

Application Round: Expanding the Research School Network 2019

Education Endowment Foundation

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent grant-making charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement, ensuring that children from all backgrounds can fulfil their potential and make the most of their talents.ⁱ

The EEF is planning to expand its regional work from September 2019 with a significant increase in activity to support schools to use evidence and evidence-based practice with particular emphasis on the most disadvantaged pupils.

This means we are now looking to expand the reach and capacity of the Research Schools Network with the appointment of approximately 10 new Research Schools to begin work in September 2019.

To support the application process for those interested in becoming a Research School this document provides:

- Background to the Research School Network and the EEF's future vision
- A description of what it means to be a Research School, the support available and the expectations.
- An outline of the application process

The Research Schools Network

The Research School Network was established in Sept 2016ⁱⁱ as a network to support schools to use evidence to improve teaching practice. Research Schools act as a bridge between evidence and practice, providing local and regional support to other schools by disseminating research findings, supporting the translation of this into practice through training and other school support.

Whilst the EEF and others produce a range of evidence-based resources and information for schools, including, amongst others, the EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkit and EEF guidance reports, we know that the 'passive' dissemination of research alone is unlikely to impact significantly on pupil outcomesⁱⁱⁱ. Research use is increasingly recognised as a social process, and thus, active support for implementation - such as dialogue, coaching and training - is vital in producing substantive changes in teachers' practice.

We believe sustainable impact is best achieved by working with, and through, the profession as partners in mobilising knowledge. There is a clear rationale for such an approach:

- Schools listen to other schools (a clear finding from the EEF baseline surveys on teachers' use of research)
- The evidence on 'what works' on implementation suggests that encouraging practitioners to 'own' the evidence results in wider and deeper understanding and use.
- The expertise on how to apply evidence precisely in schools and classrooms lies within the schools themselves.

What does it mean to be a Research School?

The purpose of being a Research School is to provide support to schools to access, understand, critique and apply evidence, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Specifically, this involves supporting schools in their locality to access and use systematic external evidence and be critical of their use of evidence in school improvement activities.

Research Schools work with schools directly, but they also support Local Authorities, Teaching School Alliances, Multi-Academy Trusts and other organisations to be more evidence-informed in the content they use and the approaches they take.

Being a Research School is not about doing research in your own school, or focusing solely on improving your own school, although existing Research Schools express the significant benefits of being engaged in professional networks with access to high-quality professional development and training.

How do Research Schools operate?

Research Schools receive three years of core funding from the EEF, beginning in September 2019. This comprises:

- **2019-20:** £60,000
- **2020-21:** £40,000
- **2021-22:** £40,000

In addition to this core funding, there will be funding streams available which enable Research Schools to widen their reach into geographically isolated regions and boost their capacity to expand their support to deliver training to a larger number of schools.

To support and develop the Research Schools' expertise, additional support will be available from the EEF. This includes:

- Close links working with EEF specialists, Programme Managers and evaluation experts to deepen understanding of evidence.
- Professional development opportunities to grow each Research School and its team as an organisation;
- Content development, training materials and resources and training to support the delivery of Research School network programmes;
- Branding, website and communication materials, tools and systems to support the Research School Network to work together;
- Opportunity to learn from and support other Research Schools.

What is the expectation on Research Schools?

The expectations of each Research School will be agreed through an annual planning process and broadly cover three areas:

1. **Building capacity:**
 - Supporting the wider development of a team (within and beyond the host school) that have the knowledge and expertise to deliver training and coaching
 - Some succession and longer-term capacity planning of the RS, which might include training and supporting Evidence Leaders in Education.
2. **Expanding reach and engagement:**
 - Growing a local network through communications (for example regular newsletters, plus a programme of twilights to support engagement in evidence)
 - Working with other local school partnerships (TSs/LAs/MATs/Heads Groups etc), and,
 - Participating in EEF regional activities.

3. Delivering training:

- Adapting and delivering an Evidence-based School Improvement programme
- Delivering a range of other programmes based on RS materials and programmes
- Managing and quality-assuring a number of days of coaching support;
- Some Research Schools will want to develop and deliver high quality training to suit their interests and priorities.

There will also be specific opportunities for all Research Schools with a particular interest in incubating innovative practices to get involved in testing pilot projects:

- Discussing opportunities with EEF programme managers how to develop evidence-based teaching ideas and programmes in your schools, with the potential opportunity for early stage pilots and trials. See for example: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/digital-feedback-in-primary-maths/>
- Supporting the EEF's planned approaches for testing teacher practices, including helping to define questions and explore options for evaluating them.

Reporting and Governance

Research Schools are expected to provide regular monitoring and reporting information, particularly about the schools engaging with their activities. The expectations of each Research School's activities and delivery are agreed through an annual planning process. This takes into account: the local context and priorities; the stage of development of the Research School and its expertise and interests; the overall Research School Network's activities; and the EEF's work.

Each Research School has a light touch termly review, and a more formal annual review. Successful completion of an annual review is required for the next year of funding.

Associate Research Schools

We are looking to establish a number of Associate Research Schools (ARS) to play a role in expanding the reach of the network across the country. ARS will work closely with established Research Schools to engage schools from a wider area through communication and face to face activity. ARS are likely to have existing staff with a good understanding of the role of evidence in school improvement and potentially have links to existing RS, although this is not a requirement. ARS will differ from a full RS in their capacity and infrastructure to deliver the full range of expectations that comes with full RS funding.

The process for identifying ARS will be two-fold:

1. Existing RS may identify potential ARS for funding and support. In this case, the RS will be the lead applicant, with the ARS specified, **and will submit the application on the ARS's behalf.**
2. Some applications for RS status may have promise but are not yet in the position to take on the full expectations of a RS. In these cases, we may suggest working with an established RS and operate as an ARS.

Application Process

Research School activity is primarily targeted at mainstream school pupils in England (age 2-18). In general **we'd expect most Research Schools to be led by a host school** (or group of schools). Under exceptional circumstances we will consider applications from organisations related to schools (for example where a Teaching School has become a charitable organisation/company), where they are able to explain how they intend to work with schools to draw on their expertise to provide exemplification of teaching practice.

We are aiming to have a national coverage of Research Schools and so we will take **geography into account in decision making**. Based on the existing work and reach of Research Schools, and the EEF's priorities in breaking the link between family income and educational disadvantage this means:

- We are very unlikely to support any new Research Schools in the East of England (Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Essex, Hertfordshire), or the South West (Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Bristol);
- We are particularly interested in new Research Schools with the potential to support schools in the West Midlands, London, the South Coast (Southampton, Portsmouth area) and the South East (Kent)
- Applications for Research Schools in all other areas, and Associate Research Schools in all areas, will be decided on a case by case basis.

The application process consists of two stages:

Stage 1: A sift based on an application form

Stage 2: An interview process:

- For long listed schools this will be a 15minutes presentation followed by 15minutes of Question and Answer at the EEF Offices in London. It will be expected that either the Headteacher or CEO of your school (whoever is the most senior) will attend, along with the person who will be leading the Research School on a day to day basis.
- Following this, shortlisted schools will be visited by one of the EEF team for a half day visit. More details will be provided nearer the time.

To apply to become a Research School, you should complete the application form on the EEF website's Grants Application portal – this can be accessed [here](#).

Please note: applicants should be aware that there is no automatic word limit for each question. However, there is a word limit of **2,000 words** for the whole application document:

1. Credibility

How will you be able to demonstrate credibility to other schools when working with them?

Please make reference to your i) progress and attainment outcomes ii) FSM/PP % and iii) Ofsted Rating. For applications which are not from individual schools, please explain how you will work with schools.

Please note, we do not expect schools to be exemplary in every respect. Instead, we are looking for schools that can articulate how they have improved their school, the challenges that still remain, and how they are credible in supporting other schools to improve.

2. Understanding and use of evidence

How have you used research evidence to improve teaching and pupil attainment?

(Please note the EEF regards evidence to mean research that is systematic, robust and focuses on pupil outcomes)

Please explain the process of *both* engaging with evidence and the application of it to support decision making and change within your school. Please use this as an opportunity to outline any particular aspects of the evidence base that you have particular understanding and expertise of.

3. Capacity

How will the Research School be supported within your school/organisation?

Please explain how you will provide the staffing necessary to lead and support the work. Please demonstrate how the school/ organisation is committed to the Research School*, including any links to the vision or strategy. Please use this as an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the Research School Network vision and the EEF mission, in relation to both the use of evidence and disadvantaged pupils.

4. Changing Practice

How will the Research School effectively support leaders and teachers to change practice?

Please explain your understanding and/or experience of supporting practice change in your school and beyond, for example training, coaching or school to school support. Please use this as an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the evidence around effective professional development.

5. Building a network

How will the Research School reach and engage with a wide range of schools in your area/region, in particular those in need of support?

Please explain any existing school links and arrangements and how you propose them to support the Research School activity. Please use this as an opportunity to explain your understanding of the school improvement context and your experience/understanding of influencing and working with others to secure engagement and change.

Please also explain the area/region you would like to reach and target.

*** Supporting evidence:** To support this declaration of organisational commitment please provide as supporting evidence:

- If a Local Authority maintained school - a letter of support from the LA
- If a Multi-Academy Trust school, a letter of support from the MAT CEO or equivalent.

Timeline for Application Process

Applications open	1 April 2019
Applications close	Friday 3 May 2019 (5pm)
Longlisted schools notified	17 May 2019
Longlist presentations <i>(in London)</i>	3-5 June 2019
Shortlisted schools notified	6 June 2019
Shortlist interviews <i>(at applicant schools)</i>	w/c 10 and 17 June 2019
Final decisions	20 June 2019

- Successful schools will be expected to send two members of staff leading the Research School to a residential **training event on 3 and 4 July 2019**.

ⁱ The EEF was set up in 2011 by The Sutton Trust, as lead charity in partnership with Impetus Trust (now part of Impetus–The Private Equity Foundation), with a grant from the Department for Education. The EEF and Sutton Trust are, together, the government-designated What Works Centre for improving education outcomes for school-aged children.

The EEF funds high-potential intervention projects that aim to improve attainment and related outcomes for disadvantaged children and young people between the ages of 3 and 18. Each project is evaluated by a team of independent evaluators, allowing us to build our understanding of what works in improving outcomes for children and young people.

Since its launch in 2011, the EEF has awarded £100 million of funding to 158 evaluations, including 130 randomised controlled trials (RCTs), reaching over 10,000 schools and 1M pupils

ⁱⁱ The Research School Network was established as a collaboration between the Education Endowment Foundation and the Institute for Effective Education (IEE). Additional funding was received from the DfE to support expansion of the Research Schools Network to have 11 Schools supporting the Government’s Social Mobility Opportunity Areas. From September 2019, the majority of funding and support to schools will be provided by the EEF.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example see: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/light-touch-approaches-unlikely-to-have-impact-on-pupil-outcomes/>