

The National Prospectus Grants Programme 2015-16

October 2014

Contents

[Section One: The Prospectus policy themes 4](#_Toc401148515)

[Eligibility to apply for a grant under the prospectus 4](#_Toc401148516)

[National policy themes 4](#_Toc401148517)

[Section Two: The Prospectus policy priorities under each theme 6](#_Toc401148518)

[Theme One: Early Education and Childcare 6](#_Toc401148519)

[The aim of the theme 6](#_Toc401148520)

[Theme policy priorities 6](#_Toc401148521)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 6](#_Toc401148522)

[Theme Two: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 9](#_Toc401148523)

[The aim of the theme 9](#_Toc401148524)

[Theme policy priorities 9](#_Toc401148525)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 9](#_Toc401148526)

[Wider funding opportunities 13](#_Toc401148527)

[Theme Three: Children and young people’s mental health 13](#_Toc401148528)

[The aim of the theme 13](#_Toc401148529)

[Theme policy priorities 14](#_Toc401148530)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 14](#_Toc401148531)

[Wider context 15](#_Toc401148532)

[Theme Four: Safeguarding 16](#_Toc401148533)

[The aim of the theme 16](#_Toc401148534)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 16](#_Toc401148535)

[Wider funding 17](#_Toc401148536)

[Theme Five: Children in Care and Care Leavers 18](#_Toc401148537)

[The aim of the theme 18](#_Toc401148538)

[Theme policy priorities 18](#_Toc401148539)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 18](#_Toc401148540)

[Wider funding 19](#_Toc401148541)

[Theme Six: Adoption 19](#_Toc401148542)

[The aim of the theme 19](#_Toc401148543)

[Theme policy priorities 20](#_Toc401148544)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 20](#_Toc401148545)

[Wider funding 23](#_Toc401148546)

[Theme Seven: Family advice and support 23](#_Toc401148547)

[The aim of the theme 23](#_Toc401148548)

[Theme policy priorities 24](#_Toc401148549)

[Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities 24](#_Toc401148550)

[Wider funding opportunities 25](#_Toc401148551)

[Section Three: Information about the application process 26](#_Toc401148552)

[Introduction 26](#_Toc401148553)

[Timetable 26](#_Toc401148554)

[Frequently asked questions 28](#_Toc401148555)

[Grant awards 28](#_Toc401148556)

[General guidance notes 28](#_Toc401148557)

# Section One: The Prospectus policy themes

This document provides details of the Department for Education’s (DfE’s) National Prospectus Grants Programme for 2015-16. This programme will provide up to £25m in grant funding for 2015-16. Through the National Prospectus we want to help improve outcomes for children and young people (particularly those who are disadvantaged) and support for their families. The application form for the National Prospectus Grants Programme is available on [Contracts Finder](https://online.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/).

## Eligibility to apply for a grant under the prospectus

The 2015-16 National Prospectus is open to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. Other organisations can be part of a partnership or consortium bid (but not the lead organisation) made on a “not for profit” basis. The impact of the activity and any direct delivery of the services must be in England only.

## National policy themes

The DfE has identified seven policy themes it wishes to fund through this National Prospectus. Bids must be made specifically in support of one, or more, of the following seven policy themes below. A separate application is required for each project.

* **Theme One**: Support the delivery of reform priorities around choice, quality and affordability in **early education and childcare**.
* **Theme Two**: Support the delivery of **special educational needs and disabilities** (SEND) reforms, providing specialist advice and support for specific SEND and encouraging innovative approaches to filling gaps in the market and the SEND reforms.
* **Theme Three**: Improve the identification of **children’s mental health issues**, their prevention, and the better commissioning of support and collaboration between agencies and services.
* **Theme Four**: Improve the **early help** provided to children with additional support needs; **protect and support children at risk** of harm including through **bullying**.
* **Theme Five**: To drive change in the care system to raise expectations and outcomes for **children in care and care leavers**.
* **Theme Six**: Continue to improve the **adoption** system and ensure reforms are sustained, particularly through improvements to matching, post adoption support, services for prospective adopters, support and challenge to the workforce, and strengthening parental voice.
* **Theme Seven**: Improve advice and **support to families** to promote resilience, support early intervention and to improve engagement with statutory services..

More information about the specific policy priorities we are looking for bids to deliver, under each of the above themes above, is described in Section Two.

# Section Two: The Prospectus policy priorities under each theme

Applications **must** contribute to **one or more of the policy priorities** outlined in this section. We have also provided information under each of the themes about specific work we may be interested in funding in pursuit of the priority.

## Theme One: Early Education and Childcare

### The aim of the theme

The Government is committed to ensuring that all families, wherever they live, have access to high quality, flexible and affordable childcare. We want to improve choice, quality and affordability of childcare for the benefit of all children so they have the best start in life and reach school ready to take advantage of all the opportunities available to them.

### Theme policy priorities

* **Choice**: Parents need to have a real choice when they are considering what childcare, if any, is suitable for them and their child. We want to see a thriving early education and childcare market which offers value, flexibility and choice to parents.
* **Quality**: We want to improve the standard of the workforce and the quality of provision, creating a self-improving system (which includes children’s centres and schools).
* **Affordability**: We want to close the attainment gap for the most disadvantaged children by engaging with the families and communities least likely to take up the two-year-old offer and supporting providers to deliver the early years pupil premium.

Bids **must** contribute to one or more of the priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

#### Priority: Choice

We are seeking innovative approaches to consolidate current provision, and address market weaknesses and gaps to drive up the quality and choice of early education offers in disadvantaged areas/for disadvantaged children. In particular, we are seeking proposals that:

* Use partnership working between schools, private, voluntary and independent childcare providers and others to do one or both of the following:
	+ Improve the quality of provision, for example by raising the quality of care on offer or improving the transition from nursery to school.
	+ Develop the early years workforce, for example by facilitating the sharing and swapping of experience and knowledge.

Proposals bidding under the above proposal will need to show clearly that all of the necessary partners are already engaged.

* Consolidate provision that helps the sector do one or both of the following:
	+ Improve access for BME and/or the most disadvantaged families, including making better use of community settings, children’s centres and outreach as ways for parents to access a wider range of services.
	+ Disseminate best practice to reduce social inequalities, tackle back to work barriers and close the attainment gap.

#### Priority: Quality

We are aware that families with disabled children too often experience challenges and financial pressures in getting the services they need. In addition to the wider context of reforms on SEN and disability driven by the Children and Families Act 2014, the recent parliamentary inquiry on childcare for disabled children highlighted the extent to which disabled children and their families face barriers to childcare. It looked in particular at: affordability, availability and inclusion, quality, and access and information.

Barriers include lack of provider skills, confidence and quality of inclusive practice. The VCS can play a critical role in driving cultural change so that childcare for disabled children and their parents is a better experience.

There is more to do to improve workforce practice to:

* Address ‘market weaknesses’ in developing good quality practice and services for parents with disabled children. The aim is to encourage a self-improving system that effectively commissions and delivers services for parents and disabled children so that childcare for disabled children and their parents is a better experience.

We are seeking projects that:

* Support early years providers better to understand and deliver what is required of them to meet the EYFS reforms and within that, their duties and responsibilities as set out in the SEND Code of Practice. This includes disseminating best practice to providers which promotes inclusive childcare for disabled children and encouraging childcare providers to provide more places for disabled children.
* Make sure early years providers are equipped to implement the SEND code of practice and understand how to recognise and respond to the development needs of all children including those with SEND.
* Increase providers’ confidence in inclusive practice to work with parents to ensure that children’s individual needs are met.
* Help early years mainstream and specialist providers (including children’s centres and schools) to work together to improve engagement with the most disadvantaged families to help them meet the needs of their disabled children.

#### Priority: Affordability

**Free early learning for two-year-olds**

Currently six out of ten two-year-olds from the poorest 40 per cent of families do not access any formal early learning – compared to three out of ten in the richest fifth of families.

Since September 2010 every three and four-year-old has been entitled to 570 hours a year of Government-funded early education over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year. In September 2013, that entitlement was extended to two-year-olds. Since September 2014 (when the entitlement was extended to include low income working families) some 40 per cent of all two-year-olds in England have been eligible for the entitlement.

The entitlement targets those two-year-olds that face the highest levels of disadvantage, to close the attainment gap between rich and poor and because the evidence shows that they benefit the most from early education. To support the delivery of the entitlement, we are seeking projects that:

* Help us engage with communities least likely to take up early education. In particular, work within areas of low take-up of the two-year-old programme - there is some evidence that suggests take-up is particularly low among some BME communities.
* Help providers delivering the two-year-old entitlement to support parents of disadvantaged children to create the best possible home-learning environment for their children.

**The Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP),** whichwill be implemented from April 2015, means that the most disadvantaged three and four-year-olds will attract additional funding to support their early learning. We estimate that 170,000 children could benefit from EYPP in 2015-16. It is important that early years providers are aware of the programme, its benefits and what interventions have the greatest impact on disadvantaged children.

We think that the VCS can help to increase the sector’s awareness about EYPP and encourage providers to:

* Access information, advice and guidance on the EYPP.
* Engage with parents of children that they deliver early education to, in order to actively promote EYPP and encourage them to sign up for if they are eligible.

Explore and disseminate innovative or evidence-based ways to use the EYPP to have the greatest impact.

## Theme Two: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

### The aim of the theme

The reforms of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system are intended to significantly improve outcomes for children and young people with SEN or disability. They will join up support across education, health and care from birth to 25. Help will be offered at the earliest possible point, with children and young people with SEN or disability and their parents or carers fully involved in decisions about their support and what they want to achieve, leading to better outcomes and more efficient ways of working.

### Theme policy priorities

* **Parents and young people**: support for Parent Carer Forums and ensuring that parents and young people have access to independent advice, support and guidance.
* **Specific types of SEND**: support for organisations and umbrella groups providing specialist advice on specific types of SEND.
* **Delivery support**: supporting local authorities, early years settings, schools and colleges, as well as the health sector and other delivery partners in implementing the SEND reforms.
* **Encouraging innovation**: encouraging innovative approaches to implementation of the SEND reforms.

Bidders **must** contribute to one or more of the priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

#### Priority: Parents and young people

The Children and Families Act 2014 places parents and young people at the heart of the SEND system. It is therefore essential that parents and young people have access to independent advice, support and guidance.

We would welcome proposals to support the engagement of parents, children and young people with the SEND reforms.

#### Priority: Specific types of SEND

We are keen to support specialist organisations providing expert advice and support materials on specific types of SEND, aimed at parents and young people, as well as staff in early years settings, schools, colleges and other practitioners.

We would welcome proposals to support several specific types of SEND.

**Dyslexia**

Around 70,000 pupils are supported by schools in England with a specific learning difficulty (including dyslexia) as their primary special educational need. We are committed to improving support for children and young people with specific learning difficulties and to ensure they achieve well.

* We are looking to fund innovative and effective approaches to support schools, parents and carers and the professionals who work with them to embed resources to assure effective and appropriate support for pupils with literacy and specific learning difficulties. This includes equipping and training teachers to deliver quality teaching and SEN support for pupils with dyslexia.

**Autism**

Ensuring good support for children and young people with autism is a priority for the Government, including addressing the issue of exclusions, legal or “informal”, which is a matter of particular concern for parents and their support organisations. We are seeking to use the National Prospectus to fund projects that support local services in improving provision for children and young people with autism. In particular we would welcome projects that:

* Provide online materials supporting parents and professionals in dealing with exclusion of children and young people with autism.
* Provide specialist advice about informal, fixed period and permanent exclusions to parents and professionals.
* Work with schools and FE colleges to share good practice in transition between institutions for young people with complex autism and learning disabilities.

**Sensory impairment**

In January 2014 there were 26,700 children with a sensory impairment receiving support through School Action Plus or with a statement of special educational needs. We are committed to ensuring that the specialist support available to children and young people with vision, hearing or multi-sensory impairments is maintained and improved so that they are able to fulfil their potential.

We are seeking to fund projects that:

* Review the effectiveness and quality of specialist resources in early years settings, schools and colleges, including access to ‘teachers of the deaf’ use of British Sign Language, and access to habilitation support for vision impaired.
* Design and disseminate guidance and best practice for early years settings, schools, FE colleges and local authorities on how they meet the needs of children and young people with sensory impairment. This will include increasing the supply of specialist teachers of the deaf across England.
* Expand the Government-funded pilot delivering new standard Communication Support Worker qualification to roll out beyond pilot areas. This will involve processing grant applications for the Communication Support Worker development fund, further evaluation of impact, and collecting data from schools, colleges, deaf children and young people.

#### Priority: Delivery support

We will continue to support local authorities and their partners, especially early years providers, schools and colleges, but also social care and health services, in implementing the Children and Families Act 2014. We would welcome proposals to support implementation of the SEND reforms.

**Short breaks**

Short breaks provide opportunities for disabled children and young people to have enjoyable experiences which help them become more independent and form friendships outside their family. They also give parents and carers time to do normal things which other families take for granted, like doing the shopping or going for a run.

We are seeking to fund projects that:

* Provide support for local authority commissioners, providers and users of short breaks services to help them to promote the take up and understand the link between short breaks and the SEN reforms.
* Encourage innovation in the commissioning and delivery of short breaks to maximise take up
* Share best practice on commissioning and personalisation of short breaks in line with the SEND reforms.
* Engage parent carer forums to improve the delivery of short breaks.

**Preparation for employment**

The Children and Families Act 2014 requires the support for children and young people with SEN and disabilities to reflect the preparation for adulthood outcomes – i.e. employment, health, independent living and community participation. We wish to facilitate post-16 providers engaging with local employers and other key stakeholders so that young people with SEN and disabilities can be better prepared for employment.

We are looking to fund projects which identify and engage local stakeholders (including schools, post-16 education providers, local employers, local supported employment services and local authorities) to identify the skills and behaviours employers are seeking, and propose practical solutions to problems that are raised. This should include:

* promoting person-centred planning and high quality careers advice;
* supporting post-16 providers to develop employer engagement strategies for young people with SEND with practical advice that can be adopted during the summer 2015 term and the 2015/16 academic year;
* identifying and disseminating good practice and resources on improving employment outcomes for young people with SEND.

**Supporting early years settings, schools and FE colleges**

Early years settings, schools and colleges have a key role to play in identifying and supporting children and young people with SEN and disability. We wish to provide support for class teachers, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and other professionals in early years settings, schools and colleges (both mainstream and specialist) to help them embed the SEND reforms.

We are looking to fund projects which:

* + Develop and disseminate best practice to help teachers and SENCOs in schools understand their role in relation to pupils on SEN support; inspire culture change in raising aspirations and outcomes for pupils with SEND; and help them access the practical support they need to identify triggers that constitute SEN, and deliver SEN support through the graduated response. This may involve school to school support activities, continuous professional development, and/or developing and promoting good practice materials.
	+ Develop a programme of support for staff in post-16 education providers (principally FE and Sixth Form Colleges, but also including independent specialist colleges and private training providers where appropriate) to help implement the SEND reforms throughout the whole institution, modelling a ‘whole provider’ approach and supporting providers to develop a high quality, personalised support for all students with SEN or disabilities (including those without EHC plans or LDAs). This may include developing innovative approaches to peer-learning and sharing good practice on SEND provision (including study programmes) which are focused on learning visits, immersion days and other forms of hands-on learning; and, in consultation with providers, developing a self-assessment tool for providers to conduct baseline reviews of their whole-college systems for supporting students with SEN or disabilities and facilitating peer challenge between colleges.
	+ Develop a ‘brand/ badge’ for different types of settings which are leading the way in supporting children and young people with SEN or disabilities, developing criteria against which to assess providers and creating centres of excellence which are recognised by other providers and which can be used a source of advice and support.

**Young offenders**

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduces new statutory requirements relating to children and young people with SEN detained in youth custody, which commence from April 2015. These include new duties on home local authorities to ‘keep’ an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan where a child or young person moves into custody, and arrange appropriate special educational provision for the child or young person (under 19 years old) while he or she is detained if they have an EHC plan. The detained person’s health services commissioner will have a duty to provide the healthcare provision specified in the plan and Youth Offending Teams and those in charge of the secure estate establishments will be required to co-operate with the home local authority.

We are seeking to fund projects that:

* Raise awareness of the new young offender provisions and support implementation through consultancy support and working with the sector, including health, local authorities, youth offending teams and the secure estate, to develop and disseminate best practice and encourage joint working.

#### Priority: Innovation

We will also consider innovative proposals supporting implementation of the SEND reforms. We will expect successful proposals to be relevant nationally, and to fill gaps emerging in the market rather than duplicating provision or support which already exists.

Areas where we would encourage proposals include (but are not limited to):

* Defining clearly specified outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
* Supporting young people to exercise their new decision-making rights.
* Preparing young people with SEND for employment and independent living.
* Integrating adult social care services to support SEND for 19-25 year olds.
* Supporting health services to implement the SEND reforms.

### Wider funding opportunities

We are also inviting organisations to tender for contracts to support implementation of the SEND reforms is available. Further information is available on Contracts Finder.

## Theme Three: Children and young people’s mental health

### The aim of the theme

To support and improve practice in education/childcare settings and children’ services in preventing, identifying and responding to mental health issues – making effective links with specialist support and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

### Theme policy priorities

**Prevention** – promoting general awareness and understanding of mental health issues and approaches to improving resilience.

**Early identification** – promoting knowledge of mental health conditions, assessment approaches and sources of support.

**Securing access to specialist interventions** – developing approaches to delivery and/or commissioning of services that secures swift interventions tailored to individual circumstances and integrated with education and/or wider children’s services provision for those with complex needs.

Bids **must** contribute to one or more of the priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

We are seeking proposals that develop innovative and sustainable practice. Proposals might cover more than one of the priorities – for instance combining aspects of 2 or 3 of the priorities in a way that is focused on particular groups of young people – e.g. primary or secondary pupils, children in care, adopted children etc. They might also focus on particular issues, such as eating disorders, self-harm etc.

#### Priority: Prevention

Specific approaches to support education/childcare settings and/or children’s services to improve practice in promoting mental health awareness and strategies to increase resilience of pupils or specific groups such as looked after children or adopted children.

Information, advice and guidance to children, young people and families about mental health issues and sources of further advice and support.

#### Priority: Early identification

Approaches to improve education settings and/or individual children’s services identification of mental health issues in children and young people.

Information, advice and guidance to parents or carers concerned about the behaviour, mental health or emotional wellbeing of a child or young person, to enable them to decide when to seek support and raise issues further.

Information, advice and guidance to children and young people about mental health issues and sources of further advice and support – proposals based on partnership across services in a local area will be particularly welcome.

#### Priority: Securing access to specialist interventions

Approaches to community or setting- based delivery of specialist support, as part of co-ordinated packages of support for individuals, including effective management of transition to adult services.

Approaches that lead to more responsive commissioning of support for individuals or groups - drawing upon CAMHS/VCS mental health services effectively.

Support for local authorities to achieve effective collaboration between agencies for looked after children, care leavers and adopted children with complex mental health needs; drawing out learning and sharing best practice – including on transition to adult services.

Information, advice and guidance and intensive support to parents or carers where mental health issues have been identified for a child or young person, to enable them to make best use of available support services.

### Wider context

This is a new theme within the National Prospectus and there are a number of policy developments and other sources of support that proposals can look to build on or complement.

* SEND reforms: At a strategic level new joint commissioning duties on health services and local authorities, along with the new local offer of services for children and young people with SEN and disabilities will include appropriate mental health support and services. Proposals could include approaches for linking wider mental health services for all children, young people and families to this.
* SEND reforms: The new 0-25 SEND Code of Practice emphasises the importance of identification of underlying mental health issues in education settings. Proposals could seek to develop practice in identifying mental health issues and providing access to services within the approach set out in the Code on SEN support.
* School Behaviour and Mental Health advice: the Department issued high level advice earlier this year on identification of mental health conditions and commissioning of support linked to behaviour issues in schools. Proposals could develop specific practice approaches building on the advice set out.
* MindEd: the Department of Health launched the MindEd portal to provide advice and training on mental health to all adults working with children and young people. Proposals could seek to build on and develop that content.
* There is a range of work in relation to children with more complex needs. This includes work on attachment issues being done by virtual school heads and adoption services. Proposals could include specific approaches for specific groups of children and young people where particular mental health conditions are more common.

## Theme Four: Safeguarding

### The aim of the theme

Improve the early help provided to children with additional support needs; protect and support children at risk of harm including through bullying.

Theme policy priorities

* **Early help**: Improving the early identification and management of cases where children are identified with additional support needs.
* **Safeguarding children from abuse or neglect**: Supporting prevention, raising awareness and providing front line workers, children, parents, carers, families (including victims) and communities with advice, support and guidance.
* **Bullying**: Support for teachers in preventing and tackling bullying including specific forms of bullying e.g. cyber-bullying, and support and advice for children and young people bullied or engaged in bullying and their parents/carers.

Bidders **must** contribute to one or more of the policy priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

#### Priority: Early help

Early identification, assessment and management of cases where children are identified with additional support needs – in particular in relation to neglect and disability.

We are interested in how early help services are being embedded in frontline practice and approaches to ensure that children and families are identified. We are particularly interested in:

* Innovative approaches to the relationship between early help and children in need and child protection services.
* Projects that enhance our understanding of thresholds for accessing early help services.
* Projects involving the child and their family in service planning.
* Innovative structural approaches that may involve multi-agency teams and voluntary organisations.
* Ideas around restructuring local authority children’s services.

#### Priority: Safeguarding children from abuse and neglect

We are interested in proposals to address a variety of issues, in particular:

* Those linked to specific communities such as female genital mutilation, early forced marriage and/or faith-based abuse, including the treatment of children who are accused of witchcraft.
* Child sexual exploitation and/or child sexual abuse, including peer on peer and intra-familial abuse.
* Domestic and/or gender-based violence.
* Children being placed at risk as a result of movement across international borders, for example, those who are subject to trafficking and/or undeclared private fostering arrangements.

Proposals will be particularly welcome which will support and sustain improvements in action to tackle these issues through:

* The dissemination and embedding of effective practices, including those developed through earlier versions of this programme.
* Action to support improvements in multi-agency working, especially those involving voluntary sector partners.
* Targeted action in local communities which address specific issues or can be rolled out on a wider basis.
* The development and dissemination of new approaches, toolkits or other materials for frontline agencies and for those at risk of or experiencing abuse, including through the use of new media.
* Activities to support children, especially those most at risk, including support for victims of child sexual exploitation and/or child sexual abuse.

**Priority: Bullying**

* Support for teachers in preventing and tackling bullying including specific forms of bullying e.g. cyber-bullying, and support and advice for children and young people bullied or engaged in bullying and their parents/carers.
* We are interested in sustainability, embedding progress and developing new innovative solutions to prevent and tackle bullying, including cyber-bullying.

### Wider funding

We intend to announce a grant for activity targeted at homophobic bullying in schools shortly.  Further information will be published on Contracts Finder.

In 2014-16 we are investing over £100 million through the Innovation Programme to support the development, testing and sharing of more effective ways of supporting children who need help from children’s social care services. Although the window for expressions of interests has now closed we will be funding a number of projects relevant to the safeguarding theme.

## Theme Five: Children in Care and Care Leavers

### The aim of the theme

The Government is committed to raising expectations and improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers – for example we have changed the law so that children living with foster carers should be able to remain with them until aged 21, and are helping local authorities boost foster care recruitment. We are also introducing new quality standards for children’s homes.

However, we want to do more to support young people in care and beyond. We have identified two areas where the voluntary sector is uniquely placed to help make a real difference for young people.

### Theme policy priorities

* **Corporate parenting**: Children and young people in care have a unique place in society. Central government and local authorities share responsibility for being their corporate parents, and it is vital that we have a real sense of parental responsibility for their outcomes. This should encompass their education, their health and welfare and their aspirations as they enter adulthood.
* **Empowering and skilling up children in care and care leavers**: Children in care and care leavers do not have the same networks and access to support and advice that their peers enjoy. It is therefore vital that this group of young people have the encouragement and support to develop their skills and confidence. Highlighting the successes of children in care which will help to challenge the prejudices around looked-after children. Building the self-confidence and skillsets of young people in care and care leavers will improve their prospects for employment and education.

Bids **must** contribute to one or more of the policy priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

We are inviting proposals that build on established good practice and demonstrate an awareness of the need to embed such practice across the country. Below are some of the areas that proposals could include:

#### Priority: Corporate parenting

We are seeking innovative proposals for a programme to achieve raised expectations and outcomes for Children in Care by amplifying the voice of young people. We want to strengthen engagement between Corporate Parents and Children in Care Councils, at regional and national levels.

Such a programme might:

* Support Children in Care Councils to maximise their impact at both strategic (Directors of Children’s Services and lead member) and practice levels.
* Share information about effective accountability.
* Showcase young peoples’ talents more widely.
* Help them express their aspirations and needs to their carers, social workers, personal advisors and wider corporate parents.

#### Priority: Empowering and skilling up children in care and care leavers

In order to empower young people to realise their potential, we are looking to the VCS to help us develop programmes that support them to develop a sense of purpose and identity. Such a programme might involve young people working with other young people who have been on a similar journey through activities such as coaching, mentoring, networking, workshops and work shadowing/ work experience opportunities.

### Wider funding

The Department is also proposing to tender for a number of contracts to support children in care, care leavers and vulnerable children and families in the autumn with the expectation that services will be operational from April 2015 or in some cases June 2015. Details will be made available on Contracts Finder.

In addition, in 2014-16 we are investing over £100 million through the Innovation Programme to support the development, testing and sharing of more effective ways of supporting children who need help from children’s social care services. Although the window for expressions of interest has now closed we will be funding a number of projects relevant to the children in care theme.

## Theme Six: Adoption

### The aim of the theme

The Government, working closely with local authorities, the voluntary sector, and others has undertaken a significant programme of reform of adoption in England and is keen to build on these reforms further as we move on to the next phase of delivery.

The core priorities of the adoption reform programme are to increase the supply of adopters, ensuring those recruited are able to meet the needs of children waiting; to improve the support available to adoptive families; and to eradicate unnecessary delay for children.

### Theme policy priorities

* **Improving matching**: Embedding of existing good practice, and developing innovative and effective approaches further to improve matching of children and adopters – including improving social work practice in terms of matching harder-to-place children.
* **Adoption support**: Expanding the availability of high quality evidence-based adoption support and address gaps in the market, whether service-specific or geographical.
* **Ensuring high-quality customer service for adopters**: Developing common professional standards of customer service and behaviours for adoption agencies and adoption support agencies, to make the system more welcoming to potential adopters.
* **Workforce skills, knowledge and behaviours**: To develop and deliver adoption training materials and courses to adoption agencies (including local authorities and voluntary agencies) to further improve the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to provide high quality adoption practice.
* **User/parental voice**: Developing and facilitating peer support and networking between adopters / adopted children and relevant local agencies, to help shape local provision and raise standards of practice in adoption.

Bids **must** contribute to one or more of the policy priorities above. The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

#### Priority: Improving matching

The Government is committed to ensuring that all agencies and social workers use best practice when matching children with potential adopters and (following the success of new adopter-led matching approaches) is keen to see bids for further innovation.

Bidders should set out plans to support the full embedding of existing best practice in terms of social worker and adopter-led matching. Bidders should also set out how they would identify further areas for improvement and develop further innovative approaches to make sure that all children and adopters are given the opportunity to be matched appropriately in the most timely way. It is essential that improvements in matching practice are extended to children who are currently seen as “harder to place”.

We are seeking bids that will:

* Support agencies, social workers, and/or prospective adopters to better understand and deliver best practice in matching.
* Identify challenges in matching and devise solutions to these that will support and challenge agencies to make good matches quickly and effectively.

#### Priority: Adoption support

Too often adopters struggle to get the support that they and their children need to overcome the experiences of abuse and neglect. The Government is committed to improving the adoption support available to families, including investing in a new Adoption Support Fund which will be established in 2015 to fund therapeutic services for adoptive families.

We are seeking bids to increase the availability of high quality adoption support. There is likely to be increased demand for high quality adoption support services from 2015, given the forthcoming government investment in the Adoption Support Fund. We are particularly interested in bids which will increase the supply of adoption support services to address weaknesses in the market, including bids that:

* Address identified service-specific gaps such as child-to-parent violence, designing and testing services for adoptive families to meet currently unmet needs.
* Build provision of adoption support in areas with little or no availability of independent provision to address geographical gaps in the market and to increase choice for parents.
* Evaluate and build the evidence base of the effectiveness of adoption support interventions.
* Transfer proven approaches, which may currently be provided to other groups of children or families, to meet the specific needs of adoptive families.

#### Priority: Customer service for adopters

Prospective adopters (i.e. those enquiring, applying and going through the assessment process to become approved adopters) report high variation in the level of service and support they experience from their agency.

We are seeking bids that will deliver all of the following:

* Conduct research and produce a report on current customer service.
* In the light of the findings, develop innovative proposals for the development and implementation of professional standards of customer service and behaviour, including a quality ‘kite-mark’ for adoption agencies and adoption support agencies to ensure users of the services have an effective way of recognising agencies are providing high quality services. The standards should be developed and agreed with sector representatives and agency representatives, informed by the views of prospective and approved adopters and provide them with a voice in improving the delivery of services. This would be a way of ‘kite-marking’ agencies along the lines of Investors in People and The Helplines Association standards ‘badge’ for telephone helplines.
* Consider and develop a core set of adoption-specific professional standards; relevant training materials and events at a regional and national level to support implementation and motivate and stimulate improvements; and a self-assessment tool for agencies, including capturing users views, to test themselves against. Once developed, the materials would be hosted on the National Gateway for Adoption.

The ambition is for adoption agencies to use the self-assessment tool and take any remedial action needed to meet the standards required, in order to use the ‘kite-mark’.

#### Priority: Workforce skills, knowledge and behaviours

The Department will continue work to support and challenge the adoption workforce to implement reforms in adoption processes and practice. This will need to include responses to new challenges in the system and well as embedding the changes that have already been introduced.

We are seeking bids to:

* Provide advice to the Department that accurately reflect the views and experiences of adoption practitioners in both the public and voluntary sector, including on adoption policy proposals and local implementation, and emerging challenges to progress.
* Advise the Department about new and innovative practices in adoption services, particularly those which: lead to improvements in the timeliness and quality of adoption placements (especially for children considered harder to place); help reduce the risk of adoptions breaking down or not fully meeting the child’s needs; lead to increases in the number of approved adopters; and/or which support the provision of adoption support and the implementation of the Adoption Support Fund.
* Develop and deliver a range of training materials and courses to support local authority and voluntary adoption agencies across England, together with other adoption professionals. This will focus on new and emerging elements of the Government’s adoption reform programme and help practitioners to understand and implement the practice changes needed to deliver improvements to adoption services:
	+ All adoption agencies in England will receive a minimum of 4 free training places during the period of the grant, with the largest agencies receiving more. Adoption agencies requiring additional training places above their allocation will be able to buy more places at cost.
	+ As the reform programme continues there will be a need to identify and prioritise training objectives, in consultation with the Department and representatives from the sector. Training will cover relevant parts of the adoption reform programme and the implications of the reforms for the adoption sector. This grant will focus on new and emerging elements of the reform programme.
	+ Further training should be developed in response to needs highlighted through the survey of training needs and initial training sessions. The bid should aim to identify synergies between this training support and other work aimed at the adoption workforce. This should include identifying potential cost savings, such as the use of common dates and venues, and making the best use of potential delegates’ time.

#### Priority: User/parental voice

The Government recognises the importance and power of user voice and is keen for adopters and children in the system to be able to help shape provision and good practice locally in adoption services, including on adoption support, matching practice, wider social work practice, and recruitment.

The Government is keen to fund work on finding ways of supporting adopters and children to do this by:

* Facilitating peer support and networking between users to challenge and support agencies (local authorities, voluntary agencies, and other services, e.g. health) to improve local practice; and
* Providing communication routes, information networks and feedback mechanism between users and local and central government.

### Wider funding

In addition, in 2014-16 we are investing over £100 million through the Innovation Programme to support the development, testing and sharing of more effective ways of supporting children who need help from children’s social care services. Although the window for expressions of interests has now closed we will be funding a number of projects relevant to the adoption theme.

## Theme Seven: Family advice and support

### The aim of the theme

Building on our historic investment in this area, we want to ensure that families continue to receive, via internet or telephony, impartial, expert advice and support based on early intervention principles and improved engagement with statutory services. This will both benefit children and their families and by helping prevent the avoidable escalation of issues reduce the burden on the public purse over the longer term. This is in line with the Prime Minister’s [recent statement about the important contribution families make to build a strong society](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-cameron-on-families).

### Theme policy priorities

* **Support families** in the efficient and effective access of local authority children’s services where that is appropriate.
* **Provide access to advice** relating to family, child or education law.
* **Support parents** in particular situations e.g. single parents and fathers.
* **Address specific issues** faced by parents of teenagers particularly bullying, drugs, relationships, sexual health and pregnancy.

Bidders **must** contribute to one or more of the policy priorities above.

In addition, all services **must** be delivered online and/or through telephony; contain robust plans to be demonstrably resilient and self-sustaining; be national (i.e. England-wide only) in scale; and:

* Signpost users to the right agencies (including statutory services) according to their needs.
* Provide users with the information.
* Provide information and guidance to users to enable them to resolve issues at the earliest possible stage, creating more positive interactions for users, and enhancing the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Proposals that meet the support needs of parents and families related to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and to mental health are being managed through those specific themes set out in the National Prospectus.

The information below describes the sorts of projects we may be interested in.

### Suggestions for work in pursuit of the theme priorities

Considerable investment has been made in the past in order to promote growth and resilience in the market for family advice and helpline services. Current holders of DfE contracts have been working towards sustainability, however, we recognise that there is further to go before such a service can be truly self-sustaining.

To that end we are inviting proposals that will enable us to fund for one year services where providers can demonstrate existing reach into the priority areas and where they have plans for maintaining and extending that reach in effective and accessible ways.

We would welcome in particular bids for projects that:

* Demonstrate the capacity to support families in ways which contribute to efficient, effective and reduced engagement with statutory services;
* Maintain the expertise and provision required to meet the needs of the specific priority area users;
* Demonstrate the development of partnerships with statutory services;
* Seek to secure collaboration and co-operation amongst other family advice and support providers.

Project proposals should also highlight how they support Ministerial priorities in the other themes set out in the Prospectus.

### Wider funding opportunities

As the focus upon families is a cross government priority, there may be other funding opportunities advertised by other government departments through Contracts Finder.

# Section Three: Information about the application process

## Introduction

Organisations must prepare applications in accordance with this document and the application form which describes how applications are scored and assessed. All information requested on the application form must be provided if your application is to be considered.

Your application is not an agreement or contract. Meeting the selection criteria does not guarantee funding.Funding is limited and applications will be assessed and prioritised according to the extent to which they meet the assessment criteria. Only high quality applications are likely to be considered for funding.

Following a check of eligibility, the information you provide in the application from will be assessed in two distinct stages:

* + Stage One will be an initial sift, assessing the information you provide in Section Four of the application form.
	+ Stage Two will assess those who are successful at stage one on the information provided in Section Six of the application form.

Not all applications will pass to the Second Stage. The scoring from Stage One will not be carried forward to Stage Two.

Only those bids that are highest scoring under each of the themes at the initial sift will be evaluated further. In this competitive process only the highest scoring proposals in relation to the theme applied will be awarded grants within the available funding.

The Department reserves the right to determine the number of applications that are successful based on the quality of the bids received, ensuring a sensible spread of bids across the themes and policy priorities.

## Timetable

Set out below is the proposed timetable for organisations interested in bidding. This is a guide and, subject to the quantity and quality of bids it may be subject to change.

| Activity | Date |
| --- | --- |
| The National Prospectus and supporting documents are published on Contracts Finder website | 16 October |
| Deadline for you to register to attend the briefing event for interested applicants | 23 October |
| Briefing event for you to find out more about the National Prospectus themes and application process | 28 October |
| Deadline for you to email us questions about the National prospectus themes and application process | By Noon 30 October |
| Any final questions and answers are added to the FAQ document and published on [Contracts Finder](https://online.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/)  | 4 November |
| Deadline for you to submit your application/s to the Department | By Noon 21 November |
| Notified of the outcome of Stage One of the process | Week Commencing 12 January |
| Notification of the outcome of the Stage Two of the process | Week Commencing 9 February |
| You will be asked for any supporting documentation outlined in the application form. Due diligence checks will be carried out (for example further checks of financial information and references as required) and we will negotiate with you in order to develop your work plans.  | Week Commencing 9 February – Week Commencing 2 March |
| Grant Funding Agreements signed between you and the Department | Week Commencing 9 March 2015 |
| Funded activity begins | 1 April 2015 |

Your proposal must be sent by email by noon on Friday 21 November to the email address provided on the application form. You will receive an automatic email response letting you know that your bid has arrived with us. Late proposals will notbe considered.

The DfE will be holding a briefing session on 28 October for organisations to find out more about the Programme’s objectives and the process. The briefing session will be held at a London venue.

If you would like to attend you must register your interest by **Thursday 23 October** by emailing enquiries.dfefunding@education.gsi.gov.uk. You must include the name of your organisation and the words “briefing event” in the title of your email and within the email provide the name and contact details of the person wishing to attend. A single place will be allocated for each prospective organisation on a first come first served basis.

We regret that we are not able to run more than one briefing event. Materials distributed at the event, and any new questions asked and answered, will be published on Contracts Finder, so that those who are unable to attend will not be disadvantaged.

## Frequently asked questions

A comprehensive frequently asked questions (FAQ) document has been produced to help organisations with submitting their proposals. This can be found on [Contracts Finder](https://online.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk/).

If you have any queries about the bidding process which are not covered in the FAQ these should be sent by email to enquiries.dfefunding@education.gsi.gov.uk by **noon 30 October**. You should identify in the subject header the ‘name of the policy theme’ or enter ‘bidding process’ if your query is more generally about the application or assessment processes.

In order to ensure transparency and equal access to information, we are not able to respond to individual enquiries directly. We will respond to questions received at the Stakeholder event on the 28 October and will publish a revised FAQ following that event to take into account questions received by e-mail and questions asked at the event.

The enquiry email box will close at noon 30 October and all responses will be posted by 4 November**.**

## Grant awards

Funding will be for a maximum of one yearwith the expectation that organisations will progressively develop alternative sources of funding to become self-sustaining.

The exact number and size of individual grants will depend on the range and quality of bids received. There is no specific minimum or maximum amount of grant award, but as an indicative guide for bidders, and reflecting the national focus of this grant programme, we would expect grant awards to be in the region of £100,000 to £750,000.

We are not seeking to fund research-related activity, small scale projects or services or activities which are locally focussed unless they have clear potential to inform national policy development and delivery.

Grants will be awarded for all eligible direct project costs (revenue funding). Capital expenditure (e.g. building work) will not be eligible.

## General guidance notes

if you are bidding for more than one project you will need to complete a separate application form for each bid.

Proposals will be rejected if the information asked for in the applicable application form is not provided.

Further guidance notes and information about the assessment criteria and scoring of your proposal are included in the application form. Please select the application form that is relevant to your theme, for example, if your proposal is in support of the adoption theme then complete the adoption application form. You should open and complete the application form using Adobe Reader. If you do not have this programme it can be [obtained for free from Adobe](http://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/).

#### Inducements

Offering an inducement of any kind in relation to obtaining this or any other grant with the Department will disqualify your application from being considered and may constitute a criminal offence.

#### Costs and expenses

You will not be entitled to claim from the Department any costs or expenses which you may incur in preparing your proposal whether or not your proposal is successful.

#### Feedback

Following the award of grants, feedback will be available to unsuccessful bidders on request.

#### Freedom of information

The Department is committed to open government and to meeting its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Accordingly, all information submitted to the Department may need to be disclosed in response to a request under the Act. If you consider that any of the information included in your proposal is commercially sensitive, please identify it and explain (in broad terms) what harm may result from disclosure if a request is received, and the time period applicable to that sensitivity. You should be aware that, even where you have indicated that information is commercially sensitive, we may still be required to disclose it under the Act if a request is received. Please also note that the receipt of any material marked ‘confidential’ or equivalent by the Department should not be taken to mean that we accept any duty of confidence by virtue of that marking. If a request is received, we may also be required to disclose details of unsuccessful proposals.

#### Management information

The successful grant recipients will be asked to provide management information to meet the needs of the Department. These will be subject to further negotiation but the Department’s minimum information needs are:

* + Quarterly written reports on achievement of key outputs and milestones as set out in the Delivery Plan; and
	+ Two meetings per grant-funded year with DfE policy leads to review overall performance, including progress the grant-funded organisation is making towards securing financial sustainability for the project once DfE funding ends.

The Department will specify the format for providing management information as part of the process of issuing the grant agreements. The Department will also expect applicants to set out in their proposal how intended outcomes will be measured. Organisations which are subsequently awarded a grant will be required to agree on the approach to measuring and evaluating the project and the expected impact of planned outcomes. The Department may wish to evaluate formally some projects and, if requested to do so, you will be expected to participate and cooperate in the process, including in the implementation of the methodology.

#### DfE grant funding agreement

Grants will be awarded on the basis of the Department’s standard grant funding agreement. You can find the latest version of the grant funding agreement, terms and conditions, and explanatory notes on Contracts Finder: (Please note this is a model version and may be subject to slight changes).

We will provide all organisations which are successful at Stage Two of the process with the final version of the DfE grant funding agreement. This agreement will set out our expectations of all successful applicants and all bidders will be required to accept the final version in full. A grant funding agreement with each successful organisation will be finalised in March 2015.

#### State Aid

State Aid rules must be adhered to. State Aid is a European law term which refers to forms of financial support from a public body or publicly-funded body, given to organisations engaged in economic activity on a selective basis, which has the potential to distort competition and affect trade between member states of the European Union. Unauthorised State Aid is unlawful aid and if public authorities award State Aid in breach of the rules, the European Commission has the power to require repayment with interest from the aid beneficiary. State Aid may be permitted if it falls under a certain threshold. This is known as de minimis aid. Currently the total de minimis aid granted to any one organisation must not exceed €200,000 over any period of three financial years.

We consider it unlikely that the funding to be provided under this scheme would be considered State Aid. However, applicants should form their own view, taking advice if necessary, as to whether the funding they receive is unlawful State Aid. Furthermore, if you have received State Aid from any public body in the previous three financial years you must let us know on the application form. If your organisation has received State Aid in the previous three financial years below the de minimis threshold, this could possibly limit the amount for which you are eligible.



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