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## **Embedding with "fidelity and consistency"? Exploring the role of the SEN regional hubs in disseminating the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP)**

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### **Background**

Within the overall study, which is the focus of the symposium, this paper reports interim findings on one specific topic - the role of the ten SEN regional hubs in embedding the Inclusion Development Programme across English local authorities (LAs).

The ten SEN Regional Hubs were launched in autumn 2008 with a remit 'to embed national policies, programmes and initiatives with fidelity and consistency in different LA settings across England; for the coordinating hub LA to demonstrate this application and support other LAs in the region to do this; [and] to provide powerful channels of feedback to the DCSF on efficacy and impact of policies and programmes [...]' (National Strategies, SEN/LDD autumn newsletter SEN.LDD, 2008)

### **Research Questions**

Within the overall study, the research questions for this paper are:

- 1) What was the role of the IDP strand lead in LA and/or hub?
- 2) How did the dissemination model (i.e. from National Strategies to SEN regional hubs to LAs to schools) work in practice?
- 3) How effective was that model in engaging school staff and other relevant professionals in the IDP?

### **Methods**

A sample of 30 LAs was constructed to ensure a range of levels of responsibility around the IDP (all 10 hub lead LAs for IDP strand, all 8 IDP Pathfinder\* LAs, 12 other LAs) and to give regional coverage across England (3 per region) and a range of types of LA (London, unitary, metropolitan, county). (\*Pathfinder LAs were selected by DCSF to trial different models of dissemination to schools.)

In all 30 LAs, the IDP strand lead was invited to participate in a series of three semi-structured interviews (June 2009, June 2010 and January 2011). This paper presents interim findings from interviews with 28 of the 30 IDP leads from June 2009 (by Sept 2010, we expect also to include findings from June 2010).

The interviews were conducted by phone. The question topics were sent in advance along with a leaflet about the project and a statement about the research purposes. Participants were told the information they shared would be used anonymously and would be incorporated into a thematic analysis of views across participants. With permission, the interviews were recorded. These were then transcribed.

### **Frame**

The transcribed interview texts were analysed in relation to the themes structured in by our questions but also in relation to themes raised by the interviewees. Analysis focused on seeking to ascertain the range and relative weight of views expressed under each topic and took into account background

factors relating to role of interviewee such as whether their substantive post was in a SEN team or a school improvement team and whether they were a hub IDP lead or IDP lead of another LA.

## **Research findings**

Analysis of the June 2009 interviews indicated, in some regions, resistance to the hubs' replacement of the previous regional partnerships and to having a single hub lead LA but not to the idea of working regionally. The national meetings of hub leads and the regional meetings of LA leads were valued as ways of sharing good practice, improving efficiency, and giving some impetus to IDP implementation.

Asking for views about the effectiveness of the model in engaging schools generated an unexpected variety of ways in which the hubs, but also the LAs within the hubs, had approached the task of encouraging schools to participate in the IDP. Analysis indicated five dimensions to this variety (approach, level, pitch, school phase and IDP module/s), each of which had between three and eight options. LAs adopted a 'pick and mix' approach to create a model tailored to that LA. There were differences in the numbers of schools engaged by these different approaches to dissemination, with the most effective models being those involving close contact with schools.

Overall, relatively low numbers of schools had actively taken up the IDP at time of interview. Perceptions as to why this was the case included the late delivery and poor presentation of the Phase 1 IDP materials; unrealistic timelines for return of evaluation data; and competition from other initiatives. At LA level, the impact of IDP dissemination work included impetus towards greater alignment of school improvement and SEN support work and an increased focus on CPD support at Wave 1 (universal) rather than Wave 3 (specialist interventions).

These findings will be supplemented by those from June 2010 when the IDP may be expected to have become more embedded in schools.

The paper concludes by questioning whether the variety of dissemination approaches adopted within the hubs could deliver 'fidelity and consistency' but also by querying whether this was an appropriate demand in the first place. A requirement for 'fidelity and consistency' in implementation ought to be justified through a strong evidence base for the efficacy of content, format and delivery style - this was missing for the IDP.