) reported that their SENCO supported them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' across all aspects of the SENCO role in the three domains of PKU, LCP and PPQ, with two exceptions (see below). Staff who did not know whether their SENCO had the Award tended to give lower ratings than staff who did know whether their SENCO had the Award, and the former accounted for most of the 'not sure'/'prefer not to say' responses.

The aspects **receiving the highest proportion** of 'a lot'/'quite a lot' ratings of support from their SENCO reported by school staff were:
- ensuring that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing: 194 (88.2 per cent); 6 (2.7 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220.
- drawing on external sources of support when appropriate for SEND pupils: 193 (87.7 per cent); n=220)

- coordinating provision for pupils with SEND: 189 (85.9 per cent); n=220).

The following four aspects of SENCO support were rated **almost as highly**:

- supporting the identification of pupils' special educational needs: 183 (83.2 per cent); n=220
- ensuring that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND: 183 (83.2 per cent); 3 (1.3 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220
- working strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos: 180 (81.8 per cent); 4 (1.8 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220
- helping staff to understand the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND: 177 (80.5 per cent); n=220.

These seven aspects put the emphasis on working strategically to develop support systems, both within and beyond the school.

Five further aspects of support received ratings of 'a lot'/'quite a lot' from 76.8 to 72.3 per cent of respondents (n=169-159):

- managing staff to ensure efficient use of resources to improve SEND pupils' progress: 169 (76.8 per cent); n=220
- supporting in understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning: 168 (76.4 per cent); n=220
- ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing: 166 (75.5 per cent); 10 (4.5 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220
- giving strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND: 159 (72.3 per cent); n=220
- helping to develop effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND: 159 (72.3 per cent); n=220.

These five aspects are concerned with pupils' learning and progress.

The aspects which **fewer respondents** agreed that their SENCO supported them 'a lot'/ 'quite a lot' were:

- modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND to colleagues: 144 (60.9 per cent); 6 (2.7 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220
- encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND: 79 (35.9 per cent); 13 (5.9 per cent) 'not sure'/'prefer not to say'; n=220.

These two aspects were ones for which fewer SENCO Award-holders and trainees reported increased confidence as a result of undertaking the Award. We cannot, however, conclude that school staff thought that these were aspects for which SENCOs did not provide adequate support; it could be the case that school staff did not feel the need for support in these aspects.

To find out whether the Award had a direct impact on perceptions of support offered to school staff, we compared ratings profiles ('a lot'/'quite a lot' vs. 'a little'/'not at all') between respondents from schools where the SENCO had the Award (n=129) and respondents from schools where the SENCO did not hold the Award (n=57), giving a total of 186 respondents from 174 unique schools. There was, however, no statistically significant difference between the proportions opting for the high ratings vs. low ratings in any of the aspects of the SENCO role in the three domains of PKU, LCP and PPQ, and no consistency in patterns of responding; in some aspects, more staff from schools with an Award-holding SENCO gave high ratings, in other aspects more staff from schools where the SENCO did not have the Award gave high ratings. Furthermore there was no evidence of a statistically significant difference between responses from the three staff categories (headteacher/senior leader/ teacher), using both parametric and non-parametric tests (all p>0.05). In the contexts of individual schools, there are clearly many other factors contributing to the support that SENCOs are able to offer that are over and above the increased confidence achieved by those who undertake the Award.

4.1.1 Impact examples

One secondary school (nine respondents) and two primary schools (four respondents each) returned at least four completed surveys. We have placed their responses into Tables 4, 5 and 6 below to provide illustrations of the spread of responses across the rating tasks and of the perceived impact of the SENCO's work in each of these schools. Not all respondents knew if their SENCO had achieved the Award.

Table 4: Rating task responses (secondary school)

Question / categories of response	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure/prefer not to say
To what extent has the Award made you more confident in the following aspects in (SENCO)… / To what extent does the SENCO in your school (school staff) …					
Professional Knowledge and Understanding					
Understanding/Help you to understand the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND?	6 **(SENCO)**	2			
Supporting/Support you in understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning?	5 **(SENCO)**	3			
Giving/Give you strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND?	5 **(SENCO)**	3			
Supporting/Support the identification of pupils' special educational needs?	7 **(SENCO)**	1			
Helping/Help you develop effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND?	3 **(SENCO)**	5			
Leading and Coordinating Provision					
Working/Work strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos?	5	2	**(SENCO)**		1
Modelling/Model effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND to colleagues?	3 **(SENCO)**	3	2		
Managing/Manage staff to ensure efficient use of resources to improve SEND pupils' progress?	4 **(SENCO)**	4			
Encouraging/Encourage teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND?	2 **(SENCO)**	4	1		1
Drawing/Draw on external sources of support when appropriate for SEND pupils?	3 **(SENCO)**	5			
Ensuring/Ensure that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND?	6 **(SENCO)**	2			
Coordinating/Coordinate provision for pupils with SEND?	6 **(SENCO)**	2			
Personal and Professional Qualities					
Ensuring/Ensure that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing?	2	5 **(SENCO)**			1
Ensuring/Ensure that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing?	5	3 **(SENCO)**			

N=9: eight teachers, one SENCO. SENCO responses are **(bold and in brackets)**

The responses in Table 4 above, which comprise mainly 'a lot / quite a lot' ratings, show that the Award was seen to have both a positive effect on the SENCO with almost all aspects of

the Award training, and a positive impact by staff from the way in which the SENCO's work was perceived within the school. Six of the teacher respondents indicated that they knew that their SENCO had achieved the Award, while two responded that they did not know.

Table 5: Rating task responses (primary school)

Question / categories of response	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure/prefer not to say
To what extent does the SENCO in your school …					
Professional Knowledge and Understanding					
Help you to understand the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND?	3	1			
Support you in understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning?	3	1			
Give you strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND?	3	1			
Support the identification of pupils' special educational needs?	3	1			
Help you develop effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND?	3		1		
Leading and Coordinating Provision					
Work strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos?	2	2			
Model effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND to colleagues?		3	1		
Manage staff to ensure efficient use of resources to improve SEND pupils' progress?	3	1			
Encourage teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND?	1	1	1		1
Draw on external sources of support when appropriate for SEND pupils?	2	2			
Ensure that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND?	2	2			
Coordinate provision for pupils with SEND?	4				
Personal and Professional Qualities					
Ensure that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing?	2	2			
Ensure that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing?	3	1			

N=4: one headteacher, two senior leaders, one teacher.

Table 5 above shows the responses from school staff in a primary school. The SENCO did not respond; three participants reported that they did not know if the SENCO had achieved the Award, although the headteacher responded 'Yes'. The patterns of response are similar to those from the secondary school in Table 4, with the majority showing that the SENCO's work was having a positive impact within the school. The three responses of 'a little'/'not sure' or 'prefer not to say' in the aspects of 'modelling effective practice of pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND' reflect the two aspects that received the lowest overall ratings (see Section 2) in which one-third of respondents indicated that the Award training had made them 'a lot'/'quite a lot' more confident.

The responses in Table 6 below show more variation in staff views on the impact of the SENCO's work, with more 'a little' responses than in the other two examples. There are, however, relatively few 'not at all' or 'not sure/prefer not to say' responses (7/56). The headteacher from this school responded that the SENCO had achieved the Award, two staff responded that they did not know, and one responded that the SENCO did not hold the Award. As was the case with the school in Table 5 above, the SENCO for this school did not respond to the invitation to complete the survey.

Table 6: Rating task responses (primary school)

Question / categories of response	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all	Not sure/prefer not to say
To what extent does the SENCO in your school …					
Professional Knowledge and Understanding					
Help you to understand the statutory responsibilities for pupils with SEND?		2	1	1	
Support you in understanding how SEND can affect pupils' learning?	1	1	2		
Give you strategies to improve outcomes for pupils with SEND?	1	1	1	1	
Support the identification of pupils' special educational needs?	1	1	2		
Help you develop effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND?	1	1	2		
Leading and Coordinating Provision					
Work strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos?	1	2	1		
Model effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND to colleagues?	1	2	1		
Manage staff to ensure efficient use of resources to improve SEND pupils' progress?	2	1		1	
Encourage teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND?	1	1		2	
Draw on external sources of support when appropriate for SEND pupils?	1	2	1		
Ensure that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND?	3		1		
Coordinate provision for pupils with SEND?	3		1		
Personal and Professional Qualities					
Ensure that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing?	1	2			1
Ensure that parents/carers are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing?	2		1		1

N=4 respondents: one headteacher, one senior leader, two teachers.

4.2 Non-SENCOs: issues that the Award should address in future

A total of 178 respondents (66 headteachers; 66 senior leaders; 46 teachers) who were neither SENCOs nor held the Award responded to the open-ended survey question, 'What do you think are the most important SEND issues that the Award should address in the future?'. As in all other cases with the open-ended responses, data were analysed and coded thematically. Once again, for the sake of brevity, we refer to these respondents as 'school staff'. In Table 7 below we show all those suggestions that were mentioned by at

least 15 respondents. The six themes in the Table correspond to those suggested by Award-holders (see Section 3.5), but in a slightly different order of importance.

Table 7: SEND issues that the Award should address in future (school staff)

Suggestions / staff role	Head teacher	Senior leader	Teacher	Total
Financial management and funding training	31	10	9	**50**
Supporting pupils	6	16	8	**30**
Up to date/evidence-based interventions and strategies	6	13	5	**24**
Teaching and learning for SEN pupils	3	5	9	**17**
Parent/carer and pupil voice	9	6	2	**17**
Understanding outside agencies	8	6	2	**16**

Headteachers n=66; senior leaders n=66; teachers n=46

The highest number of suggestions was the same from both Award-holders and non-Award-holders; that the Award training should include aspects of **budget management and funding training**, although in this case a notable number of headteachers (31) commented that this should be included in future Award training. In their responses, school staff consistently linked budgetary issues with the perceived increase in numbers of pupils with SEND in mainstream schools and/or the reduced level of local support services:

> 'The ever increasing complexity of special educational needs in a time of reducing budgets and disappearing local services' (headteacher, primary school).

Suggestions that **supporting pupils** should be included in the training focused on supporting pupils during the transition to secondary and further education, and with issues such as social, emotional and mental health; profound, complex and multiple learning needs; specific learning needs such as dyslexia, autism and attention deficit hyperactive disorder; English as an additional language when combined with SEND; language acquisition; and the effects of alcohol and drugs on unborn children. One respondent summed these suggestions up as:

> 'Identification of and provision for the widening range of SEND that we are facing in mainstream education' (headteacher, primary school).

Knowledge of **up-to-date interventions, strategies and resources** was seen to be helpful by teachers:

> 'Providing SENCOs with information about successful resources to use with children with different needs, which can be fed back to staff' (teacher, primary school).

'Making it essential for SENCOs to model good practice and teaching for pupils with SEND' (senior leader, primary school).

These could be linked to suggestions that focused on **teaching and learning** for SEND pupils, which advocated that the Award training should include pedagogical strategies for pupils with SEND; strategies to improve their access to the curriculum; quality first teaching for pupils with SEND; differentiation; managing/delivering higher expectations about pupils with SEND; accessing the English Baccalaureate; and teacher accountability. Some respondents drew attention to the role of funding in supporting the learning of pupils with SEND:

'We have increasing class sizes and sadly many of our weaker [pupils with] SEN are in very large bottom sets with little if any Teaching Assistant support. We have some students unable to access the new GCSE, but due to class size and lack of support we cannot offer an alternative curriculum' (teacher, secondary school).

Several respondents drew attention to the challenges associated with **assessing the progress** of pupils with SEND, highlighted in the following example. This comment also includes reference to the complexity of managing funding, the new Code of Practice and parental expectations, and suggests that SENCOs should be supported in developing the skills to have potentially difficult **conversations with parents/carers**:

'Assessment that fits the current Ofsted model so that the children who make small steps progress are not seen as requiring improvement. Many schools now have children, that for them, coming in every day and answering the register or completing an activity for ten minutes independently is major progress. You need to ensure SENCOs have the skill set to clearly show this progress and argue their case. You also need to ensure that SENCOs are trained in difficult conversations - more parents we find are misunderstanding what the funding associated with SEN [is] and sometimes the timescales that happen. SENCOs need to be confident for these conversations' (headteacher, primary school).

Finally, those making suggestions about **understanding outside agencies** focused on the perceived challenges of working across local authority (LA) boundaries and accessing different sources of support as LA support diminishes:

'Working across two LAs is extremely difficult as they operate in very different ways ... this is very time consuming ... Chasing funding is virtually impossible … The old system of funding [at] LA level across LA boundaries worked far more efficiently. For instance after three years of trying I have now received more funding from another LA!' (headteacher, primary school).

> 'Accessing support and expert opinion for different types of SEND, since this
> is so much harder to access now' (headteacher, primary school).

4.3 Parents' views on SENCO role in provision for children with SEND

We received 532 survey responses from parents/carers of children with SEND; however, given the methods of invitation to take part in the survey, we cannot claim that our sample is representative of all parents/carers of school-aged children with SEND. Parents/carers would have to be motivated to take the trouble to complete the survey, and their motivation was likely to be linked to their experiences of seeking support for their child (or children) and to a desire to pass on their story. In the many (optional) open comments added by parents/carers to multiple choice questions, they sometimes reported positive experiences and sometimes unsatisfactory or upsetting experiences. While offering valuable insights into how SEND processes work from their point of view, not all of these experiences were directly related to the support they had received from SENCOs.

Furthermore, only a relatively small proportion of parents/carers (20 per cent) knew whether the SENCO in their child's school had achieved the Award; the analysis that follows is therefore offered to inform discussion of Award content in relation to work with parents/carers. It is beyond the scope of this report to set out the many reported instances of shortcomings in provision and respondents' suggestions of ways in which these might be overcome.

4.3.1 Description of sample

The majority of the 532 responses came from parents/carers whose children attended mainstream provision primary schools, illustrated in Table 8 and Figure 2 below.

Table 8: Number of children whose parent/carers were survey respondents: type and age range of school attended

School type/ age range	Age range of school			
	Primary	Secondary	All through	**Total**
Mainstream	318	123	4	**445**
Special unit	11	12	2	**25**
Special school	9	13	11	**33**
Another kind of school	8	14	7	**29**
Total	**346**	**162**	**24**	**532**

N=532

Twenty-nine respondents selected 'another kind of school' and their comments of what this might be included free schools, Pupil Referral Units and sixth form college. The children of 14 respondents selecting 'another type of school' were home-schooled or not attending any provision at the time of the survey; a further three children were reported as attending nursery provision.

Parents supplied their child(ren)'s date of birth. To calculate the range and average age of children's ages, four incorrectly entered dates-of-birth were removed; this included one negative age and one apparent 44 year old. Although removed from this calculation, their data were not excluded from the rest of the analysis. The average age of respondents' children at the time of completing the survey was 10.6 years, with the youngest child 1.8 years and the oldest 23.7 years, shown in Table 9 below. This includes six children aged four and under, and five young people aged between 19 and 25 years, all of whom were attending educational provision of some kind.

Table 9: Age range of children whose parents/carers completed the survey

Min.	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	Max	Inter-quartile range	N
1.8	8.1	10.3	10.6	12.9	23.7	4.85	528

N=528

Parents were asked to indicate their child's category of special educational need and were able to tick up to three options. Two hundred and twenty eight parents selected one category, 141 selected two and 163 selected three categories. The most frequently reported category of SEND was Autistic Spectrum Disorder (262; 49.2 per cent) followed by Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia) (170; 32 per cent) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (168; 31.6 per cent). The relatively high proportion of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in our sample emphasises that this is not a representative sample of all parents/carers with children with SEN, as the current reported percentage of pupils with ASD

on SEN support in England is 4.7 per cent (DfE, 2016:6[5]). Responses are summarised in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Category and frequency of children's category of SEND

Child's category of SEND	Frequency (%)
Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia)	170 (32.0%)
Moderate or Severe Learning Difficulties	65 (12.2 %)
Speech, Language or Communication Needs	113 (21.2%)
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	262 (49.2%)
Visual Impairment	13 (0.6%)
Hearing Impairment	22 (4.1%)
Physical Disability	42 (7.9%)
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	168 (31.6%)
No Specialist Assessment	13 (2.4%)
Prefer not to say	3 (0.6%)

N=532

4.3.2 Parents' and carers' knowledge and experience of SENCO

The next set of questions asked about parents/carers' knowledge and experience of the work of the SENCO in their child's school. Respondents were able to skip these questions, and around ten per cent did; often these were parents/carers whose children were not attending school at the time of the survey. Other parents/carers of school-non-attenders responded to this question by referring to the SENCO in the last school that their child had attended. Percentages in these tables refer to the number of parents/carers responding to that question, not to the total sample.

The large majority of the 481 respondents (443; 92.1 per cent) had met the SENCO in their child's school, but most parents (373; 77.5 per cent) did not know whether their SENCO held the Award. Of those who did know, 68 parents/carers (14.1 per cent) said their child's school SENCO had the Award, and 40 (8.3 per cent) said that their child's school SENCO did not.

Of the 475 parents/carers who gave a response to the question 'Do you feel the SENCO at your child's school has sufficient training and experience to carry out their role?', 235 (49.7 per cent) responded 'No" in comparison with 129 (27.2 per cent) who responded 'Yes'; their child's SENCO did have sufficient training and experience; 111 (23.3 per cent) responded that they did not know.

We asked respondents to tell us how the SENCO had helped them and/or their child, by selecting a range of possible options (see Table 11 below). These options were related to the same aspects of the SENCO role that appeared in the school survey. Four hundred and eighty-one parents responded to this question. The most frequent option, chosen by 227

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[5] Department for Education (2016) *Statistical educational needs in England: January 2016*, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2016.

(47.2 per cent), was 'set up and/or run a review meeting' followed by 'organised classroom support' (179; 37.2 per cent) and 'involved experts (e.g. Educational Psychologist) from outside the school' (172; 35.8 per cent). One hundred and eighteen parents (24.5 per cent) reported that the SENCO had not helped them yet.

Table 11: Parents/carers' views on their child's school SENCO activities

Type of help	Frequency (per cent)
Has not helped yet	118 (22.2%)
Set up and / or run a review meeting	227 (42.7%)
Involved experts (e.g. Educational Psychologist) from outside the school	172 (32.3%)
Organised classroom support	179 (33.6%)
Arranged a special learning programme	92 (17.3%)
Organised special equipment and / or materials	93 (17.5%)
Worked directly with your child	96 (18.0%)
Organised support for your child's physical or personal care	51 (9.6%)
Advised you in any way	120 (22.6%)
Other	33 (12.6%)

N=481

To find out about how provision in schools was organised, we also asked parents/carers about what other staff in the school were doing to support their child. The most frequently chosen kinds of support here, from the 475 parents who responded to this question, mirrored the most frequently chosen actions by SENCOs outlined above, notably 'Provided classroom support' (253; 53.3 per cent), 'Worked directly with your child'' (238; 50.1 per cent) and 'Attended a review meeting' (235; 49.5 per cent). We infer from these responses that other staff were acting in response to what had been organised or initiated by SENCOs, thereby highlighting how SENCOs were carrying out key aspects of the SENCO role addressed in the Award (such as 'helping [staff] to develop effective recording systems for monitoring the progress of pupils with SEND' and 'ensuring that school systems effectively support pupils with SEND').

4.3.3 Pupil and parent/carer voice

Parents/carers were then asked about their child's experience of school to explore other aspects of the SENCO role, in particular working 'strategically with senior leaders to promote an inclusive ethos' and ensuring 'that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions on their learning and wellbeing'. We asked whether parents/carers thought that their child felt included in school life and contributed to decision-making. Responses to this question from 468 parents were distributed across the full range of ratings (see Table 12 below); 208 (44.5 per cent) though their child felt included 'very much'/'quite a lot'; however, nearly a third of parents (143; 30.6 per cent) reported that their children felt 'hardly/not at all' included.

Ratings for children's contributions to decision-making were lower; 100 (21.5 per cent) thought that their children contributed 'very much'/'quite a lot' to decisions about their learning, but 233 (50.2 per cent) thought that they contributed 'hardly / not at all'; 112 (24.1 per cent) thought that their children contributed to decisions on their wellbeing 'very much'/'quite a lot' but 221 (47.6 per cent) thought they contributed 'hardly/not at all';

Table 12: Parents/carers views of their child's experience of school

Does your child …	Very much	Quite a lot	A little	Hardly at all	Not at all	Not sure
feel included in school life?	87 (18.6%)	121 (25.9%)	104 22.3%)	63 (13.5%)	80 (17.1%)	16 (3.4 %)
contribute to decisions on their learning?	28 (6.0%)	72 (15.5%)	120 (25.9%)	97 (20.9%)	136 (29.3%)	13 (2.8 %)
contribute to decisions on their wellbeing?	29 (6.2%)	83 (17.9%)	118 (25.4%)	87 (18.7%)	134 (28.9%)	16 (3.4%)

N=468

Finally we asked respondents whether they felt that they were considered as an equal partner in supporting their child's achievement and wellbeing; this relates directly to ensuring 'that parents are equal partners in supporting their SEND child's learning and wellbeing'. The results are shown in Table 13 below. Four hundred and sixty-eight parents/carers answered this question again using the full range of available ratings; their responses for feeling 'considered an equal partner in supporting children's achievement' were spread fairly evenly across the first four ratings from 'very much' to 'hardly at all'; 138 (29.5 per cent), however, reported that they did not feel considered an equal partner at all in this aspect of provision.

Ratings for 'being considered an equal partner' in supporting their child's well-being were slightly higher in comparison with 'supporting their child's achievement', mirroring parents/carers' ratings of their children's contribution to decision making in these two aspects of provision. However, over a quarter (127; 27.2 per cent) of the 468 parents/carers who answered this question did not feel considered equal partners 'at all'.

Table 13: Parents/carers views of partnership in supporting their child at school

Do you feel considered …	Very much	Quite a lot	A little	Hardly at all	Not at all	Not sure
an equal partner in supporting your child's achievement?	91 (19.4%)	76 (16.2%)	84 (17.9%)	75 (16.0%)	138 (29.5%)	6 (1.3%)
an equal partner in supporting your child's wellbeing?	104 (22.3 %)	78 (16.7%)	83 (17.8%)	66 (14.1%)	127 (27.2%)	10 (2.1%)

N=468

4.3.4 Reflections on parents/carers' survey

Because so few respondents knew whether their SENCO had the Award or not, it was not feasible to compare responses from parents/carers in schools where the SENCO had the

Award with those from schools where the SENCO did not have the Award. Given the non-representativeness of our sample, and the open comments entered into the survey, we judged that these parents/carers' responses were strongly influenced by their particular experiences of provision and associated processes, and these experiences had been affected by many factors other than the level or efficacy of SENCO's training. Nonetheless, the powerful message from a sizable proportion of parents/carers about not feeling included should be considered in conjunction with the high priority given to aspects related to working with parents/carers by SENCOs with the Award and by school staff.

4.3.5 Key messages from parents' comments in survey and interviews:

We carried out 15 interviews with parents/carers who had completed the survey and given us their contact details. We asked them about their child(ren)'s needs and experiences of provision before asking them about their knowledge of the SENCO Award and the role of the SENCO. Eleven of the parents/carers interviewed had not heard of the Award before they completed the survey; two had some awareness that training was needed and two more thought they had heard of the Award. None had any awareness of the content of the Award. They were therefore not able to comment on the impact of the Award on practice.

In the course of interviews, all parents/carers offered examples of practice from their experiences of working with SENCOs and/or of SEND provision in general. While some of these experiences had been positive, the majority of interviewees gave detailed accounts of their '*struggles with the system'* as they had sought to secure appropriate support for their children. In conjunction with their responses to the question, 'What makes a good SENCO?', key messages and representative quotations from parents/carers on their views of the work of SENCOs are summarised briefly below. Quotations from surveys are 'in inverted commas' and quotations from interviews are *'in italics and inverted commas'.*

Interviewees suggested that a 'good SENCO' is one who

 i. knows about a wide range of **different special educational needs**: *I would expect them to have a broader and deeper knowledge of the range of the different neuro-diverse issues that children have in a typical population of any school'.*

 ii. **listens to parents**. 'W*ith M* [younger son] *I find that the SENCO listens to me, listens to M, seems to respond to him as a person rather than a list of symptoms. And I am very positive about his SENCO … And that is not my experience with T* [older son]. *With T I found that his SENCO didn't really listen to me … He was kind of fitted into what they think they should offer rather than offering what he needed. And … they didn't follow his statements very well. So I wasn't very happy'.*

 iii. **admits when he/she is wrong**. '*And sometimes to admit that you* [the SENCO] *failed. Put your hands up and actually* [say], *'I have failed and the*

> *scheme I have put your child on hasn't worked. Let's try something else'.*
> *Instead of saying: 'No, keep carrying on'.*

iv. **believes children/parents/carers** when they say there is a problem. 'Because she [the SENCO] doesn't see the behaviour we see, she gives the impression she doesn't believe us. She has questioned the ASD diagnosis'. 'They [SENCOs] also need to listen to parents first and believe them and put measures in place to help. Not the other way around. I was never believed and therefore no one wanted to help us'.

It was evident from some parents' comments, both in the survey and in interviews, that they were also looking for **SENCOs to be allies** to *'fight'* for them, and were disappointed if this did not happen.

> 'She doesn't fight for us, that's for sure. I feel like everyone's afraid to say anything that would cost the school district money'.

Parents also recognised the **difficulties faced by some SENCOs** to manage support for their children in a school where the culture did not support these efforts.

> *'No matter how good the SENCO is, if they are in a school that wants to believe that everything is the parent's fault, then the SENCO's hands are tied … And I think they need support and strategies to know how to deal with that situation. Because I think there are some good SENCOs who want to do the right things but their hands are tied'.*

While these comments do not relate directly to the Award, they do add to our understanding of the context in which SENCOs are operating and the skills that they are likely to need to work in partnership with parents and carers.

4.3 Views of pupils with SEND on their experiences of provision

In the email invitation to parents/carers to complete the relevant survey, we included links to two surveys to collect the views of children with SEND about aspects of provision addressed by the Award. Parents/carers were also provided with guidance (see Appendix 2) to help them select the more appropriate version for their children, based on their knowledge of their child, and to offer support to enable their child to present their own views. We devised two versions of the survey with a range of ages, communication needs and reading confidence in mind. Version 1 had longer sentences while Version 2 used Widgit© symbols and had short sentences and simpler words. At the beginning of each survey there were three questions to check that the child/young person had talked to their parent/carer before completing the survey, and to add their date of birth and gender. Version 1 comprised six multiple choice questions and two open questions; Version 2 comprised five multiple choice questions plus

one further request for 'any other comments'. Each survey gave children/young people the option to add further comments after multiple-choice questions, should they wish.

4.3.1 Description of sample

All children and young people responded that they had talked with someone before completing the survey. Fifty-eight completed Version 1 and 32 completed Version 2. More boys than girls completed each survey, shown in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Responses by gender to the two versions of the pupil survey

	Boys	Girls	Prefer not to say	Total
Version 1	41 (70.1%)	14 (24.1%	3 (5.2%)	**58**
Version 2	19 (59.4%)	11 (34.4%)	2 (6.2%)	**32**

Version 1 n=58; Version 2 n=32

In response to the request for child's date-of-birth, three instances of incorrect dates of birth were entered, one in Version 1 and two in Version 2, all three corresponding to ages over 30 years. These instances were removed from calculating the age range of respondents. However, on the assumption that these dates of birth had been entered incorrectly and wanting to respect the effort that pupils had put into responding, the data from these respondents were not removed from the analysis of the rest of the survey.

The children who completed Version 1 (mean age 11.6 years) were on average around two years older than the children who completed Version 2 (mean age 9.75 years). The youngest child completing Version 1 was 6.9 years old, and the oldest 18.7 years old. The youngest child completing Version 2 was 4.9 years old, and the oldest 16.7 years old. This is shown in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Age ranges at time of survey completion for each version of the pupil survey

	Min.	1st Quartile	Median	Mean	3rd Quartile	Max	Inter-quartile range	N
Version 1	6.9	9.5	11.5	11.6	13.2	18.7	3.6	57
Version 2	4.9	7.4	9.1	9.7	11.9	16.7	4.5	30

Version 1 n=57; Version 2 n=30

Pupils did not have to respond to a question if they did not want to; therefore the number of respondents varies between questions. Percentages in the section that follow are calculated using the number of respondents for that question.

4.3.2 Pupils' views on aspects of provision

In **Version 1** pupils were asked to rate how easy they found certain aspects of provision:
- Learning in class
- Joining in with school activities
- Getting on with classmates

- Working with teachers
- Getting on with other people who work in school.

As shown in Table 16 below, 50 per cent or more of pupils found each aspect easy at least some of the time; 'get on with other people who work in school' received the highest ratings, with 15 respondents (28.8 per cent) reporting that they found this easy all the time. The two aspects to which young people responded 'no, not really' most often were 'learn in class' (26; 50 per cent) and 'join in with school activities' (21; 40.4 per cent).

Table 16: Pupils' ratings of different aspects of provision (Version 1)

Do you find it easy to ...	Yes, all the time	Yes, some of the time	No, not really
Learn in class	4 (7.69%)	22 (42.31%)	26 (50.00%)
Join in with school activities	12 (23.08%)	19 (36.54%)	21 (40.38%)
Get on with your classmates	11 (21.15%)	28 (53.84%)	13 (25.00%)
Work with your teachers	12 (23.08%)	21 (40.38%)	19 (36.54%)
Get on with other people who work in school	15 (28.85%)	23 (44.23%)	14 (26.92%)

N=52

In **Version 2** pupils were asked if they felt they could
- learn in class
- join in school events
- work with the teacher
- work in groups.

They responded using a symbol rating scale to capture 'yes', 'sometimes', 'no'.

Table 17: Pupils' ratings of different aspects of provision (Version 2)

At school I feel I can …	Yes	Sometimes	No
learn in class	8 (32.0%)	11 (44.0%)	6 (24.0%)
join in school events	9 (36.0%)	12 (48.0%)	4 (16.0%)
work with the teacher	8 (33.3%)	15 (62.5%)	1 (4.2%)
work in groups	9 (36.0%)	14 (56.0%)	2 (8.0%)

N=24/25

A large proportion of pupils responding to Version 2 (between 19 – 23 respondents; 76.0 – 95.8 per cent) reported they felt able to engage in each aspect of provision at least sometimes, with 'working with the teacher' given the highest ratings. The two aspects which received the most 'not at all' ratings were 'learn in class' (6 respondents; 24 per cent) and 'join in with school activities' (4 respondents; 16 per cent), but this was a smaller proportion of the totals than we found for pupils responding using Version 1.

Taken together, the results from the two versions of the survey point to variation in experience of provision for both groups of pupils, with some pupils able to engage with and

feel at ease in a range of aspects of provision, but others giving low ratings for their experiences, particularly when learning in class.

4.3.3 Pupils' views on support

We then asked pupils about their views on the support they received in school. In **Version I** pupils were asked, 'Do you feel you get the help you need at school?'. Twenty-nine (55.7 per cent) responded that they got help at least some of the time, but 23 pupils (44 per cent) responded 'No, not really'. Responses to the question, 'Do you feel that your school cares about your needs?' were similarly distributed across ratings options, shown below in Table 18.

Table 18: Pupils' views on support in school (Version 1)

Do you feel ...	Yes, all the time	Yes, some of the time	No, not really
you get the help you need at school?	14 (26.9%)	15 (28.8%)	23 (44.2%)
that your school cares about your needs?	13 (25.0%)	16 (30.8%)	23 (44.2%)

N=52

In **Version 2** pupils were asked if they felt they could ask for help, and then whether they got help (see Table 19 below). Twelve pupils (50 per cent) responded, 'Yes', a further seven (29.3 per cent) could ask sometimes and five (20.8) per cent of pupils said, 'No', they couldn't ask for help. However, all but one child said that they got help at least sometimes. This suggests that pupils responding Version 2 had a more positive experience of support at school than pupils responding to Version 1.

Table 19: Pupils' views on support in school (Version 2)

At school I feel ...	Yes	Sometimes	No
I can ask for help	12 (50.0%)	7 (29.2%)	5 (20.8%)
I get help	8 (33.3%)	15 (62.5%)	1 (4.2%)

N=24

We then asked pupils about the people they asked for support at school. In Version 1, pupils were asked: 'When you need support at school, who do you ask? Choose your two favourites...', while in Version 2 they were asked 'If I need help at school I ask ...', with no restriction on number of options that they could select. Results are shown in Table 20 below.

Version 1 respondents selected teachers or teaching assistants most frequently, followed by family, and Version 2 respondents selected helper in class and family most frequently, followed by teachers. A surprisingly small proportion selected 'friends'; this might be because of the restrictions in Version 1 of only selecting two options, or might be because of relatively high number of pupils with ASD in our sample.

Role or person	Survey Version 1: When you need support at school, who do you ask?	Survey Version 2 If I need help at school I ask ...
Teacher	37 (63.8%)	10 (31.2%)
Teaching assistant (V2: 'helper in class')	37 (63.8%)	16 (50.00%)
Other people who work in school	7 (12.1%)	4 (12.5%)
Friends	8 (13.8%)	10 (31.2%)
Family	29 (50.0%)	15 (46.9%)

Version 1 n=52; Version 2 n=23

4.3.4 Pupil voice

We asked pupils about their opportunities for talking about their learning and their future plans. In Version 1 of the survey this included two questions:

- When do you talk about the best ways to help you learn?
- When do you talk about your plans?

Pupils were able to tick any that applied. Table 21 below shows that the three opportunities chosen most frequently were 'in meetings with teachers', 'talking to other people' and 'in class', which were selected by between nine and 15 pupils (15.5 and 25.9 per cent); 17 (29.3 per cent) however reported that they talked about both issues at another time. Out of 16 comments explaining when this other opportunity occurred, 12 pupils reported that they spoke about these issues at home. While the majority of students had some opportunity to talk about their learning and their plans, nearly a third (16 using Version 1 and 18 using Version 2; 27.3 per cent and 31 per cent respectively) responded that they never spoke about these issues.

Table 21: Pupils' responses to questions about learning and their plans (Version 1)

Opportunity ...	... to talk about learning (n=50)	... to talk about plans (n=48)
In class	10 (17.2%)	9 (15.5%)
In meetings with teachers	15 (25.9%)	12 (20.7%)
Talking to other people	12 (20.7%)	10 (17.2%)
School council	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
School questionnaire	1 (1.2%)	3 (5.2%)
Never	16 (27.6%)	18 (31.0%)
Another time	17 (29.3%)	17 (29.3%)

To invite pupils who completed Version 2 to reflect on whether staff at school were helping them to develop a sense of progression in their learning and development, we asked to pupils to say whether they felt that people at school helped them to get better at working, get on with people better or get better at something else (see Table 22 below).

Table 22: Pupils' responses to questions about learning and development (Version 2)

I feel people at school help me to …	Yes	Sometimes	No
get better at working	10 (41.7%)	12 (50.0%)	2 (8.3%)
get on with people better	9 (37.5%)	6 (25.0%)	9 (37.5%)
get better at something else	6 (26.1%)	13 (56.5%)	4 (17.4%)

N=23/24

Their responses show that 22 (91.7 per cent) felt that they were helped to get better at working at least sometimes; a smaller proportion of 15 out of 24 (62.5 per cent) thought that were they were helped at least sometimes to get on with people better; 19 (82.6 per cent) felt that people at school helped them get better with something else. This suggests that the majority of pupils responding to Version 2 were encouraged towards a sense of progression in their learning.

We added an open question to Version 1

- Imagine that you could help a new teacher. Can you tell them one thing that helps you to learn?

Forty-one children added responses that gave insights into aspects of provision that would improve their learning experiences. These included practical considerations ('Being able to sit at the front so that I do not get distracted while listening to the teacher') and teachers' responses to their difficulties ('Not be cross when I can't concentrate').

We also asked for any other comments (Version 1, n= 18; Version 2, n=6), many of which continued these themes of practical help and a more sympathetic/listening attitude from staff:

> 'Sometimes my behaviour is bad, I get angry and frustrated. I feel bad about this but teachers do not understand' (pupil, Version 1).

> 'I find writing quite hard but I get some help. I need a bit more help' (pupil, Version 2).

One pupil also commented in the importance not just of listening but acting:

> 'When they ask me how they can help they really listen and try to put something in place to make it easy er for me nor just ask then tell me I have to conform like everyone else what the point of asking me if they do nothing with my answers' (pupil, Version 1).

Responses from the two surveys showed that some children were happy with their provision and the support they received, had opportunities to comment on their learning and consider their plans for the future. Other children did not report such positive experiences, with responses from about a third of pupils completing Version 1 suggesting dissatisfaction with support and opportunities to have their voice heard. The experiences of pupils who

responded to Version 2 appear to be more positive overall; this could be because they were younger or because, given that they were using Widgit© symbols, they were more likely to be in special provision where levels of support and personalisation of learning provision are greater. Further research would be needed to investigate these differences in more detail.

4.4 Summary and key points

While three quarters of non-SENCO school staff had sufficient awareness of the Award to be able to say whether their SENCO had the Award or not, the majority of parents responding to the survey did not know whether their child's school SENCO held the Award. Most parent interviewees had not heard of it before being invited to complete the survey. Nonetheless, all groups were able to comments on aspect of the SENCO role covered by the Award.

The aspects which were most often highly rated by school staff were concerned with working strategically to develop support systems, both within and beyond the school, followed by the aspect concerned with pupils' learning and progress. The SENCO's role in working with parents/carers was the aspect most often highly rated by school staff respondents.

The two aspects that received the lowest ratings overall from school staff were 'modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practice for pupils with SEND'. These reflect the two aspects of the Award that were given the lowest ratings by SENCOs.

The aspects of the SENCO role most often identified as helpful by parents/carers were related to their experiences of their child's SENCO organising review meetings, involving external agencies and organising classroom support. These mostly mirror those that were highly rated by school staff, namely 'ensuring school systems effectively support pupils with SEND', 'drawing on external sources of support' and 'coordinating provision for pupils with SEND'. There was less agreement over the SENCO's role in working with parents/carers; while about a half of the parents/carers in our sample felt that they were considered an equal partner, over a third felt that they were 'hardly/not at all' considered as an equal partner in supporting their child's achievement or wellbeing. Parent/carers recognised that in some schools the ethos was not always supportive of the SENCO's work

The responses from pupils with SEND supported a similar view of aspects of provision which fall within a SENCO's role; about half of the pupils in our sample felt that they were able to get help at least some of the time at school, and that this help came mainly from staff at school or from family. The majority of pupils also had some opportunity to talk about their learning and their plans. However, about a third of pupils in our sample did not feel supported, and did not have opportunities to have their voices heard. This was an aspect of the Award which was rated highly by relatively few Award holders and trainees (see Section 2.2.3).

Future suggestions for Award content from school staff and parents included listening to parents, managing budgets and supporting the learning of pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and in different contexts.

5. The National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination in context

In this section we examine the data that relates to the issues of headteacher SENCO succession planning, the Award's perceived relationship to career progression, decisions about taking the Award, and working in academies and multi-academy trusts (MATs). In the final sub-section we draw on data from the interviews with 20 SENCOs to illustrate how the interaction of different contexts affects the experience of those who are training for the Award.

5.1 Headteachers: Award training and succession planning

Table 8 below shows the number of staff that 121 participating headteachers reported had been trained for the Award in the last two years. Thirty-six headteachers reported that no staff working in their school had trained for the Award; 63 that one member of staff had trained; 18 that two staff members had trained; and four schools that three staff members had trained. The majority of responding headteachers (85/121; 70 per cent) therefore reported that at least one member of their staff had trained for the Award.

Table 23: Number of staff trained for the Award in the last two years (headteachers)

School sector/Number of staff trained	0	1	2	3
Primary	36	48	12	2
Secondary		12	4	1
Special		3	2	1
Total	**36 (30%)**	**63 (52%)**	**18 (15%)**	**4 (3%)**

N=121

Following on from this question, headteachers were asked 'In the next two years, how many (if any) staff do you plan to fund to train for the Award?'. They were invited to indicate the number of staff whose training they intended to fund, and the role that these potential trainees held in the school; 121 responded, and their responses are shown in Table 9 below. Participants were then asked to explain their approach through the open-ended question 'Please could you briefly explain your school's policy on funding staff to achieve the National SENCO Award'.

Table 24: Number of staff headteachers plan to fund for training in the next two years

School sector/Number of staff trained	0	1	2
Primary	47	46	4
Secondary	5	9	3
Special	2	5	
Total	**54 (45%)**	**60 (50%)**	**7 (6%)**

N=121

5.1.1 No plans to fund Award training

Fifty-four headteachers (47 from primary, five from secondary and two from special schools) reported that they **would not fund any staff** to undertake the training in the next two years. Some reported that they either had not developed a policy or had not yet needed to develop a policy on funding staff to train for the Award, and a few reported that they currently had a sufficient number of staff trained:

> 'With three fully trained staff we are future proofed for now' (headteacher, secondary school).

The majority reported that they would only fund staff that were appointed or in post as SENCO:

> 'We train as needed and plan for succession although we would not put someone through the qualification until they were appointed SENCO' (headteacher, primary school).

Seven headteachers, however, reported that they either were the school SENCO or that they would undertake the role if necessary, generally because of budget constraints and the prospect of the trained SENCO leaving the school:

> 'I am the school SENCO and have been a SENCO in this and two other schools since [date]. We have a school of [number] pupils in a rural area with comparatively few SEND needs. I am a teaching head ... There is not the capacity or funding to pay for me to take the time necessary to do the National SENCO award, and there is not a regular enough need for specialist SENCO knowledge to make the investment and time worthwhile' (headteacher, primary school).

> 'I have completed the award as it is most cost effective to train the person who is likely to be remaining within the school' (headteacher, primary school).

As can be inferred from the above comments, budget was an important concern for the majority of respondents. A secondary headteacher outlined in detail the reason that s/he would not be funding staff to train for the Award, demonstrating that this was not a concern purely for the small rural schools seen in the comment above:

> 'Due to funding constraints and increasing expenditure on teacher pensions and NI contributions, I have cut the school continuing professional development (CPD) budget from £30,000 in 2014 to £10,000 in 2016. This has to cover 160 staff. I would like to support the SENCO Award but cannot afford it at the moment (headteacher, secondary school).

5.1.2 Plans to fund one staff member to train for the Award

Sixty headteachers (46 from primary, nine from secondary and five from special schools) reported that they planned to fund **one member of staff** to train for the Award in the next two years. Thirty-two headteachers reported that they planned to fund training for a SENCO (27 primary, four secondary, one special); 15 that they planned to fund senior or middle leaders (11 primary, two secondary, two special); and 12 that they planned to fund teachers (seven primary, four secondary, one special).

Once again the majority planned to fund training for the Award as the need arose, generally for their SENCO or for another member of staff who was planning to take over the role in the future:

> 'As a new SENCO is appointed we fund the training from our CPD budget' (headteacher, primary school).

> 'We are funding a member of staff to undertake the training. She will take over from our SENCO when she retires' (headteacher, primary school).

Several respondents outlined their succession plan that involved training staff before the need arose:

> 'Our school currently has one member of staff with the Award but the school intend to train another member of staff to support but also as succession planning' (headteacher, primary school).

> 'Training is provided when a new SENDCO is required - e.g. this September we are changing our SENDCO, and training another member of staff as part of our succession planning ' (headteacher, primary school).

A few respondents referred to the advantages of ensuring staff had up to date knowledge and skills, and reported that they were prepared to fund Award training at regular intervals:

> 'The National Award is important to the school as it helps us ensure we meet statutory obligations in delivering learning to SEND pupils. In addition, we submit a number of Education and Health Care Plans during the year and qualified staff are advantageous in this process' (headteacher, special school).

> 'We fund one place per year to ensure we have a qualified SENCO in place' (headteacher, secondary school).

Once again budget was reported as a challenge, although by fewer schools than in the previous sub-section, and once again a respondent from a small, rural school outlined the issue in detail:

'Our current SENCO is due to retire in a year and so we will need to fund a new one. However we are a very small rural primary school … and I do not (yet) have a member of staff who wants to train for this role. At this point, I am also very worried about how we will afford the training' (headteacher, primary school).

In connection with potential budgetary issues, a few respondents commented that they had made funding conditional on the staff member remaining in the school for a certain length of time:

'We fund and then if they leave within a certain time we claim some of the money back. This is because over the last two years we have paid to train two SENCOs and then they both left!' (headteacher, primary school).

An interesting question here is why two SENCOs have left a school within two years, and may relate to the comment made by parents/carers in Section 4.3.5; that in some schools the ethos is not supportive of SENCOs. The point is also made by teacher SENCOs in Section 5.2.3, who argue that they are unable to implement change because of the absence of support from senior leaders or the absence of influence as they are not a member of the senior leadership team.

5.1.3 Plans to fund two staff members to train for the Award
Seven headteachers (four from primary, three from secondary schools) reported that they planned to fund Award training for **two staff members** over the next two years; this included training for six SENCOs, five senior/middle leaders and three teachers. Two respondents offered relevant comments on their policy for funding the Award:

'We fund those who need the qualification (SENCOs) and part fund those who don't need it but for whom it is continuing professional development' (headteacher, secondary school).

'We need to do this as we would not otherwise be able to appoint a competent SENCO. Need to grow our own' (headteacher, primary school).

5.2 Impact of the Award on career progression
A total of 426 Award-holding respondents (411 SENCOs, 15 non-SENCOs) answered the question 'Has achieving the Award resulted in career progression for you?'.

Table 25 below shows the results; 145 (34 per cent) said that the Award had resulted in career progression and 281 (66 per cent) reported that it had not. From these respondents, 378 offered further comments in response to the question 'Please tell us how, if at all, the Award has influenced your career progression'. Once again the comments varied from brief

('Promotion' or 'It hasn't') to highly detailed. In what follows we have divided the responses from the three categories of staff (headteachers, senior leaders and teachers) to illustrate the themes arising from the data that relate to staff progression.

Table 25: Has achieving the Award resulted in career progression?

Role / Response	Yes	No
Headteacher SENCOs	1	5
SLT SENCOs	99	171
Teacher SENCOs	36	99
Sub-total	136	275
Headteacher non-SENCOs	3	1
SLT non-SENCOs	4	2
Teacher non-SENCOs	2	3
Sub-total	9	6
Total	145 (34%)	281 (66%)

N=426

5.2.1 Headteachers

Four headteachers responded that the Award had resulted in career progression; six that it had not (see Table 25 above).

Headteachers who reported that the Award had directly influenced their career progression described how it contributed to their appointment as head of school. One emphasised how the SENCO role enabled him/her to build relationships with members of the school community:

> 'I am now Head of School following being SENCO. I think this has a lot to do with building relationships with challenging children and families' (SENCO headteacher, primary school).

Another delineated a direct route to headship:

> 'I was able to take on the role of SENCO, establish my position on [the] senior leadership team and then take over leading the school when the previous head resigned' (non-SENCO headteacher, special school).

A third emphasised how the Award made Award-holders more employable, something that may be more relevant to smaller schools:

> 'I am more employable as a head or senior teacher with the ability to offer SENCO role to a school' (non-SENCO headteacher, primary school).

The fourth respondent to report that the Award had resulted in career progression pointed out the beneficial range of experience offered by undertaking the SENCO role:

> 'By qualifying early in my career, I worked at a senior level and gained experience of a broader range of issues affecting school' (non-SENCO headteacher, primary school).

Those headteachers who responded that the Award had not made any difference to their career progression offered no further detailed comment.

5.2.2 Senior leaders

One hundred and three senior leaders reported that the Award had resulted in career progression; 173 that it had not (see Table 25 above).

The majority of senior leaders who commented that the Award had influenced their career progression cited promotion to senior leadership:

> 'Progression to Assistant Headteacher' (non-SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

> 'I was able to apply for a non-teaching SENCO role, as part of the senior leadership team - paid with a Teaching and Learning Responsibility increment (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

An important theme was that the Award-holder was taken more seriously and had greater scope for influence and/or time to undertake SENCO duties:

> 'I would not have been a SENCO without it because it was compulsory by the time I became SENCO, but it has also meant that other leadership take the role more seriously (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

> 'Before the award I had 2.5 hours SENCO time at our school per week. I now have two days allocated for SENCO & Safeguarding non-teaching time per week. I am more involved in Senior Management meetings and decision making' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

> 'Enhanced my skill as SENCO. Given a legitimacy, via the qualification, to my voice and raised profile across the school. SENCO is now a part of [the] senior leadership team within the school' (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

A few respondents commented on their promotion to multiple roles, with possible budgetary implications for the school:

'It allowed my Head to combine the role of Deputy Head and SENCO to one paid leadership role' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

This theme of employability was echoed by a small number of respondents who had found the Award helpful when applying for another job, either in their own school or another:

'I am SENCO but with an Inclusion and Assistant Head post also. I think the qualification gave me confidence and self-belief because I based my decisions on the reading and research I had done personally as well as advice from my senior colleagues. I think this influenced my senior colleagues' opinion of my abilities and when the Assistant Head role came up, I was encouraged to apply' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'I applied for an Assistant Headteacher Inclusion position, I was the only applicant with the qualification (it was not stipulated on the advertisement). Initially I took the course as it was mandatory for my role but I am aware that schools are finding it difficult to recruit staff with the qualification or those willing to undertake the course' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Comments from senior leaders who reported that the Award had not resulted in career progression for them focused on a number of different areas. The majority of respondents reported that they were already members of the senior leadership team, or that they achieved the Award as part of the conditions of their appointment:

'I was already on the senior leadership team and had been the SENCO for a year already - no career progression' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'As a new SENCO I had to take course to be in post' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Some commented that the Award had not influenced their career progression but had given them confidence in their ability to undertake their current SENCO role; sometimes this included further study that led on from achieving the Award:

'Haven't progressed in career … but feel more confident doing role and doing it well' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'It hasn't other than continuing as a SENCO as it is a requirement. It has enabled me to progress onto further study which will hopefully mean I gain a Master's at the end of it' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Others anticipated that holding the Award would improve their employability in the future:

'It makes me marketable as I have the Award and schools have to employ somebody with the Award as the SENCO (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

On a more cautionary note, some respondents focused on the potentially challenging consequences of combining the SENCO role with another senior leadership responsibility:

'I am a Deputy Headteacher so it hasn't really had an impact on career progression for me - it saves the school money not to have to employ a separate SENCO but is a heavy work load for me and often takes me away from school improvement as a Deputy' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

A few expressed concern that achieving the Award would mean less likelihood of promotion within the holder's school. Once again this was linked to budgetary concerns:

'I think it's tied me down to the role as I'm now seen as the SENCO and won't be considered for other roles because of the expense and time commitment it would involve in appointing a new SENCO' (senior leader, secondary school).

5.2.3 Teachers

Thirty-eight teachers reported that the Award had resulted in career progression; 102 that it had not (see Table 25 above).

The themes from the teachers who commented on career progression following their achievement of the Award were similar to those in the previous sub-sections of promotion, employability, greater influence within the school, and the opportunity for further study:

'I have been a SENCO for one provision within our collegiate and, following re-structuring of the collegiate, I have now been appointed as Assistant SENCO across the whole collegiate (SENCO teacher, special school).

'Given me the right to have a more effective role at the school' (teacher, secondary school).

'I then went on to do the Master's in SpLD (dyslexia) at the same University as the Award. This helped my career progression and my deeper understanding of SENCO issues' (teacher, secondary school).

Some commented on how they had moved schools to gain career progression:

I was completing the Award to become a SENCO on retirement of my predecessor. This happened shortly after completing the Award. I am shortly

moving schools where I will become an Assistant Headteacher with SEND and Inclusion as my responsibility (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

Others reported that the Award had prevented their redundancy:

'Kept me in a job during a massive staff restructure' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

The remainder of the comments demonstrated a number of challenges for those employed as teachers in a SENCO role. The first related to the importance of senior leadership support for the role:

'Moved schools as the Award made me realise I was not going to be able to be strategic, as I did not have regular leadership support/access' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

'Although gaining the Award was a great personal triumph, it does not appear to hold any value with the senior leadership team at my school' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

The second related to workload:

'It hasn't - it just felt like a box ticking exercise that was unnecessarily stressful and added to my already huge workload!' (SENCO teacher, primary school)

'I realised that I could not be a full time teacher and a SENCO - the workload was too great. I now work as a Teaching Assistant and Preparation, Planning and Assessment cover teacher in the same school. I have had to take a reduction in pay, but I now have a work-life balance' (SENCO teacher, primary school).

The third area related to budget. The following extended comment demonstrates the complex relationship between the SENCO role, new regulations, budgetary constraints and the role of senior leadership in determining opportunities for staff members:

'In some ways it has meant I'm more stagnant as every school needs a SENCO and I feel stuck in the role and unable to move up. Unless a SENCO is included in the leadership team there is nowhere to go. In my school I have had three different senior leadership team (SLT) SEN links over the past three years who have had no experience of running an SEN or inclusion department, so it's a constant retelling of how everything works. The comment from one of these SLT links was, 'In order to be Deputy Head I need some SEN experience'. [This] shows that career progression is helpful to some people …

but not to the SENCO. I was on the extended leadership team for my SENCO role but that has now been taken away and my salary reduced (safeguarded for three years) due to budget cuts. The reduction of the SEN budget due to Education and Health Care Plans being harder to get has had a definite impact on the way my school views SEN and the SENCO role. The comment from SLT has been, 'There are fewer students with EHCPs and therefore less funding, so we have to find ways of saving money'. This is a shame as the students with SEN are still there and need supporting, but also a shame because experienced SENCOs whose salaries are being cut will be looking for different positions! Or [to go] out of the profession altogether. In three years' time, after safeguarding runs out, I will be on a lower Teaching and Learning Responsibility point than I was when I started [in] this school ten years ago. So no, the Award has not influenced my career progression' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

The following comment picks up these points and suggests that the most effective strategy for ensuring that SENCOs have sufficient influence to effect change in schools is to appoint them as members of the senior leadership team:

SENDCo's are still not being invited onto the SLT … There is no recourse to challenge this and so SEN students have no voice in this respect. I have noticed an erosion in SENCO's salaries across the board, definitely lower TLR points being offered. The SENCO is a responsible job which needs someone with higher level skills, e.g. the ability to make important decisions regarding a child's future and being able to converse with and know who to liaise with (Ed Psych, CAMH, consultants) to get the best possible outcome for a student as well as analysing whole school data to improve outcomes for those students. I'm glad the SEND guidance tries to address issues of improving the relationships and profile of the SENCo, especially with SLT, but I don't think this has happened (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

5.3 Decisions about training for the Award

In this section we report the findings from the survey questions 'Are you considering/might you consider training for the National Award for SEN Coordination?' that was asked of participants who did not hold the Award, and 'Please tell us why you wanted to achieve the Award' that was asked of respondents who had achieved the Award but were not SENCOs at the time that they responded to the survey.

5.3.1 Training in the future

Table 26 below shows responses to the question about considering training for the Award. A total of 397 headteachers, senior leaders and teachers responded, of whom 88 (22 per cent)

responded that they would consider training for the Award and 309 (78 per cent) reported that they would not.

Table 26: 'Are you considering/might you consider training for the Award?'

Role / Response	Yes	No
Headteacher SENCOs	4	19
SLT SENCOs	18	83
Teacher SENCOs	10	40
Sub-total	32	142
Headteacher non-SENCOs	6	72
SLT non-SENCOs	24	58
Teacher non-SENCOs	26	37
Sub-total	56	167
Total	88 (22%)	309 (78%)

N=397

Headteachers

A total of ten headteachers responded that they would consider training for the Award, and 91 that they would not (see Table 26 above).

The four SENCO headteachers who reported that they would consider training for the Award all stated that they would train to comply with the legal requirement to have a trained staff member employed in the school. Once again, budgetary issues were raised:

> 'Legal requirement. I wish I didn't have to as (a) we cannot afford it, (b) we are a small school, (c) I do not see what value the award adds to the good provision already being provided' (SENCO headteacher, primary school).

Non-SENCO headteachers (n=6) reported that they would undertake Award training to increase their knowledge and understanding about SEN issues, to enable them to take on the role of SENCO, and /or for the greater credibility the Award gave to SEN issues:

> 'It gives greater credibility and weight to the job whilst interacting with parents, staff and children' (headteacher, primary school).

Headteacher SENCOs (n=19) who reported that they would not consider training for the Award gave one or more of three reasons:

    i.   They were **temporarily undertaking the role of SENCO** or were close to retirement: 'My role for this coming year is to lead as SENCO and manage the Special Needs Education in the school whilst a teacher shadows and completes the SEN Training' (headteacher, primary school).

    ii.   **Time and funding**: 'I am a teaching Head teacher in a small school and do not have the time or the funding to cover it' (headteacher, primary school).

iii. They had **no legal need** for the qualification: 'I began training in cohort 1, however it became impossible to complete alongside my Head teacher role. In addition I had been SENCO for many years and therefore it wasn't statutory for me (headteacher, primary school).

Headteacher non-SENCOs (n=72) who reported that they were not considering training for the Award cited one or more of the following reasons:

i. The majority of respondents reported that achieving the Award was **not necessary for** or **applicable to** their role: 'I am a Headteacher and have an excellent SENCO and Learning support team who can filter the expertise I need upwards' (headteacher, secondary school); 'I would not have the time to complete the Award and feel that the skills and knowledge learned by completing the Award wouldn't necessarily match my job profile' (headteacher, special school).

ii. **Time**: 'I like to delegate responsibility and I do not have the time to be trained in all my areas of responsibility, when the Award is as time-demanding as this one' (headteacher, secondary school).

iii. **Imminent retirement**: 'I am a head teacher who is coming close to retirement age (headteacher, primary school).

iv. **Funding**: 'Funding/Budgetary problems' (headteacher, special school)

v. **The Award was seen as unnecessary**: 'The theory is straightforward. The award is a token. The practice is hard for structural reasons in the education system, not because of the intellectual demands of being a SENCO' (headteacher, primary school).

Senior leaders and teachers

A total of 42 senior leaders and 36 teachers responded that they would consider training for the Award; 141 senior leaders and 77 teachers reported that they would not (see Table 26 above). We have brought these two groups together in this sub-section because both reported similar reasons for considering undertaking (or not) Award training. Six respondents from these groups reported that they were soon to commence the training; another five that they had begun the training but had withdrawn from the course, either because of external circumstances or because the training was not perceived to be beneficial.

SENCOs who reported that they would consider training for the Award (senior leaders n=18; teachers n=10) cited two main reasons:

i. The **legal requirement** for a trained SENCO: 'Statutory duty to train within three years of appointment' (senior leader, primary school); 'I will need to complete the Award over the next two years' (teacher, secondary school).

ii. Their own **professional development**: 'I believe that completing the National Award will validate my experience, will provide me with professional development relating to my role and enable me to meet other SENCOs with whom I can share knowledge/experiences in a mutually beneficial way

(senior leader, primary school); 'I feel that this qualification will provide me with knowledge and skills essential for the post of SENCO' (teacher, secondary school).

Almost all non-SENCO respondents (senior leaders n=24; teachers n=26) who reported that they might consider training for the Award commented that they were interested in terms of:

    i.   **Professional development**: 'I think it could massively help students within the school, and my awareness of their needs could be vital in identifying the possibilities to enable them to access education that 'works' for them' (senior leader, special school). Almost all of these teacher respondents gave professional development as their main or only reason for their interest in training: 'It's an area I am very interested in having worked with a lot of classes with high proportions of SEN' (teacher, secondary school).

    ii.   **Career progression**. A few non-SENCO senior leaders and teachers wrote of the Award as a route to career progression: 'To further my career into SEN - I would like to be head of an SEN school' (teacher, secondary school).

The majority of SENCO senior leaders (n=83) and teachers (n=40) who reported that they were not considering training for the Award commented that there was no **legal requirement** for them to train, either because they had been in post for sufficient time, or because they were changing roles and/or because they were close to retirement. Many of these outlined how they had continued with professional development through their careers, suggesting that the Award would be of little help to them at this stage in their career. The comment below captures the spirit of these comments:

> 'I attended similar SENCO training when I first took the role on over 15 years ago and at the time did not convert it to the Master's. I have since continued to attend training sessions both nationally and locally in order to update my skills, knowledge and understanding, and currently advise others who are new to the role' (senior leader, secondary school).

Some respondents cited time as a barrier to their interest in training for the Award:

> 'It is too time consuming. I am also deputy head as well as inclusion leader and have a very, very full timetable' (senior leader, primary school).

Non-SENCO senior leaders (n=58) and teachers (n=32) who reported that they were not considering training for the Award focused on two areas:

    i.   **Lack of interest** in this career pathway. This was the view of the majority of these respondents, who had either selected different specialisms: 'I am more interested in the curriculum route than pastoral and although it is important for teachers to be aware of how to best help students with SEND, it would not be my only focus' (teacher, secondary school), were close to retirement:

'I am very close to retirement age' (senior leader, primary school) or who were already studying for a different qualification: 'Currently studying for an MA in a separate field' (senior leader, special school).

ii. A few respondents reported that they had **insufficient time** to undertake the training: 'I don't have time, so must prioritise - whilst SEND is important to me and my school, it is not my first priority for continuing professional development' (senior leader, secondary school).

5.3.2 Currently training

A total of 134 trainee respondents responded to the invitation, ''Please tell us why you are training for the Award'. Of these 86 were senior leaders (SENCO n=82, non-SENCO n=4) and 48 were teachers (SENCO n=43, non-SENCO n=5).

Senior leader trainees

The majority of senior leader respondents reported that they were undertaking the training as it was a **legal requirement** for SENCOs new in post:

'Statutory although I have a MA, ironically, in Inclusion already. I am an Assistant Headteacher and always line managed SEN, but being the active SENCO is different (SENCO senior leader, secondary school).

Some reported that the training was a legal requirement but was also an opportunity for **professional development** and/or **career progression**:

'It is a requirement to work as a SENCO, and as a specialist teacher it will allow me to carry out assessments that require a post-graduate qualification in SEN to purchase them. Also it has deepened my understanding of SEN within the context of the legislation, school improvement and inclusion' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

'It is becoming increasingly necessary to hold this qualification to move on' (SENCO senior leader, primary school).

The four non-SENCO respondents all gave career progression and/or professional development as their reasons for training for the Award. The following response summarises their comments:

'It was decided that this would support my continuing professional development. Part of my role in school is as a Reading Recovery teacher, so I have continued to develop my knowledge of SEND to equip me in my future role as SENCO' (non-SENCO senior leader, primary school).

Teacher trainees

Although the majority of responding SENCO teachers reported that the **legal requirement** to hold the Award was the reason behind starting the training, they placed a greater emphasis on **professional development** and **progression** than senior leader respondents. A few stated that they wanted to **raise the profile** of the SENCO role within their schools, and to **network** with other SENCOs. The following response includes all four of these considerations:

> 'Requirement of the role, as I have not been a SENCO before; also to learn more about the role, meet other SENCOs and raise the profile of the role in school' (SENCO teacher, secondary school).

Once again, non-SENCO respondents focused only on professional development and progression:

> 'It is something of interest to me and a role I would like to have responsibility for in the future' (non-SENCO teacher, primary school).

5.3.3 Trained but not currently SENCOs

Sixteen survey respondents reported that they had trained for the Award but were not currently SENCOs. Four were headteachers, seven senior leaders and five were teachers.

All four **headteachers** undertook the training as they moved into the SENCO role, generally in a previous school. One, however, commented that 'As Head Teacher I took on the role of SENCO and undertook the qualification when my previous SENCO left the school. The award was a barrier for staff who would have been SENCO but didn't want to undertake the course' (primary headteacher). One – different – primary headteacher reported that s/he planned to become a SENCO in future.

Six of the seven **senior leaders** reported that they did the training when they were a SENCO, and that achieving the Award was part of the role; one reported undertaking the Award as professional development. This respondent and one other (one a primary, the other a secondary senior leader) responded that they planned to become a SENCO in the future.

Four of the five **teachers** who responded to this question reported that they trained for the Award as a means to career progression, and one to develop SEND knowledge and understanding to support children in schools. All five (four secondary teachers, one from a special school) reported that they planned to become a SENCO in the future.

5.4 The Award in academies and multi-academy trusts

Award-holding survey participants were asked, 'Do you think that the Award reflects the needs of SENCOs working in academies and multi-academy trusts (MATs)?'. Table 27

below shows the results from 426 participants, the majority of whom (n=227; 53 per cent) reported that they did not know, with roughly equal proportions responding 'Yes' (n=105; 25 per cent) and 'No' (n=94; 22 per cent).

Table 27: Does the Award reflect the needs of SENCOs working in academies and MATs?

Role / Response	Yes	No	Don't know
Headteachers	4	2	4
Senior leaders	58	59	159
Teachers	43	33	64
Total	**105 (25%)**	**94 (22%)**	**227 (53%)**

N=426

Respondents who made relevant comments focused on three particular areas in which they reported that the Award reflected the needs of SENCOs working in academies or MATs:

i. The SENCO **responsibilities remained the same**, whatever the setting: 'Award is based on principles of effective provision and student centred approach – important for any setting' (senior leader, secondary school); 'The role of a SENCO is similar regardless where you are, as the key issue is ensuring the progress of pupils and support of staff' (senior leader, primary school).

ii. The **Award content**: 'All important areas covered – funding as well as evaluating impact, which is the big one because of external pressures' (senior leader, secondary school); 'The award looks at current legislation and about the real issues faced in schools. Discussion is at a school/nationwide strategic level as well as focussing in on individual pupil needs' (senior leader, primary school).

iii. The **flexibility and quality** of course delivery: 'The tutors on my course had a clear insight in to this and an understanding of the challenges. They were able to offer individualised advice in tutorial sessions. They also understood that I worked with a number of LAs … and offered on advice on how to manage this challenge (senior leader, 'other' school);

In many cases, respondents who felt that the Award did not reflect the needs of SENCOs who were working in academies and MATs focused on the emphasis on **academic study** in the training:

'It has to be academic - which I understand - but the work needs to really focus on the actual job we do' (senior leader, secondary school).

'As stated above, it is too heavily focused on research projects and not enough about the most appropriate strategies or interventions to help support children with SEND' (senior leader, primary school).

The remaining comments raised issues that were related more to the context in which the respondents were working than the narrow focus of the question. These included:

i. **Teacher workload**: 'I am working as a full-time SENCO in a busy academy school and the award is a massive pressure point rather than an effective way to develop skills to manage and co-ordinate support for the most vulnerable children in our school system. I don't feel that I have time to absorb the potential benefit of the award' (teacher, secondary school).

ii. The **importance of senior-level support**: 'By completing the course SENCOs can then use this information to drive forward inclusion. I think it should be compulsory though that either the Headteacher or a member of senior leadership team (SLT) should accompany the SENCO for at least one of the seven days. In my school, a secondary school of 2000, I am SENCO on middle leadership level. Whilst I do have the backing of my Headteacher and senior leadership team Inclusion lead, I still feel the Head could do more to lead on SEND issues rather than delegating to me' (teacher, secondary school).

iii. The **changing context** within which SENCOs are working: 'I think the role of SENCO is changing and expanding constantly. The generic course for the Award I took part in did not reflect the changes that are taking place, dealing with larger cohorts of children, split site schools and the demands of multi-academy trusts who may have their own agendas' (senior leader, primary school).

iv. The different **ways of working** within academies: 'All academies can work very differently and it also depends on the ethos of the school and how inclusion is seen by [the] senior leadership team' (teacher, primary school). This can lead to potential problems for SENCOs: 'In my view the Award focuses on the situation in maintained schools. In academies there could be unqualified teachers, local agreements etc which may make supporting children with SEN more difficult' (senior leader, primary school); 'I know some academies have different views on when a child should be on the SEND register, e.g. only if diagnosed' (senior leader, primary school).

v. The **diminishing role of LAs**: 'By working in academies the SENCO has no remit to the LA and therefore needs to be even more aware of provision and services required for children with SEN' (senior leader, primary school); 'There was a lack of … advice on assessment of children, which has become more critical since County support is more difficult to access' (senior leader, primary school).

vi. Related **budgetary issues**: 'Budgeting and funding issues are different, especially with the increase in traded services within my local authority' (senior leader, primary school); 'I think more should be done on brokering additional support from outside the LA. There is competition out there and large amount of money to be managed' (senior leader, secondary school).

vii. **Concern for SEND** in schools' agendas: 'I would hope that SENCOs provide a consistent level of professionalism wherever they are. I suspect that as budgets tighten pupils with SEND needs will be excluded and pushed out of mainstream schools/academies because their needs cannot be met. This is bad news for our vulnerable pupils and bad news for families and bad news for schools' (senior leader, primary school).

5.5 Schools without SENCOs

Thirty-six people responded to the question, 'You have told us that your school does not have a statutory requirement to employ a SENCO and that you have not achieved the National Award for SEN Coordination. You may, however, have views on the Award. Please let us know your views in the box below'. Thirteen of these respondents were headteachers, 16 senior leaders and six were teachers; all except two were employed in special schools, and these were senior leaders in alternative provision. Once again a wide range of views was expressed:

i. Several commented on the **importance of a national qualification**: 'I have worked with unqualified SENCOs in the past and feel that it is important to have a national, agreed standard of skill in order to meet the needs of the diverse population of pupils with SEND to support equitability regardless of location, and school setting. SENCOs work extremely hard and are passionate about getting the best for their pupils under what are usually very trying circumstances, so it is important to formally recognise that' (senior leader, special school).

ii. Eight respondents reported that they either **had not heard of the Award** or that they knew nothing about it: 'I didn't know about the Award. We are a special school for learners aged 11-18 and all of us do all our work with SEN pupils' (senior leader, special school).

iii. A few wrote of the Award's **irrelevance to their setting**: 'We have found that the Award is very heavily geared to students with special needs who may be in a mainstream setting. It also covers a lot of techniques for managing poor behaviour; however, it does not cover the severe needs we have in our setting or give much support for the major meltdowns some of our students have when stressed' (teacher, special school).

iv. Two had **withdrawn from the course**: 'I began the Award but found the course not informative and badly managed. Feedback from work sent in was not timely. My workload and other pressures made it clear that this was not going to impact on what I was achieving for my pupils. I have heard that the courses have since improved. I regularly attend senior meetings, have written numerous transfer reviews etc. Next year one of my teachers is attending a SENCO Award course' (senior leader, special school).

v. The issue of **workload** when completing the course was raised: 'As a long standing SENCO/deputy head teacher I have met many SENCOs who say the Award is useful but the work load when teaching is too great. Teaching is stressful and very time consuming without taking on onerous SENCO training' (senior leader, special school).

vi. **Funding** issues were also reported: 'I would love someone to be able to undertake the award, but because the school is in a deficit budget position, we can't afford to release anyone to undertake the training. However, next year, we have employed a teacher who has just completed it' (headteacher, special school).

vii. Three respondents made **suggestions** for the Award training. One was that trainees should spend time in a special school to gain greater understanding of SEND: 'We are a special school - whilst the Award is useful to enable mainstream teachers to gain a better understanding of children with special needs they need a long placement (one more than three weeks) in a special school, plus in a variety of different special settings to gain a proper appreciation of the difficulties children with SEND encounter' (teacher, special school). The other related to providing a mentor for trainees: 'Perhaps a mentor system would support the new SENCO in work and through the accreditation' (senior leader, special school). A third suggestion was that the Award should include monitoring effectiveness of SEND provision: 'We link to the SENCO Networks by providing an Outreach Service supporting schools across the city. Our role is supporting SENCOs through continuous continuing professional development and individual cases. The National Award should monitor effectiveness more closely within a school rather than just duration of course' (senior leader, special school).

5.6 The Award in wider context

In this sub-section we focus on the qualitative data from our interviews with 20 SENCOs, drawing on four of those interviews to illustrate how a number of different factors interact to affect the SENCO's experience of Award training. Each of these case studies brings together some of the different factors that we have highlighted throughout this report; the school and wider contexts within which they are working, the Award delivery, the timing of the training in the trainee's professional life and the personal attributes of the trainee all have an effect on how trainees are able to engage with the Award and use the knowledge gained within their schools. Each case study is presented in the form of a narrative, and concludes with our reflections from each of the relevant interviews. Direct quotations are *'in inverted commas and italics'*; to protect individuals' identity, all names are pseudonyms.

Emily, senior leader SENCO

Emily qualified as a teacher around twenty years ago and has held the role of SENCO for around six years. She achieved the Award a few years ago, and undertook the training when

she was already an experienced practitioner in SEND. Although she did not believe that the training offered her new insights, she reported that the Award was highly valuable to the individuals that achieved it. First, the qualification *'gives the role of the SENCO validity in school … I think it is all about the status that it gives you, so therefore you have got the authority to stand up and lead people into change'*. Secondly, she sees the Award as a route to career progression, and commented that recruiting schools often want to employ SENCOs who have already achieved the qualification. Third, she felt that the depth of knowledge offered by the Award was critical in a changing educational landscape where *'children with very complex needs'* were being placed *'in mainstream schools who wouldn't have had these children before'*.

Emily approached the Award with an understanding that *'learning is always good'*. She found multiple ways in which the training informed and enhanced her SENCO work: '*With the action research, make it something I was going to do anyway. And when I was writing an assignment,* [I was] *trying to extract something from that that I can use in my work'*. Due to her extensive experience, Emily felt that *'she ended up being the expert'* on the course, whom other SENCOs would visit to observe her practice. She saw this as a reciprocal process because *'I run a resource provision … I can say we are here, we offer this provision'* but that *'You can always learn things from people'* when they visit – all of which has helped to widen her own network of SENCO support.

Emily felt *'lucky'* that her headteacher was supportive and would *'give me any time that I needed'* to manage the Award workload, and that the flexibility of her schedule meant that she could organise her work schedule around the Award training. She felt, however, that some of her previous experience could have been taken into account more fully as she was obliged to attend day courses that she had already completed on a number of occasions.

Learning points
- Achieving the Award can have multiple benefits for both individual and school.
- A flexible and responsive Award structure, in which previous experience and/or expertise is acknowledged and accredited, could allow experienced SENCOs to avoid repeating courses already taken.
- Allowing trainees to select from topics most relevant to their settings can help to strengthen links between theory and practice.
- Strengthening or building supportive and sustainable SENCO networks can be an outcome of the training.
- A supportive school context enables trainees to derive maximum benefit from the training.

Carole, Assistant Headteacher and SENCO

Carole's new job was to become SENCO for the first time as well as Assistant Head in a primary school that was in need of '*major improvements'*. She found that *'there was nothing in place for SEN'* even though the school had a high percentage of pupils with SEND on roll.

Carole started training for the Award within the first month of appointment. She struggled with the pressures of setting up SEN provision within the school, her first appointment as SENCO – *'I didn't know a great deal'* – and managing the extra workload from the Award: *'I come in to work at seven o'clock and I go home at 6.30pm. Weekends I am trying to catch up with things for school … And then to spend hours and hours and hours doing research and your assignments, that was really tough'*. She felt she had little support in the school; although her headteacher had agreed to be her Award mentor he, too, was under pressure in a new school, as he *'never came to the first meeting, never asked me how it was going… There wasn't any time for it'*. Carole commented that *'I don't think he ever really understood the role'* and what was required of him.

These high demands on her time meant that Carole could not attend all elements of the Award training. She remembers that *'there were quite a few things in my first year that I meant to go to but didn't, because … we had to deal with what was going on here first'*. All this *'has taken its toll'*, and she failed her final two assignments. At the time of the interview she was re-writing the assignments and, for the first time, had been given study leave to complete them. This *'upsetting experience'* of failing made her question whether the Award should be compulsory, and she felt it was unfair that SENCOs but no other senior leaders have this statutory requirement to train.

Carole felt that the course was well laid out and that tutors provided helpful feedback and support. She enjoyed the opportunity to meet other SENCOs, but felt that there could have been more time for sharing experiences and learning. She commented that the *'chalk and talk'* style of her provider did not reflect her own learning needs but that she could now see the benefits of the work undertaken: *'once you go back to the portfolio, you probably realise that there is a lot in there that you can now use'*. At the time of the training, she felt that she needed more practical support in the day-to-day aspects of the role, but during the interview expressed her appreciation of the course focus on leadership.

Learning points
- The working context of the potential trainees needs to be taken into account when making the decision to train for the Award.
- Senior leadership support, including an understanding of the demands of the Award, is essential.
- Careful thought needs to be put into any mentoring structure.
- Trainees appreciate course content and tasks that can be related to everyday practice.
- The training should provide opportunities for exchange and dialogue, and make use of varied modes of delivery to reflect learners' needs.
- The aims of the training should be clearly set out at the start of the course.

Ruth was an experienced teacher when she took on the role as SENCO in a few years ago. She began training for the Award as a teacher in one class, but was moved to another class half-way through the academic year. She explained how challenges multiplied for her during that year: *'Then the SEN new Code of Practice came into place and I was writing Education, Health and Care plans, and I was trying to help with the new year group, and the curriculum had changed. And we didn't have any money to buy new resources, so I had to make everything. I had a new teaching assistant … who didn't know what she was doing'.* Ruth reported that, in order to manage the extra workload, she was *'getting to work at half-past six and not leaving work until half-past six … Tied up with that … was the fact that I was happening to do this Award as well. And you know, it was just too much'.* When the increased workload started to affect her health and family life, Ruth was signed off work for several months; when she began her phased return to work, she negotiated new reduced working hours that enabled her to manage the SENCO role successfully and maintain a work-life balance but at a reduced salary*.*

Ruth reported that the Award helped her to gain confidence in her role; *'To say, yes, I know what I am talking about!'.* Aspects of the course that she found helpful were meeting other SENCOs and sharing experiences, the specific topics covered in the course (e.g. managing teaching assistants) and undertaking role play during the face-to-face sessions: *'We had different scenarios and we have to act them out. That was really useful; just listening to my colleagues and seeing how they would deal with things'.* Further support came from her local SEND network, where the SEN adviser encouraged all SENCOs training for the Award to make contact and support each other during the training: *'We are still in contact'.* The assignments also worked well for Ruth as they were broken down into manageable small tasks, and she found the feedback to be *'excellent'.*

Since completing the Award, Ruth has been involved in supporting SENCOs, and has applied for a new SENCO job, drawing a direct link between the Award and her own career progression.

Learning points
- Changes within and beyond the school context can require re-assessment of the SENCO's capacity to train for Award. Ensuring the health and wellbeing of trainees at times of increased workload is important.
- School leaders need to protect time for trainees to complete their assignments, particularly if they have classroom duties.
- Assignments/tasks can be broken down into small, manageable tasks to fit into highly demanding timetables.
- Local network organisers can take steps to support Award trainees.
- The Award may increase the Award-holder's employability, but there is not necessarily a clear path to career progression.

Nicola, teacher SENCO

Nicola was new to the role of SENCO in a primary school when she began training for the Award. Her experience of the Award training was highly positive; she found the depth of study offered by the year-long course *'incredibly useful … The whole thing was incredibly reflective. So whenever you were given a learning objective or task to do, you would have to bring it back to your school, discuss that with your senior leadership team and really have the opportunity to build the role yourself, and reflect on it and change it'.* She found her tutor inspirational: *'She was really passionate about her subject and really helpful. She always said that this course … was an ongoing process of developing provision and adapting and monitoring, and ensuring that everyone makes progress and that everyone is provided for within the school. So it was an ongoing thing'.* A substantial part of the course concerned leadership: *'trying to reduce paperwork, trying to facilitate change without having to do it all yourself … and ways in which to encourage class teachers to take responsibility for the learning of all the children in the class'.* Nicola felt that this all helped with her role in school, as it *'made you feel like you could go back to school … with, kind of weight behind you to effect change'.*

She described the Award assignments as a *'bone of contention …* [but] *really, really important because it gives you that level of Higher Education which I think is needed'.* She, too, described herself as *'lucky'* because she was given time to complete assignments by her headteacher. However she found implementing change to be a difficult process because *'people were very set in their ways in the school I was at … The senior leadership team were all on board. But it was just trying to get other members of staff to agree … That was a battle'.* Nicola is now a senior leader in another school, and commented that the Award was particularly helpful in giving her *'leadership skills … I think that is the biggest impact it has had on me. It has given me the confidence to become an effective leader in the school'.* Her final comment related to the need for schools to allow trainees time to complete the Award assignments thoughtfully: *'You are not going to get the best out of someone when they are doing it late at night … You want them to actually reflect on what they are doing and discuss it and get something out of it'* – just as she did.

Learning points

- Award training can be seen part of a long-term process of developing and improving SEND provision in school.
- Opportunities to discuss course content with senior leaders allow critical reflection on SEND practice and the SENCO role in school.
- The leadership qualities developed by the Award are not enough on their own to implement change in school; senior leaders and staff must be willing to change. Appointing the SENCO to the senior leadership team would help to extend the SENCO's influence and enable them to make changes more easily.
- Trainees need time to complete assignments and in which to reflect on their training if they are to benefit fully from the experience.

5.7 Summary of key points

Award training and succession planning (headteachers)

- 85 (70 per cent) responding headteachers reported that they had at least one member of staff who had trained for the Award in their school.
- 54 (45 per cent) responding headteachers reported that they planned to train no members of staff for the Award in the next two years; 60 (50 per cent) that they intended to train one member of staff; seven (six per cent) that they planned to train two members of staff.
- The majority of headteachers reported that they would train staff as necessary, in order to comply with the legal requirement to have one trained member of staff in their school.
- Funding staff to train for the Award was reported as the principal challenge.

Impact of the Award on career progression (Award-holders)

- 145 respondents (34 per cent) reported that the Award had resulted in career progression; 281 (66 per cent) reported that it had not.
- Respondents who reported that completing the Award resulted in career progression cited promotion, greater employability, greater influence within their school and the opportunity for further study. Many of those who reported no career progression were already in post as SENCO when they trained for the Award.
- A number of respondents reported that it could be difficult to effect change in schools, particularly if SENCOs were not members of the senior leadership team.

Decisions about training for the Award (non Award-holders)

- 88 respondents (22 per cent) reported that they were considering training for the Award; 309 (78 per cent) reported that they were not.
- Reasons for undertaking the Award training included complying with the legal requirement, furthering knowledge and understanding, and career progression.
- Reasons for not undertaking the Award training included their length of time in post (and thus no legal requirement to achieve the Award), inapplicability of the Award to their role, lack of time and/or funding, imminent retirement, and lack of interest in that particular career pathway.

The Award in academies and multi-academy trusts (Award-holders)

- 105 respondents (25 per cent) reported that the Award reflected the needs of SENCOs working in academies and MATs; 94 (22 per cent) that it did not; 227 (53 per cent) that they did not know.
- Respondents who agreed that the Award reflected these needs reported that the SENCO responsibilities remained the same regardless of school structure; that the Award covered all relevant areas for SENCOs; and that course delivery was sufficiently flexible to cover the needs of SENCOs working in academies and MATs.
- Relevant responses that did not believe that the Award reflected these needs focused on the different structures within academies/MATs and the possible absence

of a relationship with the local authority that could make supporting pupils with SEND more challenging.

Schools without SENCOs (non-Award holders)

- 36 respondents, whose school did not employ a SENCO and who had not achieved the Award, made comments on the Award. These included the importance of a national qualification for SENCOs, the irrelevance of the Award to their setting, and issues related to workload when training and funding the Award.

Case studies

The case studies, drawn from telephone interviews with SENCOs, illustrate the complex interaction of factors on their Award experiences. These include policy and school context, Award delivery, the timing of the Award in their professional career, and the personal attributes that they bring to the training.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

SENCO responders' high levels of engagement with this research suggest that we reached a group of people who were strongly motivated to feed back their experiences of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination to the Department for Education. School staff who were not directly involved with the Award were equally helpful with their research responses. Parents/carers showed similar levels of engagement, but knew very little about the Award and commented more generally on their experiences of interaction with their child's school SENCO. Pupils with SEND offered their views on the levels of support they received in school. We offer grateful thanks to them all.

The research shows the overall effectiveness of the Award training in increasing the confidence of Award-holder/trainee in many aspects of the SENCO role. Aspects of the Award that SENCO respondents viewed as particularly strong related to the more strategic, abstract parts of the SENCO role. Aspects that fewest respondents rated as effective in increasing confidence were 'ensuring that pupils with SEND are able to influence decisions', modelling effective practice of teaching pupils with SEND' and 'encouraging teachers to use action research in developing effective practices for pupils with SEND'.

Evaluating **the impact of the Award on school practice was difficult**; although three quarters of responding non-Award-holding staff knew if their SENCO held the Award, it was not the only factor that affected the SENCO's performance or the support that SENCOs were able to offer staff. However all respondent groups were able to comment on aspects of the SENCO role covered by the Award; those rated most highly by school staff and parents related to outward-facing elements of the SENCO role, together with organising classroom support for pupils. Staff valued the support from SENCOs in working with parents, but nearly half of parents in our sample felt they were not considered an equal partner in supporting their children at school.

Around half of responding **pupils felt that they had some opportunity** to have their voices heard within school, although – as can be seen above – Award-holders, and trainees did not rate this aspect of the Award in raising SENCO confidence as highly.

6.1 Policy context

The SENCO role and the necessity for newly-appointed SENCOs to achieve the Award are now enshrined in law; the Award is clearly having a positive impact on Award-holders' confidence in their ability to carry out the role in schools. Providers of the Award ceased to be accredited in 2015 and, since then, have established a forum to assure themselves that standards are maintained and/or improved.

It is noteworthy, however, that implementation of Award training has been against a backdrop of reductions in school funding, the introduction of the new Code of Practice for SEND and the introduction of a new curriculum, all of which have implications for schools

and Award trainees. We show some evidence that parents' expectations of SEND provision have been raised. In addition there is some tension between SENCO trainees' expectations of practical, locally-relevant advice and the remit of the Award, which is to develop strategic leaders of SEND provision. Research participants have reported challenges with undertaking and completing the Award within this context, and it is from these that we make the following suggestions.

Government

We suggest that government might consider:

- A ring-fenced element in the funding formula for schools that includes funding for Award training and continuing professional development for SENCOs. This will assist schools in establishing secure succession plans for their SENCO.
- Finding ways to ensure that the SENCO is part of the school senior leadership team. Currently this is not a requirement.
- Funding for national and local SENCO networks to provide:
  - support for potentially isolated SENCOs
  - up-to-date information on external agencies
  - up to date guidance on interventions to support a wide range of pupil needs in schools.

Award providers

We suggest that Award providers might consider:

- Providing the Department for Education and schools with a realistic estimate of the time needed to complete the Award training.
- Offering a personalised Award delivery that could include opportunities for specialist modules, take account of trainees' previous experience and offer flexible dates for assignment submission.
- Monitoring course content regularly to ensure balanced coverage of the Award Learning Outcomes, particularly in those areas identified as less confidence-building by survey respondents
- Designing course assignments so that trainees can link the academic study directly to their own school practice.
- Embedding opportunities in the course for SENCOs to develop/maintain networks of SENCOs and of local external agencies.

Schools

We suggest that schools might consider:

- Automatically appointing the trained SENCO to the senior leadership team.
- Ensuring that trainees have sufficient time allocated to undertake the work involved in training for the Award.
- Setting up effective mentoring support for Award trainees.
- Supporting potential trainees to identify a feasible time in which to undertake the training.

- Encouraging a potential SENCO to shadow an experienced SENCO before commencing training for the Award.
- Encouraging a potential SENCO to spend time in a range of different types of school to broaden their experience of SEND.
- Ensuring the opportunity for further professional development following achievement of the Award by including aspects of the Learning Outcomes (e.g. managing staff and resources) in SENCO appraisals.
- Working with SENCOs to develop an awareness from all teachers that responsibility for SEND starts in every classroom and includes enabling parent, carer and pupil voice.
- Protecting time for the SENCO to engage in SENCO and external agency networks.

Individuals

We suggest that individuals might consider:

- Planning ways to manage the extra workload in advance of commencing training.
- Being prepared to be a strategic leader, who enters into equal partnership with parents and carers, and ensures pupils are able to influence decisions about their learning and wellbeing.
- In the school context, working closely with senior leaders to organise the Award training and subsequent development of the SENCO role.
- Adopting a professional enquiry approach that encourages regular reflection on the effectiveness of SEND provision in school.
- Looking out for opportunities to network with other SENCOs and people from external agencies.

Appendix 1

Parent evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO)

Introduction

What is this research about?

Every mainstream school has to have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and from 2008 all new SENCOs have had to complete the National Award for SEN Coordination qualification.

We are a team of researchers from Plymouth University working in partnership with Achievement for All (AfA). We have been asked by the Department for Education (DfE) to find out about what people think about the National Award for SEN Coordination. This is to help the DfE plan how to develop the Award.

Why are we asking you to help us?

We would like your views on SEND support in your school if you are a parent or carer of a child or children with special educational needs and/or a disability.

What are we asking you to do?

We would like you to complete this short questionnaire about your experiences of Special Educational Needs Coordination in your child's school. If you have more than one child with special educational needs and/or a disability, please complete the questionnaire once for each child. When we use 'your child' we are referring to the child in your care. Your answers are confidential; you do not have to give your name and and we have not asked for the name of your child's school, so we won't be able to tell teachers what you've said.

If you are prepared to talk to us (on the telephone) at a later date about SENCOs in more detail, we ask you to email us with your contact details. You do not need to send us these details unless you would like to talk to us.

You do not have to take part in the research, but if you do complete the questionnaire, we will assume that you are happy for us to include your responses in our data set.

Information about your child

We would like you to provide us with some information about your child

* 1. What is your child's date of birth?

	DD	MM	YYYY
Child's date of birth	☐ /	☐ /	☐

* 2. What type of school does your child attend?

○ Primary school

○ Secondary school

○ All through school

* 3. Does your child attend ...

○ a special school?

○ a special unit within a mainstream school?

○ a mainstream school?

○ another kind of school?

If 'another', please tell us more

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* 4. Please could you tell us about your child's category of SEND? You may tick up to three options.

☐ Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia)

☐ Moderate or Severe Learning Difficulties

☐ Speech, Language or Communication Needs

☐ Autistic Spectrum Disorder

☐ Visual Impairment

☐ Hearing Impairment

☐ Physical Disability

☐ Social, Emotional and Mental Health

☐ No Specialist Assessment

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other (please tell us the category)

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The role of the school SENCO

* 5. Have you met your school SENCO?

[▲▼]

* 6. Does your child's SENCO hold the National SENCO Award?

[▲▼]

7. Do you feel the SENCO at your child's school has sufficient training and experience to carry out their role?

[▲▼]

Please tell us the reasons for your answer

* 8. How has the SENCO helped you and / or your child? Please tick any that apply.

☐ Has not helped yet

☐ Set up and / or run a review meeting

☐ Involved experts (e.g. Educational Psychologist) from outside the school

☐ Organised classroom support

☐ Arranged a special learning programme

☐ Organised special equipment and / or materials

☐ Worked directly with your child

☐ Organised support for your child's physical or personal care

☐ Advised you in any way

☐ Other

If you have ticked 'other', please tell us how your SENCO has helped

Support in practice

* 9. How have other members of staff been involved in supporting you and / or your child? Please tick any that apply.

- [ ] Have not helped yet
- [ ] Attended a review meeting
- [ ] Involved experts (e.g. Educational Psychologist) from outside the school
- [ ] Provided classroom support
- [ ] Implemented a special learning programme
- [ ] Made use of special equipment and / or materials
- [ ] Worked directly with your child
- [ ] Supported your child's physical or personal care
- [ ] Advised you in any way
- [ ] Other

If you have ticked 'other', please tell us how you have been helped

Voice

These questions ask about opportunities for pupil and parent / carer voice in school.

* 10. Does your child ...

	Very much	Quite a lot	A little	Hardly at all	Not at all	Not sure
feel included in school life?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
contribute to decisions on their learning?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
contribute to decisions on their wellbeing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

* 11. Do you feel considered as ...

	Very much	Quite a lot	A little	Hardly at all	Not at all	Not sure
an equal partner in supporting your child's achievement?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
an equal partner in supporting your child's wellbeing?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Final comments

12. What is the main thing the school needs to understand about your child to best support their learning?

13. Do you feel this is already well understood?

Please tell us why

14. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

THANK YOU!

What happens now?
If you would be prepared to talk with us about the SENCO role, please contact us at DfE.research@plymouth.ac.uk, telling us your email address and phone number. We will not be able to link your contact details with your responses to this questionnaire, so your answers will remain confidential. No-one in your child's school will get to hear what you say.

When we have finished collecting data, we will write a report about our findings which will be accessible from the Department for Education's (DfE) website. We will also use data from this evaluation to write papers for academic journals about respondents' perceptions of the award, and about the role of SENCOs in general. We will not use the name of any school or individual in any publication.

It's really important that the DfE knows what parents and carers think about SENCO provision, and we are very grateful for your time and effort in completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions about the research, please contact one of the research team (Jan, Rowena or Nadine) on DfE.research@plymouth.ac.uk.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH!

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Guidance for parents/carers
Supporting children and young people to respond to the questionnaire

The importance of pupils' views
The Department for Education (DfE) want to know from children and young people with special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND) about how support is organised for them in school. This will help the DfE and schools to make sure all pupils have a good experience at school and can fulfil their potential.

The questionnaires
We have two versions of our questionnaire. They have been designed with a range of communication needs and reading confidence in mind. Version 1 has longer sentences while Version 2 uses symbols and has short sentences and simpler words; sample questions are shown on the next page. We suggest that parents/carers discuss with their child which questionnaire they would like to complete.

Support to complete the questionnaire
Some young people might be happy to complete the questionnaire by themselves; **some children will need support.** It is important that the child or young person is relaxed and confident with whoever is supporting them, so we suggest this could be provided by parents, carers, brothers and sisters, other relatives or family friends.

If the person involved knows the child or young person well, they can often offer gentle reminders of events or situations in which the pupil was involved. It is important, however, that such prompts do not influence pupils' responses. For example, they might say "Do you remember taking part in the school play?" but should avoid saying something like "You didn't like the role they gave you in the school play, did you?"

Introducing the questionnaire to your child
Whoever helps the child or young person to complete the questionnaire should emphasise that the **researchers really want to know what the pupils think** about their experiences in school, so that schools can try to make it better for everybody. Most importantly, they should emphasise that **there are no right or wrong answers**.

Please choose a time and place when your child is relaxed; it is probably best not to treat it as another item of homework. Some questions can be missed out if not appropriate. If your child appears to be getting upset, please stop completing the questionnaire and offer reassurance.

Before the questions start, we will ask you to provide some information. We ask for each child's date of birth, so that we can link their responses with yours to collect different views on SEND support for your child. Please support the completion of one questionnaire for each child with SEND who would like to take part in the research.

In summary
Prompt but don't lead
Emphasise there are no right or wrong answers
Keep telling your child that their views are important
Stop if your child becomes upset

Dr Jan Georgeson, 01752 585348
Dr Rowena Passy, 01752 585343
Dr Nadine Schaefer, 01752 585343

Version 1

Copy of Pupil evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO) (Number 1)

Your learning

These questions are about how you feel in school. Please tick the answers that fit best with the way you feel.

4. Do you find it easy to ...

|	Yes, all the time	Yes, some of the time	No, not really
learn in class?	◯	◯	◯
join in with school activities?	◯	◯	◯
get on with your classmates?	◯	◯	◯
work with your teachers?	◯	◯	◯
get on with other people who work in school?	◯	◯	◯

Please tell us more if you want to!

[ ]

Prev | Next

Version 2

Pupil evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO) (Number 2)
Widgit Symbols © Widgit Software 2002-2016

Your learning

These questions are about how you feel in school. Please tick the answers that fit best with the way you feel.

4. At school I feel I can ...

	Yes	Sometimes	No
work with the teacher	◯	◯	◯
work in groups	◯	◯	◯

Tell us more if you want to!

[ ]

Dr Jan Georgeson, 01752 585348
Dr Rowena Passy, 01752 585343
Dr Nadine Schaefer, 01752 585343

Appendix 3

Pupil evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO) (Number 1)

Introduction

We'd like to know how you feel about the support that you get in school.

Please give honest answers.

You can add comments if you want to.

You do not have to tell us your name, so your teachers won't know what you have said.

Information about you

We are interested in learning a bit about you.

* 1. Have you talked to a parent/carer about filling in this questionnaire?

◯ Yes

* 2. What is your date of birth?

	DD	MM	YYYY
Date of birth	☐	/ ☐	/ ☐

* 3. Are you a ...?

☐ ⬍

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Your learning

These questions are about how you feel in school. Please tick the answers that fit best with the way you feel.

4. Do you find it easy to ...

	Yes, all the time	Yes, some of the time	No, not really
learn in class?	○	○	○
join in with school activities?	○	○	○
get on with your classmates?	○	○	○
work with your teachers?	○	○	○
get on with other people who work in school?	○	○	○

Please tell us more if you want to!

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Support in school

The following questions ask about how you feel about the support you get in school. Please tick the answers that fit best with the way you feel.

5. Do you feel ...

	Yes, all the time	Yes, some of the time	No, not really
you get the help you need at school?	○	○	○
that your school cares about your needs?	○	○	○

Please tell us more if you want to!

[   ]

* 6. When you need support at school, who do you ask? Choose your two favourites

☐ A teacher

☐ A teaching assistant

☐ Other people who work in school

☐ Your friends

☐ Your family

7. Is there anything else that helps when you find things difficult at school?

○ Yes

○ No

If 'yes', please tell us what this is

[   ]

Your opinion

8. When do you talk about the best ways to help you learn? Please tick all the answers that are right for you.

☐ In class

☐ In meetings with teachers

☐ Talking to other people who work in school

☐ School council

☐ School questionnaire

☐ Never

☐ Another time

If 'another time', please tell us when

_____

9. When do you talk about your plans? Please tick all the answers that are right for you.

☐ In class

☐ In meetings with teachers

☐ Talking to other people who work in school

☐ School council

☐ School questionnaire

☐ Never

☐ Another time

If 'another time', please tell us when

_____

10. Imagine that you could help a new teacher. Can you tell them one thing that helps you to learn?

_____

11. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

THANK YOU!

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Your answers are really important. They help people think about what teachers can do to help you at school.

What happens now?

We will write a report about what everyone has told us. We will not use your name or your school's name in the report. Please email us at DfE.research@plymouth.ac.uk if you want to find out more about the questionnaire.

This is the end of the questionnaire. Please click 'Done'. Thank you very much for your help.

Nadine, Jan and Rowena

Appendix 4

Pupil evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO) (Number 2)
Widgit Symbols © Widgit Software 2002-2016

Introduction

We'd like to know how you feel about the support that you get in school.

You can add comments if you want to.

You do not have to tell us your name, so your teachers won't know what you have said.
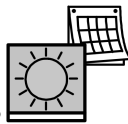
Information about you

We'd like to know about you

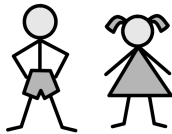* 1. Have you talked to a parent/carer about filling in this questionnaire?

◯ Yes

*

2. What is your date of birth?

	DD	MM	YYYY
Date of birth	☐	/ ☐	/ ☐

*

3. Are you a ... ?

☐ ⬍

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Your learning

These questions are about how you feel in school. Please tick the answers that fit best with the way you feel.

4. At school I feel I can ...
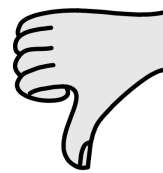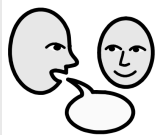
	Yes	Sometimes	No
work with the teacher	○	○	○
work in groups	○	○	○

Tell us more if you want to!

5. At school I feel I can ...

Yes | Sometimes | No

learn in class

○   ○   ○
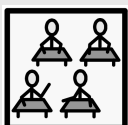
join in school events

○   ○   ○

Tell us more if you want to!

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Your Voice

6. At school I feel ...

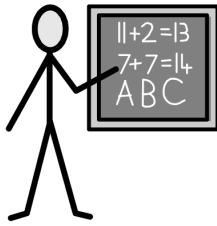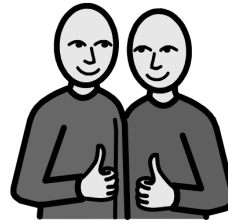|	Yes	Sometimes	No
I can ask for help	○	○	○
I get help	○	○	○

Tell us more if you want to!

7. If I need help at school I ask ...

☐ my teacher

☐ my friends

☐ a helper in class

☐ my family

☐ other people who work in school

Tell us more if you want to!

Pupil evaluation of the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (SENCO) (Number 2)
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Your Aspirations

8. I feel people at school help me to ..

	Yes	Sometimes	No
get better at working	○	○	○
get on with people better	○	○	○
get better at something else	○	○	○

Please tell us more if you want to!

9. Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

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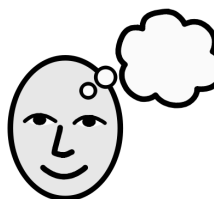
THANK YOU!

Thank you for doing this questionnaire. What you tell us is really important.
It helps people think about what teachers can do to help you at school.

What happens now?
We will write a report about what everyone has told us. We will not use your name or your school's name in the report.
Please email us - DfE.research@plymouth.ac.uk - if you want to find out more about the questionnaire.

This is the end of the questionnaire. Please click 'Done'. Thank you very much for your help.
Nadine, Jan and Rowena

Appendix 5

Department for Education evaluation of the National Award for SEN Coordination – SENCo interview

Please may I record this conversation?

1. **YOUR SCHOOL:** Please could you tell us:
- Your role in school

- The type of school you're working in? (e.g. primary, special)

- The size of the school?

- The location of the school? (urban, rural, suburban)

- What kind of provision do you have for children with special needs? (if appropriate) What is the proportion of children with special needs in your school?

- Is your school required to employ a SENCo?

2. **YOUR ROLE / AWARD ACHIEVEMENT**
- Are you a SENCo? (If yes) How many years' experience have you had as a SENCo?

- Do you hold the National Award for SEN Coordination? (If yes) When did you achieve the Award?

3. **THE NATIONAL AWARD FOR SEN COORDINATION: YOUR EXPERIENCE**
- What would you like to talk to us about the Award? Please tell us about your experience.

- What are your thoughts on the content of the Award? Did you find it appropriate / relevant?

- What are your thoughts on completing the work for the Award? (Prompt: Did you have enough time and/or support?)

- Were there any issues around funding for the Award?

- Did you establish/join any SENCo networks during your training?

- Has the Award resulted in career progression for you?

- Please could you summarise the key things you took away from the Award?

- What would you like us to feed back to the DfE?

- Do you have any other comments?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH!

Appendix 6

Department for Education evaluation of the National Award for SEN Coordination – parent/carer interview

Please may I record this conversation?

1. **YOUR CHILD**: we're asking questions about your child so that we have context for what you say and can understand your experiences. Please could you tell us your child's
- Date of birth

- Type of school attended (e.g. primary, secondary, special etc)

- Briefly, please could you tell us a bit about your child's needs?

2. **THE SENCo IN YOUR SCHOOL**
- Have you heard of the National Award for SEN Coordination? Do you know what it is?

- Do you know your school's SENCo?

- Do you know if your school's SENCo has the Award?

3. **THE SUPPORT YOU GET**
- Please could you tell us briefly about your experiences with SEND support for your child?

   o Do you feel you are included as an equal partner in supporting your child?

   o Do you feel your child's views are taken into account?

- How does your child feel in school?

- Do you feel that the SENCo is a person you can talk / turn to?

- What would you expect of a good SENCo?

- What would your ideal support look like?

- Is there anything else you would like to say about SEND support in your child's school?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS RESEARCH!