

# Understanding school workforce experiences regarding access to, and the impact of, special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) continuing professional development (CPD) and expertise

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# Understanding school workforce experiences regarding access to, and the impact of, special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) continuing professional development (CPD) and expertise

March 2022

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## Glossary

AMBDA	Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
COVID-19	Coronavirus (COVID-19)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
MEd	Master's in Education
nasen	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NGA	National Governance Association
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
OT	Occupational Therapists
PGCERT	Postgraduate Certificate
SALT	Speech and Language Therapists
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SEND	Special Educational Needs and/ or disability

# 1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

## 1.1. Overview of context

National statistics indicate that currently, in England, 12.2% of children and young people have been identified with special educational needs (SEN) and are supported through SEN Support (those with SEN, but without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)) (Department for Education (DfE), 2021). A further 3.7% of children and young people are in receipt of an EHCP. Approximately half of children and young people with an EHCP are educated in mainstream schools, with the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE and Department of Health (DoH), 2015) (hereafter referred to as the SEND Code of Practice) stating that the majority of children and young people with SEN, but without an EHCP, will be educated in a mainstream setting. The reported percentage of children requiring additional SEN provision has increased in recent years for those on SEN Support and for those with an EHCP; a trend which has continued since 2017 (DfE, 2021).

The SEND Code of Practice states that schools are 'required to identify and address the SEN of the pupils that they support', further stating that they are required to 'use their best endeavours to make sure that a child with SEN gets the support they need' (DfE and DoH, 2015 p. 92). In terms of delivering support and provision it is important to note that it is the teacher who is responsible for their pupils, including those with SEN, in terms of progress and development (DfE and DoH, 2015). However, the school-based team supporting and working with children and families with SEN will also include those who coordinate provision, including the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), as well as those who deliver interventions, often teaching assistants. This indicates the importance for the school workforce to have access to SEND Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and expertise, with the SEND Code of Practice stating that the quality of teaching for all pupils, including those with SEND, should be a core part of the school's approach to professional development.

## 1.2. Research approach

To explore the experiences of the school workforce in relation to their access to, and experience of SEND CPD, Bath Spa University and the University of Birmingham undertook



research to investigate the type of SEND CPD offered/ accessed, CPD preferences and the perceived impact of having such access. In addition, the research focused on access to expertise, noting that this can be a key activity in terms of developing the knowledge and skills of the school workforce. The research formed one of three projects focused on SEND CPD, all funded by Whole School SEND. Whole School SEND deliver the DfE SEND Schools' Workforce Support Contract, with the aim of supporting the school workforce to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The research was comprised of three phases. The initial phase consisted of a national, online survey which was open to the wider school workforce. The survey, which took approximately 20 minutes to complete, was open to teaching assistants, teachers, SENCOs and senior leaders working in both mainstream, special schools and specialist settings. We also invited responses from SEND Governors and those who work in supporting roles across the school, for example in finance or administration. General information was collected through the survey, including school location and type. Later questions were tailored to role and reported experience. The survey was open from October – November 2021 and was disseminated through The National Association for Special Education Needs (nasen), Whole School SEND, the National Award for SEN Coordination Provider group, as well as through wider networks and social media. This report details the 637 responses to the online survey. Schools and institutions within all eight regional school commissioner areas were represented in the survey with the vast majority originating within the West Midlands (46.0%), South-West of England (12.6%) and Lancashire and West Yorkshire (10.4%). Most respondents worked in primary schools (50.1%) or secondary schools (23.2%) with a large proportion also working in all-through special schools (8.6%). Data collected at the end of the survey revealed that the sample mostly consisted of those identifying as women (85.8%) with 73.7% of the sample working full time.

The second phase of the survey consisted of in-depth semi-structured one to one interviews with teaching assistants, teachers, SENCOs (including those who were part of the senior leadership team (SLT)) and SLT who work in mainstream schools. In total 32 interviews were conducted over the course of January and February 2022. The final phase consisted of two focus groups with the Whole School SEND Regional Leads. Nine participants were able to

take part across the two groups, representing six of the eight Whole School SEND regional areas.

### 1.3. Overview of findings

#### Priority and delivery of SEND CPD

- Developing effective practice for children with SEND is seen as a priority for most survey respondents, with over half stating that it is an essential priority for their own CPD.
- SEND CPD tends to be led by the needs of the current cohort and is often focused on the broad areas of needs or specific areas of SEND, with priorities often determined via staff discussion, staff meetings and provision management.
- In terms of planning and organising SEND CPD, senior leaders and/or the school SENCO are typically the personnel involved in planning SEND CPD in their school or setting, with nearly six out of ten SENCOs stating that they are 'almost always' involved in delivering SEND CPD in their setting.

#### Types of SEND CPD accessed

- The majority of respondents had accessed teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or staff meetings, with nearly three quarters (72.4%) stating that this is their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 70% of respondents stated that they had accessed consultations with professionals, with SENCOs more likely to access this type of SEND CPD. However, this was not the most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- Three quarters of respondents (75.4%) had read journals or articles. However, with the exception of SENCOs, this was not a frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- Less than half of respondents (48.8%) stated that social media formed part of their SEND CPD in the last five years.
- Survey, interview and focus group data highlighted a concern regarding what constitutes 'good' SEND CPD and how to access this.

### The effectiveness of differing types of SEND CPD

- Consultation with a professional about SEND is perceived as the most effective SEND CPD with nearly 60% of respondents (59.7%) 'strongly agreeing' that consultation with a professional about SEND is effective in helping their practice.
- Coaching and/or discussion and the observation of colleagues were considered effective forms of SEND CPD, both perceived as more effective than teacher education days.
- Over half of the respondents (57.5%) stated that coaching and/or discussion with colleagues is their preferred form of CPD, whilst nearly half of respondents (44.9%) stated that observation of colleagues was a preferred form of CPD.
- Nearly one third of respondents (32.5%) 'strongly agreed' that specialist websites such as the Autism Education Trust and nasen are effective in helping their practice with 41.3% noting this as their preferred form of CPD.
- This indicates that the most preferred form of SEND CPD is not the most frequently accessed.

### The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

- Over half of respondents (52.3%) 'strongly agreed' that the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that they have accessed more online, and distance SEND CPD.
- Nearly four in ten (39.2%) respondents 'strongly agreed' that, since the COVID-19 pandemic, they had accessed more SEND CPD in their own time.
- It is expected that this will remain the case for the future, with six in ten respondents suggesting that it is likely they will access more SEND CPD in their own time in the future as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- With regards to how respondents might access future SEND CPD, eight in ten respondents (81.4%) stated that it was either 'extremely likely' or 'somewhat likely' that they would access more online and distance SEND CPD in the future.
- However, there was equally a desire to incorporate face-to-face training again, with participants in all phases particularly highlighting the benefits of networking with colleagues from other settings, as well as the opportunity to reflect and ask questions.

## Access to expertise at the point of need

- Overwhelmingly, school staff sought support at the point of need from staff within school, with the SENCO appearing to provide most of this 'point of need' support.
- Nearly two out of five respondents (39.4%) stated that they would be 'extremely unlikely' or 'somewhat unlikely' to access support, at the point of need, from an educational psychologist.
- Whilst nearly one quarter (23.9%) stated that they would be extremely likely to access support, at the points of need, from a specialist or advisory teacher.
- Lack of time and access were cited by respondents to explain the lower scores for accessing specialists such as Educational Psychologists and specialist teachers.

## 1.4. Recommendations

### SEND CPD guidance

- SEND CPD is perceived as being synonymous with formal training. Further guidance regarding the different, additional activities which also constitute CPD would be beneficial to help the school workforce in recognising the differing types of CPD available.
- Further guidance for school leaders would be beneficial regarding the type of SEND CPD which the school workforce considers to have the most impact, and guidance regarding how to access/ implement such activities would help maximise the expertise already within schools.
- A theme through the survey data and the interviews related to concerns over what constitutes good quality SEND CPD. Further signposting to SEND CPD, for the wider school workforce, would be beneficial. This should be specific to role type and provide clear pathways of SEND CPD.

### The delivery of SEND CPD

- SENCOs and school leaders are frequently involved in the delivery of SEND CPD. However, there is potential to explore how other members of the school workforce could help in the delivery of SEND CPD. For example, teaching assistants may be able to support new colleagues through observation.

- The online survey data suggested that the majority of SEND CPD was organised and delivered 'in house', with outside providers, for example from a multi academy trust or a commercial organisation, rarely used. There is potential to support schools with networking, to either buy in or deliver SEND CPD as a cluster, delivering a bespoke package of support. The facilitation of regional SEND CPD networks would help develop this support.
- If the SENCO is the primary deliverer of SEND CPD in a school, consideration needs to be given as to how their own CPD needs are met, extending beyond that of the National Award for SEN Coordination.
- Programmes of school SEND CPD need to be regular and sequential to have impact. Follow up activities/ engagement, delivered by either the CPD provider or SENCO/SLT, would support the implementation of CPD.

#### Access to SEND CPD and expertise

- Consideration needs to be given as to how the wider school workforce can be supported with their SEND professional development. In the first instance, ensuring the wider school workforce have easy access to SEND CPD, without the SENCO acting as a gatekeeper by default.
- Online survey data, supported through the interviews, suggested that consultation with professionals and observation of colleagues was considered to be the most effective SEND CPD. However, this was not typically the most accessed. Consideration should be given as to how these activities could be further supported in schools, potentially through the creation of additional resources to facilitate such interactions, e.g., how to make the most of a peer observation.
- Schools need to consider how the whole school workforce is able to access SEND CPD and expertise. Often those working closely with the child/young person are not able to access SEND CPD or collaborate with the outside agencies, suggesting that opportunities for development are being missed.

#### The future of SEND CPD

- SEND CPD tends to be prioritised based on identified needs and is frequently specific to an area of SEND. Support and guidance to focus on the broader aspects related to

SEND support, for example high quality teaching, the graduated approach and working with parents, may help develop support at the SEN Support level.

- Whilst online SEND CPD provided a number of benefits, the benefit of face-to-face SEND CPD should not be underestimated. CPD providers should look to develop in person sessions, which also specifically facilitate time for sharing good practice and networking; elements clearly missed over the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Online SEND CPD should incorporate elements to ensure not only sequential development, but also interactive, practical elements to ensure active participation, immediate relevance to the classroom and opportunities for networking.

## 2. Full Report

### 2.1. Introduction

Between October 2021 and February 2022, Bath Spa University and the University of Birmingham undertook research to explore and understand school workforce experiences regarding their access to special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) continuing professional development (CPD) and expertise. The purpose of the research is to inform the direction of future SEND CPD provision and expertise in a post COVID-19 era.

The research sought to understand the way in which differing roles within the school workforce accessed SEND CPD and expertise, specifically teaching assistants, teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) and senior leaders. The research aimed to explore how SEND CPD and expertise had previously been accessed, including how access may have changed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were asked to reflect on differing types of CPD and expertise, including the determining and enactment of priorities, preferences of access and how engagement with these activities impacted on their individual role and, from the perspective of the participant and the children and young people with SEND with whom they work.

The research is one of a series of three projects funded by the Whole School SEND Consortium, who deliver the Department for Education (DfE) SEND Schools' Workforce Support contract. The three projects focus on the development of CPD for the school workforce, through projects related to research, the provision of development pathways and training modules.

### 2.2. Background

CPD can be defined, within the context of school-based education, as activities which develop the knowledge and skills of the school workforce which, as a consequence, impact on children and young people (Keegan, 2019; Leonardi et al., 2021). Such activities are formal and intentional, supported or delivered by colleagues or external providers, and focused on improving student outcomes (Leonardi et al., 2021; Makopoulou, Neville, Ntoumanis and

Thomas, 2021). This indicates that CPD encapsulates a range of activities, including, but not limited to, training (Cordingley et al., 2015).

Whilst reviews and guidance have been published to determine what constitutes effective CPD (Teacher Development Trust, 2015), determining specific CPD activities is more nuanced. Bates and Watts through their work exploring the positive impact of CPD on school attainment, note specific types of CPD which they consider to be impactful. These include coaching and mentoring between staff, forming networks and partnership across both primary and secondary schools within a community, team teaching and peer review, both within the schools and with other schools and a process of self-reflection (Bates and Watts, 2016 p. 51). This closely aligns with how other professional bodies understand the notion of professional learning with the Health and Care Professions Council categorising CPD activities under the themes: work-based learning, professional activities, formal and education, self-directed and 'other' (Health and Care Profession Council, 2021).

Whilst expertise is not listed as CPD activity, when this is considered against the purpose of undertaking CPD, specifically improving outcomes for pupils (Keegan, 2019; Leonardi et al., 2021), it is understandable that a link between CPD and access to SEND expertise can be made. The SEND Code of Practice (DfE and Department of Health (DoH), 2015) is clear regarding the importance of access to professionals as forming part of the graduated approach to supporting children with SEND, referring to the importance of 'draw[ing] on more specialist assessments from external agencies and professionals' (DfE and DoH, 2015 p. 99) with the key aim of ensuring that pupils with SEND receive the support and provision that they need, alongside high-quality teaching. Equally, the Chartered College of Teaching draws our attention to the potential impact that accessing external expertise, specifically speech and language therapists, can have on teaching practice, noting an increased awareness of difficulties and potential responses to support difficulties (Scutt and Harrison, 2019).

Whilst there may be debate regarding what constitutes CPD, there is agreement that CPD should be a priority for schools. The Standard for Teachers' Professional Development states that the professional development of teachers must be prioritised by the leaders in school (DfE, 2016). The SEND Code of Practice echoes the need to prioritise CPD, noting that 'the quality of teaching for pupils with SEN should be a core part of the school's performance



management arrangements and its approach to professional development for all teaching and support staff' (DfE and DoH, 2015 p. 93).

In terms of how and when access to SEND CPD and expertise is prioritised, this is often driven by the identified needs of the children and the need to meet these, as well as having SEND CPD as part of the school development plan (Wall et al., 2019). However, the work of Wall and colleagues found that CPD priorities were typically decided by the senior leadership team (SLT). With approximately 50% of SENCOs part of the SLT (Boddison, Curran and Moloney, 2021), with a disparity between primary and secondary phases, this indicates a challenge with how SEND CPD is prioritised if there is not an advocating voice during the decision-making process. In relation, it is interesting to note that research conducted prior to the pandemic by Wall and colleagues (2019) found that not only did the majority of SEND CPD take place on the school site, but it was typically delivered by the SENCO.

However, despite such calls to prioritise access to SEND CPD and expertise, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, SEND related CPD was not typically considered a priority within schools (Wall et al., 2019). Equally, it is understandable that with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to CPD and expertise has been adversely affected. Leonardi et al. (2021) found that CPD in general was de-prioritised due to the COVID-19 pandemic and for teachers this was particularly acute during the immediate period that followed the lockdown of schools in March 2020. Yet conversely, they found that the COVID-19 pandemic equally provided some teachers with greater autonomy to develop their own CPD interests.

### 2.3. Methodology

#### Research aims

Against a rapidly changing educational landscape, the research project sought to build on previous research focused on access to SEND CPD (Wall et al., 2019) and expertise through specifically exploring the types of SEND CPD and expertise accessed, with specific consideration of priority, preference, and impact. This research, therefore, considers what has changed in the interim period in a post COVID-19 era. Specifically, the research aimed to:

- Explore commonalities and differences between roles in the school workforce and engagement across WSS regions, in terms of access to, scope and impact of SEND CPD/ expertise.
- Explore the impact that SEND focused CPD/ access to expertise can have on professionals and children with SEND.
- Understand the gaps in terms of current provision of SEND CPD/ expertise, identifying trends for specific groups/ areas, including the impact of COVID-19 pandemic across Whole School SEND/ Regional Schools Commissioners' Regional areas.
- Develop a robust evidence base which identifies preferences of different user groups in terms of content and point of access for future SEND CPD and expertise in a post COVID-19 era.
- Produce examples of good practice relating to how SENCOs and SLT are prioritising and planning for SEND CPD, building on Wall et al. (2019).

The research was conducted in three distinct phases:

- Phase 1: A national survey with the school workforce in England.
- Phase 2: A series of interviews with the school workforce in England.
- Phase 3: Two focus groups with Whole School SEND regional leads.

All of these stages were granted ethical approval by both institutions.

#### Phase 1: National Survey

A national survey focused on accessed to SEND CPD/ expertise in schools and settings in England was conducted between Monday 18th October and Friday 26th November 2021 using the online tool Qualtrics. Information about the purposes of the survey was presented after which active consent was sought. Respondents were asked to complete a further six short sections that included questions relating to:

- Their school or setting - including type of school, English region, and Ofsted grade.
- Continuing professional development - including questions focused on types of CPD and courses. Further questions were asked about impact, preference, and frequency of these different types of CPD opportunities.

- Questions about SEND CPD in the school or setting - questions probed whether SEND CPD was a personal and/or institutional priority. Further questions explored how training was delivered within each setting.
- The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on SEND CPD and the future of CPD.
- Accessing support at the 'point of need'.
- Information about the respondent including qualifications and role.

The draft survey was presented to Whole School SEND and the DfE after which changes were made. The final version was piloted with members of the school workforce, including those who were students at a University in England. After this stage, no further changes were made.

### Phase 2: Interviews

Survey respondents were invited to share their contact details, via a separate link, to register their interest in taking part in one, online interview. Potential participants were subsequently contacted with further information regarding the research, including consent documentation, and a request to take part. A total of 32 interviews took place over January and February 2022. Each interview lasted between 17 and 39 minutes. Interviews were undertaken and recorded on a one-to-one basis, using the platform 'Google Meet'. Recorded interviews were later transcribed. Participants were sent the transcripts for review, with the opportunity to amend, or withdraw without notice/ reason, up until the provided date. Post this date, the data were thematically analysed using NVIVO.

Semi-structured interviews focused on the themes which were derived from the survey data, including the type of SEND CPD/ expertise accessed, how this was arranged/ accessed and the impact they felt this had had on them professionally. Priorities for SEND CPD were explored, as well as the preferred method of undertaking future SEND CPD. Access to expertise was also explored, with consideration given to the external agencies accessed, by whom and the nature of the activities. The participants were asked to consider impact of interactions with expertise, on their role professionally, as well as the children/ young people they worked with. Access to SEND CPD and expertise were also considered in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. SENCOs were asked supplementary questions, particularly related to the management and organisation of SEND CPD/ expertise.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the interview schedule was piloted with six individuals, including three teachers and a teaching assistant. Minor changes were made to ensure greater clarity of questions.

### Phase 3: Focus groups

To further explore the themes from the survey data, two focus groups were conducted with Whole School SEND Regional Leads. To enable participation, two groups were facilitated, with a total of nine participants. The focus groups lasted between 40 – 45 minutes. The focus groups were hosted using the online platform 'Google Meet'. The focus groups were recorded and later transcribed. Post transcription, participants were invited to review their individual contributions to the focus group, with the opportunity to amend or withdraw without notice/ reason up until the provided date.

The focus groups sought to build upon the themes within the interviews, to provide a differing perspective. The focus groups focused on the nature of the Whole School SEND regional lead role, specifically in relation to the provision of SEND CPD. The participants were asked about the CPD offered, engagement with this and how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on the provision, and uptake, of SEND CPD. Participants were also asked to consider the 'future' of SEND CPD, in terms of priority and delivery.

The focus group was piloted with a member from a University in England, with minor amendments made to ensure clarity of questions.

### Sampling

The targeted population of the national survey was the entire school workforce in England. The sampling was opportunistic in nature and was promoted through a variety of different methods listed below:

- Cohorts of students on the National Award for SEN Coordination (NA SENCO) programme at a self-selecting group of higher education providers.
- Twitter feeds by the report authors, their institutions and a variety of other providers.
- Communications by Whole School SEND and nasen to members.

Schools and institutions within all eight regional school commissioner areas were represented in the survey with the vast majority originating within the West Midlands (46.0%), South-West of England (12.6%) and Lancashire and West Yorkshire (10.4%). Most respondents worked in primary schools (50.1%) or secondary schools (23.2%) with a large proportion also working in all-through special schools (8.6%). Most respondents worked in a maintained (local authority) school (41.3%) or an academy (48.8%). Most academies (81.6%) were part of a multi-academy trust. Most schools had been rated good by Ofsted (64.5%).

Data collected at the end of the survey revealed that the sample mostly consisted of those identifying as women (85.8%) with 73.7% of the sample working full time. The highest qualification held was an undergraduate degree (23.5%) or postgraduate qualification (61.1%). Most qualifications did not specialise in SEND. Teachers formed the majority of respondents, with those on the leadership scale forming 20.9% of the sample and class teachers or subject teachers forming 37.4% of the sample. Teaching assistants formed 16.1% of the sample. Within the entire sample (n=637), 239 respondents were either SENCOs or had experience within this role.

Similar to the online survey, the interviews aimed to target teaching assistants, teachers, SENCOs (including those with SLT responsibilities) and senior leaders in both primary and secondary schools in England. Those working in mainstream provision were specifically targeted. Potential participants were able to find out more about the interviews, and explore whether they would like to take part, through leaving their details at the end of the online survey, via a separate link. Due to a low response rate, the research team continued to seek participants via their own network and via nasen/ Whole School SEND communications from November until February 2022.

In total 32 participants took part in the interviews. This included seven teaching assistants (five primary and two secondary), nine teachers (five primary and four secondary), seven SENCOs (four primary and three secondary), seven SENCOs who were also part of the school's SLT (five primary and two secondary) and two members of SLT, both primary head teachers. All participants worked in mainstream schools.

The largest Whole School SEND regional area represented was the West Midlands, with thirteen participants from this region. Seven participants were from the South West, with a further five from the East Midlands, South Yorkshire and Humber. The remaining participants were from the East of England and North-East London, Lancashire and West Yorkshire, and South-East England and South London.

The Whole School SEND Regional leads were contacted via Whole School SEND and invited to take part. Nine Regional Leads participated, with six of the eight regional areas represented within both focus groups.

#### Survey analysis

The national survey had 977 initial responses. The dataset was further cleaned through the removal of participants who consented but provided no further data or who did not answer the full set of questions about CPD. An additional set of respondents were removed who did not work in England. This resulted in 637 responses. The resultant data were analysed using SPSS v.28.

#### Interview and focus group analysis

The interview and focus group data were transcribed and sent to participants to check for accuracy. The data were thematically analysed using NVIVO.

### 3. Access to school based CPD

#### 3.1. The prioritisation of SEND CPD

Over half of respondents to the survey stated that developing effective practice for children with SEND was an essential priority for their own CPD. Most respondents considered that SEND CPD was an essential or high priority for whole school CPD. This was a theme echoed through the interviews, with participants stating that individual and whole school SEND CPD tended to be prioritised based on current cohort/ school needs:

*'...as an SEN lead (priority) is that what the child needs, they get. Whatever that looks like and so that's my personal priority and the priority for the school.'*

*Primary SENCO, West Midlands*

*'I think having relevant CPD which suits the children, then the learning needs of our children, I think that will be more useful for us, as opposed to just having a generic CPD, which for some people, it might be useful. For some people at that point in time, it might not be useful.'*

*Primary Teacher, West Midlands*

However, whilst SEND CPD priorities tended to be reactive, based on current need, interview participants highlighted how this also enabled the strategic development of the school workforce skillset, and therefore was supportive for future identified needs:

*'So, I feel like the training we've had yeah, has made us more aware of when there's maybe issues that haven't been... They didn't know they had it, they're not diagnosed is the word I'm looking for. So we've spotted problems or issues where we didn't know there were ones before. So the training has been invaluable for that really.'*

*Secondary Teaching Assistant, West Midlands*

The interviews suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted on how priorities were currently determined, with one interview participant stating:

*'It's [SEND CPD], kind of, interwoven, because the priority I suppose for all schools and our school is catch-up, and it's getting the kids back to where they need to be, and that includes those with SEND.'*

*Primary SENCO/SLT, East Midlands*

Whilst the SENCO was typically determining SEND CPD priorities, such decision making was not typically taken in isolation with the interviews illustrating how there would also often be involvement with members of the SLT. Decisions were typically based on feedback from school colleagues as well as tracking need/ provision, with SENCOs taking varying approaches to track both needs and/or provision. These included staff meetings and the use of provision mapping to identify future training needs. Yet this was not ubiquitously the case, with the Whole School SEND Regional Leads focus group highlighting the importance of evidence/ needs led decision making:

*'I don't think there is a clear kind of priorities for SEND training in the schools and the colleagues that I work with think it's so varied and often it can be very general, they want, I guess asked oh, can you do something on SEND strategies which is just so vague.'*

*Whole School SEND Regional Lead*

### 3.2. The organisation of SEND CPD in schools

The online survey asked respondents to reflect on their experiences of SEND CPD in the last five years, with questions specifically focused on exploring who is responsible for leading and delivering SEND related CPD in their school or organisation.

- 63.6% of school leaders and/or 71.4% of current SENCOs, are 'almost always' involved in planning SEND CPD in their school or organisation. This is opposed to 62.9 % of teaching assistants who are 'never' involved.



- 62.8% of school leaders and/or 72.8% of SENCOs, are ‘almost always’ involved in organising SEND CPD in their school or organisation. This is opposed to 72.2% of teaching assistants who are ‘never’ involved.
- 48.8% of school leaders and/or 59.9% of SENCOs, are ‘almost always’ involved in delivering CPD for SEND in their school or organisation. This is opposed to 62.9% of teaching assistants who are ‘never’ involved.
- 59.5% of school leaders and/or 59.7% of SENCOs, are ‘almost always’ involved in evaluating SEND CPD in their school or organisation. This is opposed to 58.8% of teaching assistants who are ‘never’ involved.

The above illustrates that the SENCO is typically involved in the planning, organising, and delivering of SEND CPD. This was a strong theme echoed through the interviews, with participants indicating that the SENCO is typically the person who determines the priorities of the required SEND CPD, and subsequently delivers it, with one participant stating:

*‘No, it’s definitely the SENCO [who arranges the training]. She’s, sort of, responsible for it and she takes it on-board. If there’s any issues that we have, like speech and language, we will refer that to her and she will make the arrangements.’*

*Primary Teacher, West Midlands*

The most accessed type of SEND CPD was through more formal, work-based learning especially ‘traditional’ in service training. Table 3.1 presents the results from the question ‘Who provides in-service training in SEND in your school or setting (such as staff meetings or training days)?’

	Almost always (%)	Often (%)	Someti mes (%)	Seldom (%)	Never (%)
The school SENCO	44.6	27.5	17.3	4.3	6.3
A member of the school leadership team	32.3	26.7	20.2	10.4	10.4
Another member of school staff	4.6	19.1	35.2	21.0	20.0
A specialist (such as an educational psychologist/ specialist teacher)	2.6	16.8	42.9	21.2	16.6
An outside provider from another school	2.2	9.4	33.2	27.0	28.2
An outside provider from a charity or similar body (e.g., The British Dyslexia Association)	1.9	4.4	25.0	27.4	41.4
An outside provider from a multi academy trust	1.7	4.4	18.1	20.9	54.9
An outside provider from a commercial organisation	1.5	3.2	20.2	29.1	46.0

Table 3.1 Who provides in-service training in SEND in your school or setting (such as staff meetings or training days)?

These sessions were mostly delivered within schools and were almost always delivered by the SENCO or a member of the school leadership team and with over half (54.9%) stating that outside providers from a multi academy trust never provided CPD, and 46% stating that they never accessed training from a commercial organisation.

However, a theme through the interviews highlighted a note of caution with the potential of over relying on the school SENCO to deliver SEND CPD:

*‘Well, I work in an Academy, and I think the model that they’re probably heading towards is using the SLEs [Specialist leaders of education] to train, to be trained by the most experienced SENCOs, which that’ll mean me, training others... But I think that it should come from Educational Psychologists, and you know, experts in the field really, rather than people that maybe aren’t as clued up as what we need to be.’*

*Primary SENCO, Lancashire and West Yorkshire*

Equally, interviews highlighted the importance of the SENCO themselves regularly accessing training, in order to remain up-to-date and therefore able to deliver/ cascade training:

*'So, I think very much when SENCOs and me personally tap into things it's because we want to fill a knowledge gap, definitely, and feel like we can speak on authority because that's what our staff expect from us all of the time.'*

*Secondary SENCO/SLT, London*

### 3.3. In-Service training in SEND in schools and settings

Within the national survey, respondents were asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' to whether they had accessed different types of 'work based' or 'individual learning types' of CPD within the last five years (i.e., CPD from September 2016 on). For respondents who answered 'yes', a supplementary question probed whether this was their most frequent form of CPD. Here respondents were asked to respond using a five-point scale.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

#### Work based learning

Work Based CPD opportunities are listed below (in order of proportion that accessed). Data from the national survey are contained within statements with bullet points.

- 85.9% (547/637) had accessed Teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or 'staff meetings' with 36.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 36.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

Work based CPD opportunities tended to be focused on a specific area of SEND:

*'...we've had some training regarding the best resources that we can do and how we can support children with SEN that might be related to dyslexia or dyspraxia...that's some of the training that I've got in regards to that.'*

*Primary Teacher, West Midlands*

Other forms of ‘in school CPD’ were more collaborative or peer led in nature. Figure 3.1 below demonstrates the differing types of collaborative SEND CPD accessed.

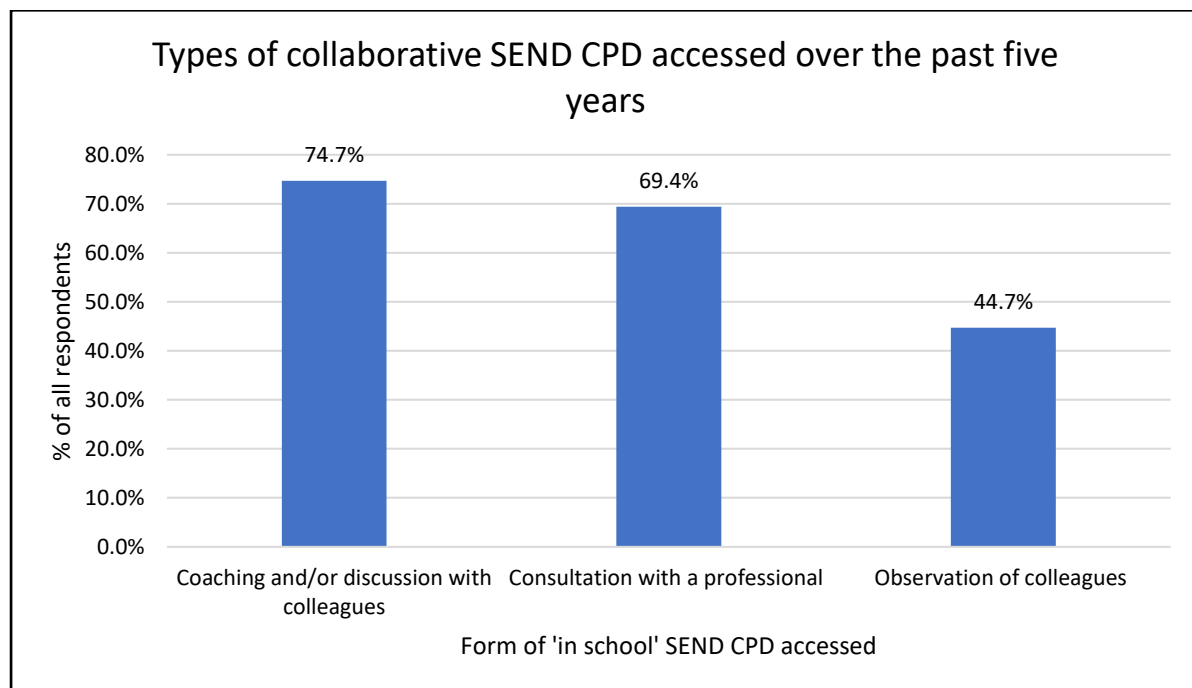


Figure 3.1 Have you accessed SEND CPD through the following work-based learning activities?

Figure 3.1 illustrates that coaching and/or discussion with colleagues was the most accessed type of collaborative SEND CPD by the survey respondents, with 16.4% ‘strongly agreeing’ and 37.6% ‘somewhat agreeing’ that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. In addition, survey respondents indicated that they had also had access to consultation with professionals, although this was not typically frequently accessed, with 14.7% ‘strongly agreeing’ and 31.0% ‘somewhat agreeing’ that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The survey indicated that, over the past five years, just under half of respondents had accessed observation of colleagues as part of their SEND CPD, with 11.9% ‘strongly agreeing’ and 32.3% ‘somewhat agreeing’ that was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

#### Self-directed learning

Respondents undertook a significant amount of self-directed learning such as looking at internet sources or consulting books or articles. These are listed below (in order of access).

- 75.4% (480/637) had read journals or articles with 12.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 32.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 72.5% (462/637) had used specialist websites such as the Autism Education Trust and nasen with 11.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 33.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 65.6% (418/637) had read whole books or book chapters with 9.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 33.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 48.8% (311/637) had used social media with 10.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 29.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

This was a theme echoed through the interviews, with participants stating that they often looked to the internet for information, including the nasen website and the National Governance Association (NGA) amongst others.

*'...the nasen stuff, NGA through the governance there's an SEN angle on there so I've done that.'*

*Primary Teacher, West Midlands*

*'I go into the nasen website to try to keep abreast of what's happening.'*

*Primary SENCO, East Midlands*

However, knowing what constituted 'good' quality SEND CPD was cited as a challenge by interviewees. The Whole School SEND Regional Leads agreed, noting that part of their role was to support and signpost.

*'People are so busy and so stretched they do need to be signposted and guided to relevant resources.'*

*'Sometimes it is a bit of minefield for people and we really need to help them navigate that.'*

## *Whole School SEND Regional Leads*

### 3.4. Access to and frequency of SEND CPD by distinct roles within the school workforce

Access to and frequency of access to SEND CPD were further analysed across separate groups of the school workforce.

#### Construction of groups

Selected roles<sup>1</sup> within the sample were grouped into four new categories.

- Senior leadership (n = 121) included all of those who could be identified as being subject to the contractual arrangements of being on the school leadership scale. This group included participants who had defined their role as executive headteacher, headteacher, and deputy and assistant headteacher.
- Teachers (n = 245) were those identified as being on the class teacher scale whether this be on the pre or post threshold scale. This group also included those who had specified that they received a teaching and learning responsibility payment.
- The final group included all who had identified themselves within a teaching assistant role (n = 97).

Teachers who could not be identified as either a school leader or class teacher were omitted from the analysis (n = 41).

A further group was created to differentiate teachers and school leaders who were currently SENCOs (n = 206) and teachers and school leaders with no SENCO experience (n = 166).

#### Senior leadership

- Teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or 'staff meetings' (93.4%: 113/121) were the most accessed form of CPD in this group with 35.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 31.9% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group was the opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> Further roles within the survey were not broken down into subgroups due to the sample size.

to observe colleagues (52.9%: 64/121) with 9.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 34.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

#### Teachers

- Teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or 'staff meetings' (86.9%: 213/245) were the most accessed form of CPD in this group with 37.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 38.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group was the opportunity to observe colleagues (35.9%: 88/245) with 9.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 28.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

#### Teaching assistants

- Teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or 'staff meetings' (84.5%: 82/97) was the most accessed form of CPD in this group with 35.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.8% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group was using social media (38.1%: 37/97) with 13.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.8% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

The survey data illustrated that teacher education days, after school CPD sessions or 'staff meetings' were the most accessed form of SEND CPD across the differing roles. Senior Leaders and teachers stated that the opportunity to observe colleagues was the least frequently accessed, whilst teaching assistants stated that social media was the least accessed type of SEND CPD. A key theme which arose from the interviews with teaching assistants was the time to access SEND CPD, particularly due to the nature of their contracts. One teaching assistant indicated that personal interest was a key motivator to undertake SEND CPD, and this meant that they would take part in CPD regardless of if this was outside of their contracted hours.

*'Yes, we stay late, about an hour later than normal on a Tuesday to do CPD.'*

*Secondary Teaching Assistant, West Midlands*

*I will be invited to teacher training actually... and I will go whether it's paid or unpaid.'*

*Secondary Teaching Assistant, South West*

## SENCOs

The data were further split to examine if there were differences between teachers and school leaders within the SENCO role and those who had never been a SENCO. Here there were some notable differences in levels of access.

- 92.7% of SENCOs had accessed specialist websites such as the Autism Education Trust and nasen as opposed to 53.6% who had never been a SENCO.
- 90.3% of SENCOs had read journals or articles as opposed to 66.9% who had never been a SENCO.
- 89.4% of SENCOs had accessed SEND CPD through a consultation with a professional (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) as opposed to 58.4% who had never been a SENCO.
- 83.5% of SENCOs had accessed SEND CPD through coaching and/or discussion with colleagues as opposed to 63.9% who had never been a SENCO.
- 82.0% of SENCOs had read whole books or book chapters as opposed to 55.4% who had never been a SENCO.

The data above illustrates that SENCOs typically have access to various types of SEND CPD, which may in part be explained by their role. The SEND Code of Practice states that a key responsibility of the SENCO may include being 'key point of contact' and liaising with external agencies and support services (DfE and DoH, 2015 p. 109). In addition, SENCOs new to post from September 2009 have been required to gain the NA SENCO, which includes the requirement to gain 60 credits at Master's level and to meet the NA SENCO Learning Outcomes.



## 4. Access to formal courses as CPD

The sample were also asked about formal educational opportunities such as having the opportunity to go on courses within the last five years (i.e., CPD from September 2016 on). For respondents who answered 'yes', a supplementary question probed whether this was their most frequent form of CPD. Here respondents were asked to respond using a five-point scale.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Two sets of identical questions were asked. The first set probed access to face-to-face courses whilst the second set probed access to online and distance courses.

### 4.1. Face-to-face courses as CPD

Figure 4.1 below illustrates the face-to-face formal and educational opportunities survey respondents stated they had accessed as part of their SEND CPD over the past five years.

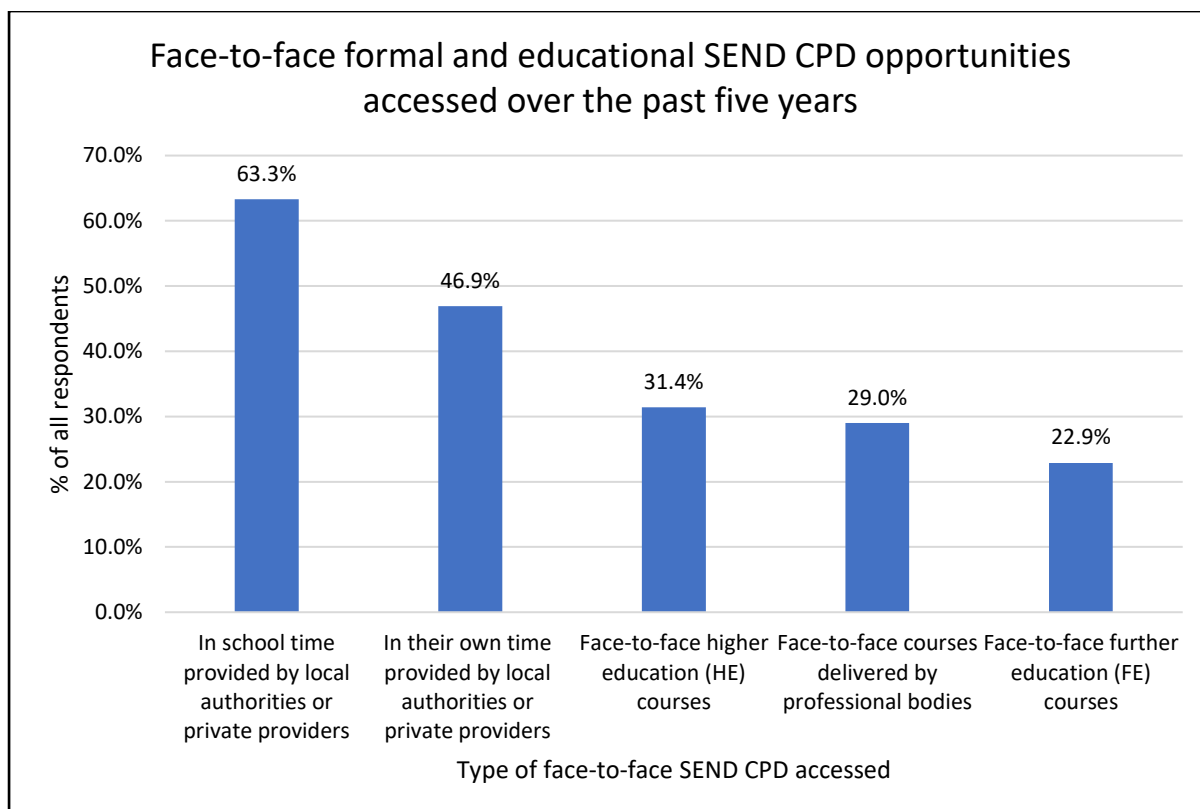


Figure 4.1 Have you accessed SEND CPD through the following face-to-face formal and educational opportunities?

Figure 4.1 illustrates that, in terms of face-to-face formal and educational opportunities, survey respondents have primarily accessed SEND CPD in school time provided by local authorities or private providers. The survey respondents reported less access to formal opportunities outside of the workplace, with less than a third reporting that they had accessed face to face higher education (HE) courses (31.4%), courses delivered by professional bodies (29%) or further education (FE) courses (22.9%). However, in terms of the primary provider of in-service SEND CPD, the survey illustrated that this is ‘almost always’ the school SENCO or a member of the school leadership team (see table 3.1). This indicates that whilst there have been opportunities in school time for face-to-face formal SEND CPD provided by a local authority or private provider, in terms over over-arching SEND CPD, the SENCO remains the primary provider of this.

In terms of the frequency of access to the differing types of face-to-face formal and educational opportunities, SEND CPD provided in school time by local authorities/ private providers was the most frequently accessed within this type of SEND CPD, with:

- 16.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 36.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 13.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 32.1% 'somewhat agreeing' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses in their own time provided by local authorities or private providers was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 32.5% 'strongly agreeing' or 33.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an Master's degree in Education (MEd), Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert), Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association (AMBDA)) was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 15.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 27.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses delivered by professional bodies (e.g., the British Dyslexia Association, Autism Education Trust) was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 28.1% 'strongly agreeing' or 31.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that SEND focused, face-to-face FE courses (e.g., a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)) was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

#### 4.2. Access to and occurrence of face-to-face SEND CPD by distinct roles within the school workforce

Access and frequency of access to face-to-face courses as CPD were further analysed across separate groups of the school workforce.

##### Senior leadership

- SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers (73.6%: 89/121) were the most accessed form of face-to-face course with 14.6% 'strongly agreeing' and 39.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were the SEND focused face-to-face FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) (26.4%: 32/121) with 43.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 15.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

## Teachers

- SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers (61.6%: 151/245) were the most accessed form of face-to-face course with 16.6% 'strongly agreeing' and 33.1% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were SEND focused face-to-face FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) (24.1%: 59/245) with 16.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

## Teaching Assistants

- SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers (58.8%: 57/97) were the most accessed form of face-to-face course with 19.3% 'strongly agreeing' and 35.1% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were SEND focused HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) (8.2%: 8/97) with 37.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

## SENCOs

The data were further split to examine if there were differences between teachers and school leaders within the SENCO role and those who had never been a SENCO. Here there were some notable differences in levels of access.

- 60.7% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused, face-to-face courses in their own time as opposed to 31.3% who had never been a SENCO.
- 53.4% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) as opposed to 20.5% who had never been a SENCO.

SENCO access to formal courses was a distinct theme through the interviews, which is in part due to the statutory requirement for SENCOs new to post to achieve the National Award for SEN Coordination, a Master's level/ Higher Education qualification, within three years of

taking up their post. Post award, access to formal courses varied and with the interviews indicating that this was often dependent on the support offered by the SLT.

*'I underwent my SENCO qualification, and then I did my master's in Inclusive Education, so they were supported both by the schools, so they were happy. My SEN qualification was funded by the school and my master's qualification, I self-funded, but they gave me the time off – so they supported that in that sense.'*

#### *Secondary SENCO, South-West*

### 4.3. Online and distance courses as CPD

Access to online and distance courses are listed below in order of access.

- 56.4% (359/637) had accessed SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers with 9.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 41.8% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 52.7% (336/637) had accessed SEND focused, online/distance courses in their own time provided by local authorities or private providers with 15.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.2% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 31.9% (203/637) had accessed SEND focused, online/distance courses delivered by professional bodies (e.g., the British Dyslexia Association, Autism Education Trust) with 14.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 19.9% (127/637) had undertaken SEND focused, online/distance HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) with 29.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 34.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.
- 11.6% (74/637) had undertaken SEND focused face-to-face, online/distance FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) with 25.7% 'strongly agreeing' or 35.1% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

The online survey data indicated that over half of respondents had accessed online SEND CPD, either in their own time or during school time. This was a theme echoed through the

interviews, although it should be noted that this trend was in direct response to changes introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview participants suggested that the move to online learning had created opportunities for access through increased flexibility.

*'The online courses have been really good because I've been able to access it in a really flexible way, so they've been particularly useful.'*

*Primary Teacher, Lancashire*

Further benefits of accessing CPD online included the flexibility of location, with those isolating due to COVID-19 still able to work (if able), a reduction in costs to attend, including travel time and costs, and the flexibility of when CPD can be accessed.

Further types of online learning, cited by the interviewees, included audio books and short podcasts shared with colleagues.

*'The era of the podcast I think is really useful because it can fit in.'*

*Secondary SENCO/SLT, London*

#### 4.4. Access to and occurrence of online and distance SEND CPD by distinct roles within the school workforce

Access and frequency of access to online/distance courses as CPD were further analysed across separate groups of the school workforce.

##### Senior leadership

- SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers (60.3%: 73/121) were the most accessed form of online/distance course with 5.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were SEND focused online/distance FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) (8.3%: 10/121) with 30.0% 'strongly

agreeing' and 20.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

### Teachers

- SEND focused courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers (57.6%: 141/245) were the most accessed form of online/distance course with 7.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 40.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were SEND focused online/distance FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) (9.0%: 22/245) with 27.3% 'strongly agreeing' and 36.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

### Teaching Assistants

- SEND focused courses in their own time provided by local authorities or private providers (51.5%: 50/97) were the most accessed form of online/distance course with 22.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 36.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD. The least accessed form of CPD in this group were SEND focused HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) (7.2%: 7/97) with 28.6% 'strongly agreeing' and 26.8% 'somewhat agreeing' that this was their most frequently accessed type of SEND CPD.

### SENCOs

The data were further split to examine if there were differences between those teachers and school leaders within the SENCO role and those who had never been a SENCO. Here there were some notable differences in levels of access.

- 76.2% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused online/ distance courses in school time as opposed to 39.2% who had never been a SENCO.
- 72.8% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused online/ distance courses in their own time as opposed to 30.1% who had never been a SENCO.

- 43.7% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused online/ distance courses delivered by professional bodies (e.g., the British Dyslexia Association, Autism Education Trust) as opposed to 21.7% who had never been a SENCO.
- 31.7% of SENCOs had accessed SEND focused online/ distance HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) as opposed to 12.7% who had never been a SENCO.

The data above indicates that, in terms of online and distance SEND CPD, SENCOs are likely to have more access to differing types of CPD than their colleagues who have not been a SENCO. This includes more access to online courses delivered by professional bodies and online HE courses.



## 5. The perceived impact of SEND CPD

In sections 3 and 4, the analysis considered the frequency and occurrence of CPD. The current section will focus on more affective considerations including the perceived impact of, and preference towards different forms of CPD.

Those who had accessed different types of CPD (see sections 3 and 4) within the last five years (i.e., CPD from September 2016 on) were asked two further supplementary questions probing whether the form of CPD accessed was...

... effective in helping my practice.

... my preferred form of SEND CPD.

For both questions, respondents were asked to respond using a five-point scale.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

### 5.1. In-Service training in SEND in schools and settings

Perceived effectiveness and preference for work based CPD opportunities are listed below (ordered according to 'strongly agreed' for effectiveness). Data from the national survey are contained within statements with bullet points.

#### Work based learning

- 59.7% 'strongly agreed' and 34.6% 'somewhat agreed' that consultation with a professional about SEND (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) is effective in helping their practice with 24.9% 'strongly agreeing' and 33.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

A theme from the interviews was the way in which the opportunity to have a consultation with a professional about SEND had impacted on the professional practice of the school workforce, through the provision of different ideas, strategies and perspectives.

*'So, an educational psychologist has come in and also we have recently had a strong connection with our Local Authority Autism Advisory Unit, which have been really supportive and helpful...and we've had a Down's Syndrome specialist teacher come in...'*

*Secondary SENCO, North West London*

One interview participant also highlighted the way in which such an opportunity had impacted on their professional thinking, and therefore had impacted on children/ young people as a result:

*'Yes, I think definitely the ASIS training. That really has had an impact and I think it makes you think as well about ways that... What students might be going through...'*

*Secondary Teacher, South West*

*'Definitely CAMHS, when I've worked with CAMHS, it really has worked, supported the students... so far, it's been really good. They've been very supportive on our behalf and supporting us and the impact on the students is building.'*

*Secondary Teacher, South West*

However, the benefits cited not only included accessing additional ideas and support strategies, but also the benefit of the school colleague receiving reassurance.

*'Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but it's definitely, for me, I think it's quite impactful. Without them it would just be me on my tod trying to make it up as I went along or trying to tap into other local SENCOs.'*

*Secondary SENCO, West Midlands*

Further interviews highlighted the way in which such input could be later disseminated and applied to differing situations:

*'I was able to implement some strategies and different ways to work with the student and obviously if I was to walk into a classroom and I saw this student displaying these...'*

*Secondary Teacher, West Midlands*

Another key issue related to time. Here there was frustration voiced by some teachers and teaching assistants that they did not have time to liaise with outside agencies. This was noted as a missed opportunity for collaboration:

*'I think it depends on the quality of the interactions between the teacher and the external professional coming in and the receptiveness of that teacher, it's the time that's been given to do that as well...'*

*Primary SENCO, West Midlands*

- 47.1% 'strongly agreed' and 45.8% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND CPD through coaching and/or discussion with colleagues is effective in helping their practice with 13.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 44.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

The Whole School SEND Regional Leads remarked upon the benefit of creating space for '*coaching and reflection*', noting the benefit of '*building on the expertise we that we already have in the region*'. Interview participants also highlighted the benefits of having time and space to work alongside colleagues, including through coaching and especially through discussion, with one participant stating:

*'..more sort of in groups and having that kind of CPD where you get to discuss things and share ideas sort of as a school community, being maybe in the hall or just in our own departments. We do have that....so I think I'd find that helpful, yeah, just being with other people again.'*

*Secondary Teaching Assistant, West Midlands*

- 43.2% 'strongly agreed' and 47.4% 'somewhat agreed' that opportunities to observe colleagues is effective in helping their practice with 13.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 31.9% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

Whilst observation was noted as CPD which was effective in helping develop practice, this was not a widely undertaken activity. Yet, through the interviews a participant identified how such activities can help not only with developing practice but also with wider impact for children and families.

*'Sometimes it's just an observation and then there is notes and I can share those with the parents and the impact is that way just to keep everybody in the loop. Otherwise, it is a, kind of, no, you need to be doing this.'*

*Primary SENCO, West Midlands*

Further interviews highlighted how observations in other schools and working across clusters benefits not only those observing, but those being observed.

- 33.1% 'strongly agreed' and 49.5% 'somewhat agreed' that teacher education days, after school CPD sessions, or 'staff meetings' are effective in helping their practice with 12.1% 'strongly agreeing' or 32.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

A key theme from the interviews was the importance of training having a practical application. School colleagues wanted to be able to take something directly back to the classroom for implementation. This was also a theme from the focus groups with the Whole School SEND Regional Leads, who highlighted the need to ensure practical strategies ready for implementation,

*'They want that practical help, and if you're giving them tools that they can take away and use, that's often when you get really positive feedback, rather than just theoretical ideas and pedagogy'*

*Whole School SEND Regional Lead*

## Self-directed learning

- 32.5% 'strongly agreed' and 57.1% 'somewhat agreed' that specialist websites such as the Autism Education Trust and nasen are effective in helping their practice with 7.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 33.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 26.6% 'strongly agreed' and 62.9% 'somewhat agreed' that reading whole books or book chapters are effective in helping their practice with 6.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 22.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 28.1% 'strongly agreed' and 59.0% 'somewhat agreed' that reading journals or articles are effective in helping their practice with 4.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 23.1% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 23.8% 'strongly agreed' and 55.0% 'somewhat agreed' that social media is effective in helping their practice with 8.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 24.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

In terms of self-directed learning, the survey respondents indicated a preference for accessing specialist websites, such as the Autism Education Trust and nasen, whilst accessing SEND CPD through social media was considered the least effective and least preferred. This potentially links to the earlier findings regarding the challenge of knowing what constitutes 'good' quality SEND CPD and the importance of supporting colleagues through signposting to relevant resources.

## 5.2. Effectiveness and preference by distinct roles within the school workforce

Perceived effectiveness and preference for different work based and self-directed forms of CPD were further analysed across separate groups of the school workforce.

### Senior leadership

- 59.0% 'strongly agreed' and 33.3% 'somewhat agreed' that a consultation with a professional about SEND (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) was perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 19.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 34.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

## Teachers

- 59.6% 'strongly agreed' and 33.9% 'somewhat agreed' that a consultation with a professional about SEND (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) was perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 26.3% 'strongly agreeing' and 31.0% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

## Teaching Assistants

- 64.2% 'strongly agreed' and 32.1% 'somewhat agreed' that a consultation with a professional about SEND (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) was perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 21.6% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

## SENCOs

- 62.2% 'strongly agreed' and 33.5% 'somewhat agreed' that consultation with a professional about SEND (e.g., specialist teacher, Educational Psychologist) was perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 21.6% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

## 5.3. Face-to-face courses as CPD.

- 70.0% 'strongly agreed' and 28.5% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) are effective in helping their practice with 32.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 60.3% 'strongly agreed' and 33.6% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) are effective in helping their practice with 27.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 35.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 55.1% 'strongly agreed' and 38.9% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses delivered by professional bodies (e.g., the British Dyslexia Association, Autism Education Trust) are effective in helping their practice with 20.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 40.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

- 50.1% 'strongly agreed' and 44.4% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses in school time are effective in helping their practice with 28.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 40.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 42.1% 'strongly agreed' and 51.5% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face courses in their own time are effective in helping their practice with 16.1% 'strongly agreeing' and 35.8% 'somewhat agreeing' that is their preferred form of CPD.

When considering how effective differing types of face-to-face courses are, as well as perceived effectiveness, the survey data indicated that overall SEND focused face-to-face HE courses are not only considered the most effective, but also the preferred form of SEND CPD. This contrasts with face-to-face courses accessed 'in their own time', with respondents citing this as the least effective and least preferred. It is notable that 61.1% of the survey sample stated that their highest qualification was at postgraduate level, although most survey respondents stated that their qualification did not specialise in SEND.

#### 5.4. Online and distance courses as CPD

- 63.8% 'strongly agreed' and 30.7% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, online/distance HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) are effective in helping their practice with 22.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 34.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 58.1% 'strongly agreed' and 37.8% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, online/distance FE courses (e.g., an NVQ) are effective in helping their practice with 24.3% 'strongly agreeing' and 28.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 42.1% 'strongly agreed' and 51.0% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, online/distance courses delivered by professional bodies (e.g., the British Dyslexia Association, Autism Education Trust) are effective in helping their practice with 13.4% 'strongly agreeing' and 37.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.
- 30.7% 'strongly agreed' and 58.9% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused courses, online/distance in their own time provided by local authorities or private providers

are effective in helping their practice with 9.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 27.7% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

- 22.8% 'strongly agreed' and 64.1% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, online/distance courses in school time provided by local authorities or private providers are effective in helping their practice with 7.8% 'strongly agreeing' and 32.3% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

### 5.5. Effectiveness and preference of different types of courses by distinct roles within the school workforce

Perceived effectiveness and preference for all types of different courses were further analysed across separate groups of the school workforce.

#### Senior leadership

- 69.2% 'strongly agreed' and 26.9% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) were perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 32.7% 'strongly agreeing' and 34.6% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

#### Teachers

- 74.5% 'strongly agreed' and 24.5% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) were perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 33.0% 'strongly agreeing' and 39.4% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

#### Teaching Assistants

- 75.0% 'strongly agreed' and 25.0% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused, face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) were perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 37.5% 'strongly agreeing' and 62.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.



## SENCOs

- 72.7% 'strongly agreed' and 39.1% 'somewhat agreed' that SEND focused face-to-face HE courses (e.g., an MEd, PGCert, AMBDA) were perceived as the most effective form of CPD with 28.2% 'strongly agreeing' and 62.5% 'somewhat agreeing' that this is their preferred form of CPD.

## 6. The impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on SEND CPD and expertise

Respondents were asked how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic changed how they accessed CPD during this period. This section was answered by 581 respondents. Table 6.1 provides the data from this question. The data are provided in valid percentages and are ordered according to the 'strongly agreed' statement.

	Strongly agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
I have accessed more online, and distance SEND CPD	52.3	25.5	14.5	4.5	3.3
I have done more SEND CPD in my own time	39.2	31.3	18.6	5.9	5.0
I have accessed more informal SEND CPD	28.4	33.2	24.6	9.0	4.8
I have had more opportunities for SEND CPD	18.2	23.4	34.6	12.9	10.8
The CPD on SEND has been cheaper	16.4	18.1	54.9	6.0	4.6
I have experienced better quality SEND CPD	10.2	16.0	50.9	14.1	8.8

Table 6.1 Has COVID impacted on your access to SEND CPD?

The respondents indicated that they were accessing more SEND focused CPD, with over half stating that they 'strongly agreed' they had accessed more online, and distance SEND CPD.

*'We did access online training before the pandemic but that's definitely taken a massive upward shift during the pandemic obviously when schools were closed.'*

*Primary SENCO, East Midlands*

One aspect highlighted by the interview respondents was the way in which online CPD had provided opportunities, increased flexibility and, in some cases, savings:

*'But pros of that are that actually you can sometimes access things quicker, easier, more possibility to do something cheaper. And so in that sense, it's not, in*

*terms of the CPD that we access, there can be some positive elements to it as well.'*

*Primary SENCO, East Midlands*

The idea that online SEND CPD aided flexibility was a view echoed by the Whole School Regional Leads, who stated that the move to online had enabled a greater geographical reach:

*'...the online training has been so beneficial to broaden the regions... people's abilities to access the webinars, not just in the region, but across the country has been really, really beneficial.'*

*Whole School SEND Regional Lead*

In addition, 70.5% either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that they have completed more SEND CPD in their own time, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was a strong theme echoed through the interviews, with a number of respondents highlighting how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted on the way in which they access SEND CPD, including the provision of further opportunities to do so due to the flexibility offered in relation to location and timings.

This was not a universal theme, however, with one interview participant highlighting the additional requirements and pressures which the COVID-19 pandemic had brought, and therefore reduced the capacity for staff to undertake additional SEND CPD.

*'You know, children with autism particularly was one of the courses which kept coming out, and I think that was massive, because actually, there was no time to do SEND CPD. We were too busy juggling all the new risk assessments which were coming out, or the children could come back in or then the children were back out again and then they had to be two metres, and it was literally being measured.'*

*Primary SENCO, East Midlands*

## 7. The future of SEND CPD

Respondents were asked how the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could change how CPD may be accessed in the future. This section was answered by 581 respondents. Table 7.1 provides the data from this question. The data are provided in valid percentages and are ordered using the 'extremely likely' response.

	Extremely likely (%)	Somewhat likely (%)	Neither likely nor unlikely (%)	Somewhat unlikely (%)	Extremely unlikely (%)
more online and distance CPD on SEND	41.1	40.3	13.1	4.1	1.4
more SEND CPD in your own time	25.8	35.3	28.1	7.7	3.1
more informal CPD on SEND	23.1	41.3	26.9	6.5	2.2
more opportunities for SEND CPD	16.5	30.1	39.2	9.3	4.8
cheaper SEND CPD	13.4	26.5	47.3	7.6	5.2
better quality SEND CPD	10.2	19.6	52.5	12.7	5.0

*Table 7.1 How do you think COVID may impact on your access to CPD in the future?*

The table above illustrates the anticipated changes to accessing future SEND CPD, with the key expectation that there will be more access to online and distance SEND CPD. The responses to the online survey, the interviews and the focus groups illustrated that, moving forward, the school workforce are keen to retain the benefits that the move to online learning had presented. This included the opportunity to access courses at a distance, saving time and money travelling, pause, rewind and re-watch training, and greater flexibility of access. Responses also highlighted the benefit of the reduced time away from school.

However, there was not an overwhelming desire to move to wholly online provision with participants across all phases querying whether a move to online CPD presented drawbacks. These included the lack of opportunity to clarify/ ask questions and whether this would lead to a lesser degree of impact.

Participants across all phases also drew attention to some of the aspects which were harder to replicate through solely online provision. There was equally a desire to incorporate face-to-face training again, with participants in all phases particularly highlighting the benefit of

networking with colleagues from other settings, as well as the opportunity to reflect and to ask questions.

*'It's nice to be able to ask questions and see things practically, or sometimes it feels naturally when somebody suggests something and a conversation can be veered in a certain direction or you can show them things that you have in school that you're using and they can give you feedback.'*

*Primary Teacher West Midlands*

The potential for more hybrid learning was also noted by the Whole School SEND Regional Leads, who identified the need to retain the benefits that online CPD afforded, whilst re-incorporating the benefits of face-to-face CPD.

*'Lots of schools are asking now for that face-to-face opportunity to engage, and the opportunity to network beyond CPD, and once they have had that CPD opportunity to continue that networking opportunity.'*

*Whole School SEND Regional Lead*

A further theme from the Whole School SEND Regional Leads focus groups was the importance to consider the cumulative nature of SEND CPD, and not to view CPD as isolated incidents.

*'One session doesn't create a huge change'*

*Whole School SEND Regional Lead*

Interview participants were asked to consider the future of SEND CPD not only in terms of delivery but also content. The importance of support for Initial Teacher Training was apparent, as well as the importance of a distinction between phases.

*'I think there needs to be loads more initial teacher training.'*

*Secondary Teacher, West Midlands*

*'Something that I think needs to be adapted from all the training providers is to make it inclusive to secondary school as well because secondary school is very different to primary schools.'*

*Secondary Teacher, South West*

This was a theme echoed through the Whole School SEND Regional Leads focus groups, who identified that the new Early Career Framework as well as the reformed National Professional Qualifications were *'really embedding SEND right the way through the whole of that provision'*.

Certainly, the interviews highlighted the desire for future SEND CPD to be practically based, with approaches and strategies with one participant stating:

*'I think very practical examples would be really useful. So being shown that this is what's been used in a school, how it's worked out, maybe the pros and the cons and then how you could adapt it to your own children because sometimes there's lots of really good ideas, but they might not specifically match the need of the child in your class. So it's nice to be given suggestions of this is what you can do to adapt, or being told that it's not always set in a certain way if that makes sense.'*

*Primary Teacher, West midlands.*

Whilst there were many suggestions regarding the future focus of SEND CPD, the interviews illustrated how SEND CPD needed to be more than focused on specific areas of SEND and should include broader aspects e.g., related to high quality teaching. The interviews and focus groups highlighted how future SEND CPD needs to be sequential and cumulative. Furthermore, there needed to be greater consistency regarding the expectations of SEND CPD, for all members of the school workforce, to enable schools to meet the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2015).

*'I think there is a real disparity in schools. I've never really understood why SEND CPD isn't a statutory requirement. You know, we're all teachers of SEND, and it*

*says that in the code of practice, and I think there are schools like us who, you know, have got a real focus on that and make that a huge priority, and other schools who really don't for whatever reason.'*

*Primary SENCO/SLT, South East*

Yet the interviews also drew attention to some of the current barriers to accessing SEND CPD, which require addressing to maximise the potential of future SEND CPD. Barriers specifically related to time and money, but it was impact of restrictions in these areas that school colleagues identified. This included the lack of time to cascade training to the wider school workforce, time to prioritise SEND CPD against other whole school priorities, and the available finance to fund both course attendance and course implementation. The interviews identified how SENCOs were seeking to address these concerns, which could also be considered for future delivery. This included sharing small, bitesize chunks of CPD through podcasts, as well as linking up with other schools to take part in CPD, but also reduce costs:

*'I think there are about ten of our schools who are part of a SENCO network for the group... so, if another school has had that training...then we'll kind of join or go together or one school will host.'*

*Primary SENCO, West Midlands*

## 8. Accessing information at the point of need

Within the national survey, respondents were asked “Sometimes you cannot wait for a course or more formal CPD. You need support or information straightaway or within one or two days. For example, a child enters your setting. You need information to help you deal with or support that child and their needs”. They were then asked to review a range of options and consider how likely they would be to receive support from each. When considering their answer, respondents were asked to include all types of communication (e.g., accessing support face to face, online, social media, telephone etc.). This section was answered by 594 respondents. Table 8.1 provides the data from this question. The data are provided in valid percentages and are ordered according to who is ‘extremely likely’ to provide information at the point of need.

	Extremely likely (%)	Somewhat likely (%)	Neither likely nor unlikely (%)	Somewhat unlikely (%)	Extremely unlikely (%)
The school SENCO	63.1	21.5	8.8	3.9	2.7
A school leader	37.5	30.5	12.5	12.1	7.4
A specialist website	28.3	48.8	15.0	4.5	3.4
Another member of school staff	27.3	51.0	12.1	6.9	2.7
Google searches	24.2	41.6	18.0	8.9	7.2
A specialist or advisory teacher	23.9	32.2	16.2	16.0	11.8
A speech and language therapist	16.0	34.5	15.0	19.0	15.5
An educational psychologist	14.0	32.3	14.3	20.4	19.0
Social Media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook group)	13.3	25.6	22.7	15.7	22.7
A webchat in a specialist or support forum (e.g., nasen)	10.4	27.3	24.7	20.9	16.7
Other professional (e.g., occupational therapist, CAMHS)	9.8	28.3	16.8	22.2	22.9

Table 8.1 How likely, at the point of need, would you be to receive support from the following?



Overwhelmingly, school staff sought support at the point of need from staff within school, with the SENCO appearing to provide most of this 'point of need' support. Here, one online survey respondent suggested that *'A knowledgeable SENCO who is able to observe and meet the child or talk to previous settings/schools or discuss issues is invaluable'* with an acknowledgment that the SENCO needs sufficient experience to provide *'quality advice'*. However, this should be foreshadowed with schools giving *'value to the role'* and providing sufficient time for this support at the point of need to happen as often the SENCO is not *'always available when needed'*.

Time and access were cited by respondents to explain the lower scores for accessing specialists such as Educational Psychologists and specialist teachers. Here there was a perception of a 'firewall' mechanism positioned between classroom practitioners and specialist agencies. Cited barriers included *'meeting criteria for involvement'* and the *'difficulty for staff other than those directly involved with SEND provision to access outside agency support'*. There was also the perception, that there were fewer specialist professionals working in central teams exemplified by one comment that *'accessing support at the point of need is extremely difficult in Cornwall as agencies are very limited, i.e., Speech and Language service have cut 40% of their capacity since August 2021'*.

A further issue here was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with one interview participant suggesting that the pandemic had increased the workload for external agencies, therefore reducing their capacity to work directly with the school workforce:

*'So maybe COVID is draining the resources of the professionals meaning that there's less time for them to kind of provide support to teaching staff. But in terms of what's available and accessing stuff online, that's fine but yeah, I think probably it's negatively impacted on their workload which then impacts on how much they can support us.'*

*Secondary Teacher, West Midlands*

Yet it should be noted that when the school workforce did work with specialists, they found it beneficial for their professional practice and for the child/ young person involved. The interviews illustrated how, in a similar way as reported earlier that specific training could

benefit a number of children, support from specialists could be utilised in a number of instances:

*'When I read the EP reports, I always find that really fascinating, the different assessments that they've done with children, and what they can extrapolate from that in terms of what the child might need for their learning, or what underlying causes might be for different behaviours. And then obviously you can apply that to other children. So, if we've got two children presenting similarly, if one of them works with the ed psych, you can then obviously use that to hopefully support the other, and use the recommendations in the same sort of way. So yeah, it definitely impacts.'*

*Primary SENCO/SLT, South East*

Yet, a key challenge presented through the interviews was the time and space to meet and discuss with specialists.

*'No, because they just usually come to observe. They just observe and tell you what's ... they just observe what they see, and they write down what they see. Well it's not really ... it's a bit ... they're lovely, but it's a bit passive. They give you the targets ... they haven't got time to discuss what they want you to do. So if they said, I want you to ... you can't watch them in action, not really. They're coming to observe. So it's almost like a diagnosis. They're coming to support a diagnosis. They're not coming to give you any professional practice.'*

*Primary Teaching Assistant, West Midlands*

Nonetheless, where resources and size allow, other settings had counteracted these issues by developing *'strong multi-disciplinary professional team that includes Specialist Teachers, Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), Occupational Therapists (OT), Educational Psychologist, Clinical Nurse Specialist and Physiotherapists'*.

Many respondents accessed websites for point of need support with fewer accessing social media. Access to accurate information was regarded as an issue within the free text comments. Here there was some trepidation about different pieces of advice across a

multiplicity of different internet sources with one respondent suggesting that *'many teachers wouldn't know where to access the correct information'* and others suggesting that *'support organisations offer very helpful resources, but this approach relies on me using my judgement to assess the validity and reliability of a source of information'*. This issue was also raised with access to social media with respondents commenting that far too much information was not based on sound evidence. Privacy and professional issues were also cited on using social media for point of need support with one respondent not wishing to cross the boundary between the social and professional presence online. Despite this, respondents did point to useful support mechanisms including closed groups and offers on LinkedIn Learning.

## 9. Summary and Conclusions

The data from the online survey, the interviews and the focus groups indicate that SEND CPD is viewed as a priority for many individuals and schools, with over half of the online survey respondents stating that developing effective practice for children with SEND was an essential priority for their own SEND CPD. However, this should be viewed in the light that this was a 'self-selecting online survey' and therefore may have attracted those who are already invested in this area.

The online survey, interviews and focus groups illustrate that SEND CPD priorities and access to expertise are typically facilitated by the SENCO. SENCOs take the lead on determining priorities, often with the input from other senior leaders in the setting. The determination of priorities is varied, sometimes, but not always, evidence/ need led.

Certainly, the school workforce is accessing SEND CPD in a variety of formats, although typically when CPD was considered this was often taken to mean formal training. Yet the most frequently accessed SEND CPD was not always considered, by the school workforce, as the most impactful. Respondents to the online survey highlighted the potential benefit of consultations with education professionals, as well as access to coaching/ mentoring and observations, yet this was typically the least frequently accessed. Despite certain preferences, the data indicated that the majority of forms of SEND CPD were helpful to some extent.

Whilst the recent COVID-19 pandemic has provided opportunities for increased engagement with online CPD, mitigating some of the previous issues related to time and finance, caution should be exercised regarding a complete move to this medium of CPD in the future. Online survey respondents and interview participants noted that they benefitted from face-to-face learning, specifically the networking opportunities such sessions facilitated. Equally respondents noted potentially higher levels of engagement with course content. Regardless of how the CPD is delivered, having a strong practical basis, for immediate implementation back in the classroom was important to respondents.

Equally, whilst there has, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, been a move towards online CPD, this has not necessarily extended into social media, with less than half of online survey respondents stating that they accessed this form of CPD.

The data from this research has highlighted the myriad of ways in which the school workforce are accessing both SEND CPD and expertise and the perceived benefits that such engagement brings. However, the research has also highlighted scope for development particularly in relation to wider access, consistency, addressing known barriers and 'making the most' of the wider opportunities which present in settings, with the aim of improving provision for children and young people with SEND.

*'But I think, as teachers and particularly for TAs, they want to know, "What can I try? What's the practical bits that tomorrow, when I'm working with this child, I can introduce and see the impact?'*

*Primary SENCO/SLT, South East*

## 10. Recommendations

### SEND CPD guidance

- SEND CPD is synonymous with formal training. Additional guidance regarding the different, additional activities which also constitute CPD would be beneficial to help the school workforce in recognising the differing types of CPD available.
- Further guidance for school leaders would be beneficial regarding the type of SEND CPD which the school workforce considers to have the most impact, and guidance regarding how to access/ implement such activities would help maximise the expertise already within schools.
- A theme through the survey data and the interviews related to concerns over what constitutes good quality SEND CPD. Further signposting to SEND CPD, to the wider school workforce, would be beneficial. This should be specific to role type and provide clear pathways of SEND CPD.

### The delivery of SEND CPD

- SENCOs and school leaders are frequently involved in the delivery of SEND CPD. However, there is potential to explore how other members of the school workforce could help in the delivery of SEND CPD. For example, teaching assistants may be able to support new colleagues through observation.
- The online survey data suggested that the majority of SEND CPD was organised and delivered 'in house', with outside providers, for example from a multi academy trust or a commercial organisation, rarely used. There is potential to support schools with networking, to either buy in or deliver SEND CPD as a cluster, delivering a bespoke package of support. The facilitation of regional SEND CPD networks would help develop this support.
- If the SENCO is the primary deliverer of SEND CPD in a school, consideration needs to be given as to how their own CPD needs are met, extending beyond that of the National Award for SEN Coordination.
- Programmes of school SEND CPD need to be regular and sequential to have maximum impact. Follow up activities/ engagement, delivered by either the CPD provider or SENCO/SLT, would support the implementation of CPD.

### Access to SEND CPD and expertise

- Consideration needs to be given as to how the wider school workforce can be supported with their SEND professional development. In the first instance, ensuring the wider school workforce have easy access to SEND CPD, without the SENCO acting as a gatekeeper by default.
- Online survey data, supported through the interviews, suggested that consultation with professionals and observation of colleagues was considered to be the most effective SEND CPD. However, this was not typically the most accessed. Consideration should be given as to how these activities could be further supported in schools, potentially through the creation of additional resources to facilitate such interactions, e.g., how to make the most of an observation.
- Schools need to consider how the whole school workforce can access SEND CPD and expertise. Often those working closely with the child/ young person are not able to access SEND CPD or collaborate with the outside agencies, suggesting that opportunities for development are being missed.

### The future of SEND CPD

- SEND CPD tends to be prioritised based on identified needs and is frequently specific to an area of SEND. Support and guidance to focus on the broader aspects related to SEND support, for example High Quality Teaching, the Graduated Approach and working with parents, may help develop support at the SEN Support level.
- Whilst online SEND CPD provided a number of benefits, the benefit of face-to-face SEND CPD should not be underestimated. CPD providers should look to develop in person sessions, which also specifically facilitate time for sharing good practice and networking; elements clearly missed over the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Online SEND CPD should incorporate elements to ensure not only sequential development, but also interactive, practical elements to ensure active participation, immediate relevance to the classroom and opportunities for networking.

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