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Developing a behavioural approach to knowledge mobilisation

Reflections for the What Works Network

April 2020

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Summary

In this What Works Network Strategic Fund project, we aimed to develop and pilot an approach to mobilising research evidence that was informed by the behavioural needs of users. It was based on the premise that by understanding the current state of practice, in addition to the current state of the evidence base, What Works centres could better address the gaps between the two. It focused on mobilising a joint piece of evidence-based guidance from the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) on social and emotional learning (SEL).

The project involved the following three phases.

- 1. Mapping** – through use of a behavioural science framework (COM-B) to gain a better understanding of the behavioural barriers and enablers to adopting evidence-informed practice on SEL.
- 2. Design** – use the insights from the mapping phase to design a targeted, multi-stranded package of knowledge mobilisation activities that attended to those behavioural needs.
- 3. Implementation** – begin to implement and monitor those knowledge mobilisation activities.

The project generated subtle insights on the behavioural factors relating to SEL teaching, which in turn informed the messages in the guidance, how those messages were communicated, and the nature and sequence of mobilisation activities.

We believe that the process has led to a more precise and efficient knowledge mobilisation plan than for previous guidance reports, and that the approach has wider potential applicability across the What Works Network. A more thorough evaluation of the process used, and the resulting knowledge mobilisation activity, would be a valuable next step.

1. Introduction

A common challenge across the What Works Network is putting evidence into action at scale. Simply providing information about evidence-based programmes or practices is insufficient to change what policymakers, commissioners or practitioners do, even if that information is underpinned by robust research.^{1,2}

Encouragingly, What Works centres are moving in the direction of using multi-stranded approaches to mobilising knowledge. However, these approaches are typically developed without full consideration of the starting points of the research users and the system more widely. This means that knowledge mobilisation projects are often designed through intuition and best guesses, rather than a deep understanding of the barriers to widespread research use, and the levers and mechanisms that can influence change in practice. As a result, scale-up projects are unlikely to be as effective and efficient as they might be.

This report offers reflections for the What Works Network on a collaboration between the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) and Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to develop and study an approach to designing a user-informed strategy to mobilise evidence on social and emotional learning (SEL).

1.1 Mobilising guidance on social and emotional learning

There is good evidence from previous work carried out by both What Works centres – including substantial meta-analyses and longitudinal studies – that improved social and emotional skills in childhood are associated with a range of positive outcomes at school and in later life.³

Currently, most of the evidence regarding SEL is focused on intervention programmes, with little guidance on the types of strategies or practices that teachers can integrate into their everyday teaching. EIF and EEF therefore collaborated to review the evidence, and develop guidance, on both structured programmes and everyday teaching practices.

In parallel with the evidence review, this project aimed to design a knowledge mobilisation campaign for the SEL guidance that was built around an understanding of the needs of research users (in this case, primary school headteachers, senior leadership teams and teachers). It was based on the premise that by understanding the current state of practice and decision-making in schools – in addition to the state of the evidence base – What Works centres and others could better address the gaps between the two.

Although the focus was on education, we envisaged that the lessons and methods could be applied more widely across the What Works Network. We wanted to study the process as it evolved and develop a first iteration of a generalisable process for designing knowledge mobilisation plans that are built around the needs of research users.

1 Langer, L., Tripney, J., & Gough, D. (2016). *The science of using science: Researching the use of research evidence in decision-making*. London: EPPI-Centre, UCL Institute of Education, University College London. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=3504>

2 Lord, P., Rabiasz, A., Styles, B., & Andrade, J. (2017). 'Literacy octopus' dissemination trial: Evaluation report and executive summary. London: Education Endowment Foundation. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/literacy-octopus-dissemination-trial-evaluation-report-and-executive-summary>

3 Goodman, A., Joshi, H., Nasim, B., & Tyler, C. (2015). *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life*. London: UCL Institute of Education, Early Intervention Foundation. <https://www.eif.org.uk/report/social-and-emotional-skills-in-childhood-and-their-long-term-effects-on-adult-life>

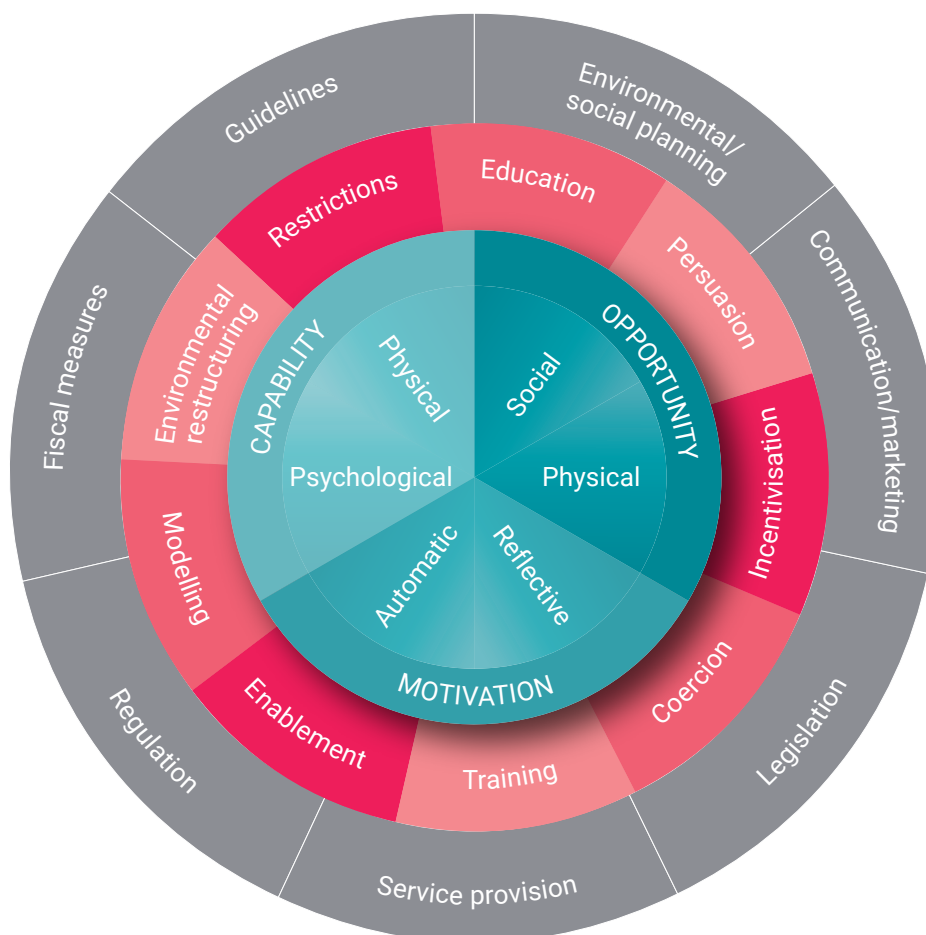
1.2 Taking a behavioural approach

In 2017, What Works Wellbeing commissioned the EPPI-Centre, at University College London, to review the efficacy of interventions that aimed to increase decision-makers' use of research across different social science sectors.⁴ In line with previous reviews of this type, the team classified interventions in terms of the mechanisms used to mobilise the research, for instance supporting interactions between decision-makers and researchers.

In addition to examining the mechanism of change, they also looked at the behavioural components that were required by the research user to make evidence-informed decisions. They did so by applying Prof Susan Michie's COM-B framework, which proposes that changing behaviour relies on behavioural barriers and enablers relating to capabilities, opportunities and motivation (COM).⁵ The COM-B framework sits at the centre of the **behaviour change wheel**, which proposes that different types of intervention are suitable for addressing different behavioural barriers, which in turn are influenced by different policy levers (see figure 1.1).

FIGURE 1.1

The behaviour change wheel



Source: Michie, S., Atkins, L., & West, R. (2014) *The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions*. London: Silverback

4 Langer, L., Tripney, J., & Gough, D. (2016). *The science of using science: Researching the use of research evidence in decision-making*. London: EPPI-Centre, UCL Institute of Education, University College London. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=3504>

5 Michie, S., Atkins, L., & West, R. (2014) *The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions*. London: Silverback

A key finding in the *Science of Using Science* review was that using evidence to inform decision-making relies, to some extent, on meeting the behavioural needs of the user. For example, creating access to research only impacts on decision-making if the user has the opportunity and motivation to do so. This overarching finding suggests there is value when mobilising evidence in standing from the perspective of the research user and considering their ‘points of departure’ when engaging with research. In other words, what is preventing them from engaging with, and acting on, the evidence? The authors of the report suggest: ‘It is advisable that future research and practice focus on how to design and tailor interventions that better feature these COM configurations.’⁶

In this What Works Network Strategic Fund project, we aimed to apply the COM-B framework to understand and codify behavioural factors that influence how teachers and school leaders make evidence-informed decisions relating to social emotional learning. This information, in turn, would be used to help design an appropriate mobilisation strategy for EIF and EEF (see figure 2.1). The behaviour change wheel methodology is of interest to What Works Centres, although to our knowledge hasn’t been applied yet in a concerted way. In chapter 2 we describe the approach and the insights that emerged.

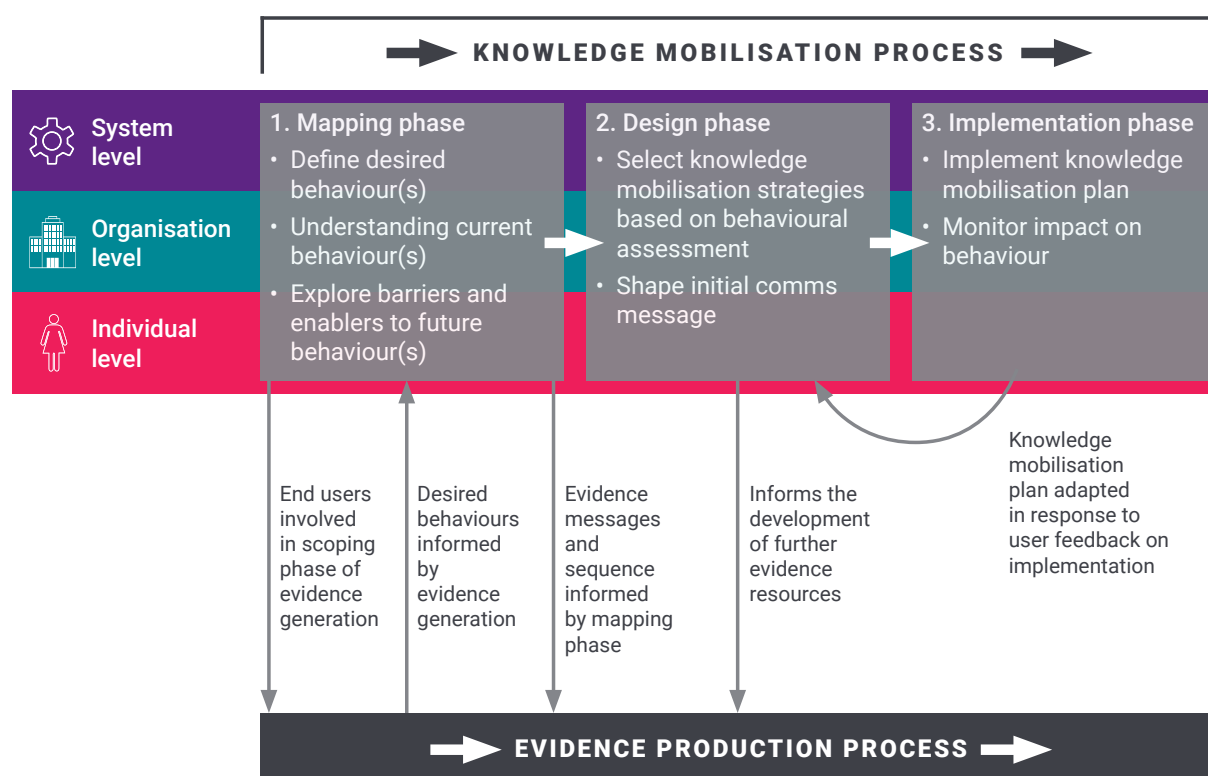
6 Langer, L., Tripney, J., & Gough, D. (2016). *The science of using science: Researching the use of research evidence in decision-making*. London: EPPI-Centre, UCL Institute of Education, University College London. <https://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=3504>

2. The three phases – mapping, design, implementation

Figure 2.1 illustrates the phases and elements of the project.

FIGURE 2.1

Summary of the overall process and flow of information



2.1 Mapping phase

The objective of the mapping phase was to provide:

- an understanding of **current practice** (or 'behaviour') at different levels of the system: (a) individual level, such as class teachers, (b) organisational level, such as school leadership, (c) system level, such as policymakers
- an understanding of the barriers and enablers to **future practice** – that is, the **desired evidence-informed behaviours** identified through the SEL evidence review
- a sense of the **interactions between different levels of the system** and their impact on behaviour.

The aim of this phase was to build a better understanding of the gaps between evidence and practice, a summary of what needed to change, and the barriers and enablers to change at each level of the system (and between the levels).

Methods

The mapping phase involved three parallel activities:

- a national survey of current practice in primary schools
- regional focus groups involving headteachers, class teachers and local system leaders
- in-depth system-level interviews with national stakeholders, such as Ofsted, national charities and sector bodies.

We ran these mapping activities concurrently with the guidance production process (see figure 2.1), which provided the basis for the ‘desired behaviours’ at individual (teacher) and organisational (senior leadership) level.

Findings

The **initial mapping work** gave us a good sense of current practice. In headline terms, we made the following findings.

- School leaders and teachers saw SEL as important and were generally implementing it in some form.
- Implementation typically involved a whole-school approach, with some specific classroom activities, although these were sometimes infrequent and often unstructured.
- Some, but not all, schools had allocated dedicated curriculum time for SEL.
- Some schools were implementing SEL programmes, although very few of these were evidence-based. Word of mouth and ‘trusted sources’ were the preferred means of deciding what to deliver.
- There was little evaluation or monitoring of current activity.
- Training and ongoing professional development on SEL was limited.

The **evidence review process provided a set of ‘desired behaviours’** at individual and organisation level relating to SEL, including:

- establish a shared vision for SEL, alongside schoolwide norms and expectations
- implement a planned SEL curriculum with dedicated curriculum time
- implement an evidence-based SEL programme
- integrate and model SEL skills during everyday teaching
- focus on consistent quality implementation.

A full summary of recommendations from the SEL guidance report is available in appendix A.

We used this set of desired behaviours to **explore the barriers and enablers to adopting evidence-informed practice** at different levels within the system. Analysis of the data from the survey, interviews and focus groups led us to the following headline conclusions.

Individual teacher level

- Teachers generally had strong support for the concept of SEL.
- Teachers tended to be resistant to what they saw as unduly prescriptive approaches (including evidence-based programmes), which would impact on their ability to teach SEL using their own personal style.
- Some teachers thought that they and their colleagues already taught SEL well: that it was instinctive and a fundamental part of being a good teacher. Others thought they, and others, had considerable skills gaps.

School level

- School leaders tended to think that staff were already delivering high-quality SEL, leading to low motivation to engage with evidence or focus on implementation quality.
- School leaders were sceptical about the value of evidence-based SEL programmes, which they tended to see as insufficiently responsive to the needs of their school.
- Other headteachers or ‘trusted sources’ of advice were given priority over sources based on research evidence.
- Perceived capability of teachers and staff to teach SEL may have been higher than actual capability. SEL was seen by some as instinctive for good teachers, with few explicit conversations on effective SEL teaching.
- Training and CPD on SEL was limited.
- Curriculum time was limited, as was funding for off-the-shelf programmes.

Wider system

- The perceived focus across the sector on attainment meant that prioritisation of SEL was difficult.
- The Department for Education’s perceived prioritisation of ‘knowledge’ over ‘skills’ was also a barrier to proper integration of SEL within the curriculum.
- The new Ofsted framework has provided a greater focus on personal development, behaviour and attitudes, and while we shouldn’t overestimate the impact of this, it was at least a ‘nudge’ for some schools on SEL.

2.2 Design phase

The objective of the design phase was to **use the insights from the mapping process to design a targeted, multi-stranded package of knowledge mobilisation activities**, which:

- attended to the behavioural needs of end users
- influenced change at different levels of the system
- built the capacity of end users to use evidence.

Methods

The analysis from the mapping phase fed into three design workshops, involving an advisory group of experts in SEL, behavioural science, implementation, policy, communications and classroom SEL teaching. We used the behaviour change wheel (BCW) (figure 1.1) as the basis to consider categories for behaviour change interventions – for instance incentivisation and training. The BCW suggests that different types of intervention are best suited to addressing different behavioural barriers. In addition to the BCW, the group drew on wider insights and evidence when proposing knowledge mobilisation strategies – such as from previous successful EEF mobilisation campaigns. We also considered proposed knowledge mobilisation activities against the East framework⁷ and findings from the EPPI *Science of Using Science* review,⁸ posing the following questions.

- Are we attending to the behavioural needs of users – that is, motivation, capability and opportunity?

7 The Behavioural Insights Team (2015). *EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights*. <https://www.bi.team/publications/east-four-simple-ways-to-apply-behavioural-insights/>

8 See Langer et al, at note 1.

- Can we create behavioural norms?
- Are we looking to align SEL with existing beliefs, incentives and motivations? What is the role of targeted messaging and communications in doing so?
- Are we thinking about using advocates and/or being mindful of the ‘messenger’?

Findings

The insights gathered in the mapping phase influenced the choice and sequencing of mobilisation activities, as well as the content and messages within these activities. For example, the mapping process suggested that the perceived capability of teachers and staff to teach SEL was higher than actual capability (see section 2.1). In response, we prioritised the production of self-audit and review tools that would encourage schools to reflect on the SEL evidence in relation to their own practice.

The output from the design phase was a clearly specified knowledge mobilisation plan, which set out the objectives, key elements of the approach, mobilisation activities, and desired short- and longer-term outcomes (see appendix B). The plan was designed to achieve three initial aims, in response to the identified barriers and enablers.

- 1. In a policy context that does not emphasise SEL, use the evidence to reinforce schools’ inherent motivation and support for SEL.** The plan includes a series of communications products which aim to make core messages about the benefits of SEL highly accessible, including an infographic and online video content.
- 2. Drive a focus on high-quality SEL teaching, clearly exemplifying what high-quality SEL looks like in practice and stressing the importance of doing SEL well.** The plan includes an initial set of self-audit tools designed to help schools reflect on their current practice in relation to the evidence, and tools to help with implementation. The plan sets out a longer-term ambition to develop teacher training and professional development support.
- 3. Influence the wider system to make the conditions more favourable for SEL, both by seizing immediate policy opportunities and considering longer-term influence with the Department for Education and Ofsted.** In the short term, the plan includes actions to ensure that the guidance report and accompanying tools are referenced within key school-facing policies or guidance.

2.3 Implementation phase

The objectives of the implementation phase were to implement the knowledge mobilisation plan, to monitor the impact of the activities, and to use this information to further refine the strategy. As the timescale of the project is limited, we are only able to report on the very early stages of that process (first three months).

Methods

The ‘Implementation activities’ column of the knowledge mobilisation plan (see appendix B, column 3) outlines the various implementation actions. These activities are being led by a working group comprised of EEF and EIF staff, members of the knowledge mobilisation advisory group and teachers with a specialism in SEL. This group are co-designing additional resources (such as self-audit tools) and are liaising with other colleagues as appropriate (for instance comms and policy leads).

A monitoring framework is currently being developed that will capture some of the implementation outcomes, as set out in the knowledge mobilisation plan.

Methods of monitoring implementation will include:

- web analytics, including within WWCs and intermediary partners, such as research schools
- revisiting the focus groups from the mapping phase, to capture qualitative data on the knowledge mobilisation activities and their impact
- submitting questions to national surveys of teachers – for instance the NFER Teacher Voice Omnibus survey
- press monitoring and policy document analysis.

Findings

Our **initial communications** activity on publication of the SEL guidance was designed to reflect the mapping phase insights into the barriers and enablers to schools adopting its recommendations. As set out in the knowledge mobilisation plan (appendix B), the messaging aimed to:

1. capitalise on the intrinsic belief among senior leaders and teachers that SEL is important
2. land the message that ‘quality matters’ and encourage a focus on implementation quality.

Initial comms activity included a press release, a blog post from EEF’s chief executive and a podcast involving headteachers and SEL experts.⁹ A downloadable poster summarising the key recommendations from the guidance and a one-page summary of the core social and emotional skills were also made available to schools.¹⁰

Tailored communications activity followed. We placed an exclusive story with TES to enable us to reinforce the key messages with the sector.¹¹ We created a structured communications pack with suggested content for social media and newsletters for EEF’s Research School Network – a key route to schools on a regional basis – and a follow-on webinar for research schools to engage with the lead author of the report.

We also moved quickly to provide tools to **encourage school leaders to reflect on current practice**, by publishing a basic planning tool for schools and an initial self-audit tool alongside the guidance (while a more thorough Red Amber Green assessment tool is being developed).¹²

The implementation of the knowledge mobilisation plan is in its early stages. Early indications of reach are positive. The report has been accessed 11,000 times online across both What Works centres.

9 See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/prioritise-social-and-emotional-learning> (for press release); <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/supporting-schools-to-move-beyond-what-we-do-already/> (for blog post); and <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/new-eef-podcast-looks-at-social-and-emotional-learning/> (for the podcast).

10 See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/social-and-emotional-learning/>

11 See Worth, D. (2019, September 20). Report: how to teach social and emotional skills. *Times Educational Supplement* (online). <https://www.tes.com/news/report-how-teach-social-and-emotional-skills>

12 See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/social-and-emotional-learning/>

3. Lessons and insights

3.1 How did this process impact on the design of our guidance?

Insights from the exploration of behavioural needs of users informed the content and presentation of the guidance. For example, the process brought to the surface a tension between the desire to lead with the strongest evidence (on SEL programmes) and the strong sense from our behavioural mapping that this may lead to disengagement with the rest of the recommendations. In response, we ensured that we clearly positioned evidence-based *programmes* as ‘vehicles’ for implementing some of the *practices* described in the opening sections. The process also helped us refine the descriptions of desired behaviours in the guidance and pinpoint more precisely who we wanted to do what. These examples demonstrate the potential for the behavioural needs of end users to shape the production of evidence reviews and guidance, by ensuring that they are understood early in the process.

It is worth noting that in this project the guidance production process ran concurrently, but separately, from the process of exploring behavioural needs. This meant that the transfer of insights between the two strands of work was not as efficient as it might have been. More formal links between the two strands of work, for example through a single project manager, or through a shared advisory panel or steering group, should facilitate the transfer of knowledge.

3.2 How did this process impact on the design of a knowledge mobilisation plan?

The COM-B framework helped us to structure our thinking and make sense of complex scenarios in relation to evidence use. It worked well as a means to classify and organise behavioural factors during the mapping phase and helped us to get beyond the most obvious behavioural barriers. For example, opportunity barriers (lack of money, pressure on the curriculum, and so on) were, unsurprisingly, readily identified by teachers and school leaders. COM-B prompted us to probe issues around capability and to develop a more nuanced view of the gap between knowledge and behaviour – what people say they do and what they actually do. This led to an insight that shaped the knowledge mobilisation plan: headteachers tended to overestimate the extent to which their teachers were implementing SEL practices and strategies consistently and well. In response, we prioritised the development of tools that can encourage critical self-reflection (such as Red Amber Green self-assessments), as well as case study videos that exemplify effective SEL teaching strategies. This example illustrates the potential for this approach to refine the design knowledge mobilisation plans in subtle, but potentially significant, ways. The process also underlined the importance of a knowledge mobilisation plan that operated at different system levels: classroom, school leadership, wider system (for instance national policy).

When resources for mobilising evidence are limited – which they almost always are – making well-informed choices about the nature and sequence of strategies is increasingly important. In previous projects to mobilise EEF guidance (such as *Making Best Use of*

*Teaching Assistants*¹³), useful insights on behavioural barriers and enablers have emerged as the project has unfolded. Having this information upfront, as opposed to learning as you go along, is certainly an advantage.

The process of exploring behavioural needs also sharpened the initial communications upon publication of the guidance. We were able to pinpoint the objectives of the communications activity and ensure that the messaging reflected some of the key behavioural barriers and enablers. This process would have been even more effective with more structured interactions between the communications team and the team designing the knowledge mobilisation plan, and is something we'd look to improve in the future.

We also found the behaviour change wheel (BCW) process to be of more limited value at the design phase. It was useful in terms of guiding overall types of intervention (such as using training to develop capabilities); however, the precise detail of the intervention (for instance developing self-audit tools to encourage a deeper engagement with the evidence) typically emerged from insights from the advisory group. This may reflect our limited understanding of the BCW process, which we would look to build on in the future.

3.3 How feasible is this process?

The overall process feels worthwhile and generally feasible. It could probably be done in a lighter touch way if needed, and also more intensively if there was time and resource. Our view is that the 'best shouldn't be the enemy of the good' and any reasonable effort to understand the context of research users and the wider system would be beneficial.

We suggest that the essential elements are:

- the use of a framework to guide the process (COM-B was useful for us)
- mapping work that is sufficiently reliable and representative to give you confidence in the findings – our qualitative work could have been more systematic (for example, our sampling framework gave way to pragmatic recruitment of schools into focus groups), and this would have given us a firmer foundation to work from.

Desirable elements might be:

- a quantitative survey (which certainly supported our mapping phase)
- system-level analysis to identify levers and connections at different levels (such as teacher, school, policy – we did some of this, but our process may have benefited from a clearer definition of desired behaviours within the wider system, and analysis of the barriers and enablers at those levels; there may also be value in mapping the overall system to identify the most effective levels to intervene at)
- engagement of behavioural science and knowledge mobilisation experts – we were able to engage experts at different stages of the project, which was immensely valuable
- a co-design workshop with practitioners to test possible knowledge mobilisation techniques – we did engage practitioners in the design meetings, but this was probably the wrong place on reflection; a later workshop would have spared practitioners the somewhat theoretical discussion about COM-B barriers and behaviour change techniques and enabled more useful engagement with the proposed knowledge mobilisation plan.

13 See <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/tools/guidance-reports/making-best-use-of-teaching-assistants/>

3.4 How transferable is this process?

Our view is that a behavioural approach to designing knowledge mobilisation plans is transferable to different sectors and of value to any consideration of optimal knowledge mobilisation techniques. The exact methods could differ between contexts. For example, we were working with a broad set of desired behaviours at both practitioner (teacher) and organisational (senior leadership team) level. This meant that breadth was important in our mapping work. A more sharply defined target behaviour(s) would allow for a deeper exploration of behavioural barriers and enablers, working with a narrower user group.

4. Conclusions and next steps

The initial premise for this project was that gaps between evidence and practice could be better addressed by a knowledge mobilisation campaign that was informed by an understanding of the behavioural needs of research users. Our tentative conclusion is that this process has helped us develop a more efficient and focused knowledge mobilisation campaign than we would have done otherwise.

We could have developed hypotheses about the barriers and enablers to using research on SEL in schools, informed by our existing tacit knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, our strong sense is that we would have missed important nuances on some of the barriers and enablers to behaviour change that we identified in the project. Our analysis told us that schools were typically motivated to implement SEL, but, crucially, that they tended to see SEL as something they were doing well already, in spite of a system that was geared towards attainment. This seems to be leading to a general lack of motivation to engage with the evidence, or reflection on the quality of SEL teaching. This analysis was key to our decision to focus on tools that would enable self-reflection and messages about the importance of quality implementation within our knowledge mobilisation plan.

This report offers some initial insights into applying behavioural science to work of two What Works centres, our own opinions on its value, and some very early-stage monitoring data. A more thorough evaluation of this process and the resulting knowledge mobilisation activity would be a valuable next step. To create a more robust and generalisable model we would want to test this process in different contexts, working with a different set of knowledge mobilisation challenges and activities.

Appendix A: Summary of recommendations from SEL guidance

IMPROVING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Summary of recommendations

Teaching strategies	Curriculum	Whole-school	Implementation
1 Teach SEL skills explicitly  • Use a range of strategies to teach key skills, both in dedicated time, and in everyday teaching. • Self-awareness: expand children's emotional vocabulary and support them to express emotions. • Self-regulation: teach children to use self-calming strategies and positive self-talk to help deal with intense emotions. • Social awareness: use stories to discuss others' emotions and perspectives. • Relationship skills: role play good communication and listening skills. • Responsible decision-making: teach and practise problem-solving strategies.	3 Plan carefully for adopting a SEL programme  • Use a planned series of lessons to teach skills in dedicated time. • Adopting an evidence-based programme is likely to be a better bet than developing your own from scratch. • Explore and prepare carefully before adopting a programme—review what is required to deliver it, and whether it is suitable for your needs and context. • Use evidence summaries (such as those from EIF and EEF) as a quick way of assessing the evidence for programmes. • Once underway, regularly review progress, and adapt with care.	5 Reinforce SEL skills through whole-school ethos and activities  • Establish schoolwide norms, expectations and routines that support children's social and emotional development. • Align your school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies with SEL. • Seek ideas and support from staff and pupils in how the school environment can be improved. • Actively engage with parents to reinforce skills in the home environment.	6 Plan, support, and monitor SEL implementation  • Establish a shared vision for SEL: ensure it is <i>connected to</i> rather than <i>competing with</i> other school priorities. • Involve teachers and school staff in planning for SEL. • Provide training and support to all school staff, covering: readiness for change; development of skills and knowledge; and support for embedding change. • Prioritise implementation quality: teacher preparedness and enthusiasm for SEL are associated with better outcomes. • Monitor implementation and evaluate the impact of your approaches.

Appendix B: Knowledge mobilisation plan

PROBLEM: 'Why?'

ACTIVE INGREDIENTS: 'What?'

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES: 'How?'

IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES: 'How well?'

CAMPAIGN OUTCOMES: 'And so?'

Identified teacher-level issues

- SEL programmes can have a positive impact on a range of short- and long-term outcomes.
- But, approaches to SEL in primary schools vary considerably. There is a significant gap between the evidence and what is delivered.

Identified school-level issues

- Leaders tend to think they are already delivering high-quality SEL, leading to low motivation to engage with evidence or focus on implementation quality.
- Leaders are sceptical about the value of evidence-based SEL programmes, which they tend to see as insufficiently responsive to their school's needs.
- Evidence literacy among leaders is low. They tend to rely on other Heads or 'trusted sources' of advice on SEL over credible evidence sources.
- Perceived capability of teachers and staff to teach SEL is higher than actual capability.

Identified system-level issues

- Ofsted framework potentially undermines prioritisation of SEL in spite of apparently greater focus on personal development – lack of messaging to schools about a balanced curriculum.
- DfE concept of 'knowledge vs skills' is also a barrier to proper integration of SEL within the curriculum. Potentially too much emphasis on RSE as a 'tick the box' response to this.

Active ingredient 1 – SEL guidance

EEF/EIF Guidance Report with practice recommendations for schools to underpin mobilisation plan (Improving Social and Emotional Learning in Schools).

Active ingredient 2 – Reinforcing schools' inherent support for SEL

Use the evidence to reinforce schools' inherent motivation and support for SEL:

- Create a set of communications outputs aimed at doing this.
- Share messages through relevant stakeholder organisations and intermediaries (e.g. Research Schools, Local Authorities).

Active ingredient 3 – Driving a focus on implementation quality

Drive a focus on high-quality SEL teaching, clearly exemplifying what high-quality SEL looks and feels like in a school, and stress the importance of doing SEL well:

- Facilitate a deeper engagement with the guidance and reflection on current practice by producing self-audit tools and case studies.
- Emphasise the importance of evidence-based programmes in supporting high-quality practice.
- Provide active implementation support. In the longer term we will offer more resources including training and professional development.

Active ingredient 4 – Policy influence

Influence the wider policy context to make the conditions more favourable for SEL:

- Seize immediate policy opportunities.
- Consider longer-term influence over the DfE and Ofsted.

Active ingredient 1 & 2 – Launching the guidance, reinforcing schools' inherent support for SEL

Initial comms: Press releases, social media, blogs, Podcast, TES articles, Research School Network briefing.

5 reasons why SEL matters document for schools, wider stakeholders and policymakers.

Share with:

- All primary schools
- Research School Network using the blog
- Local authority school improvement leads
- Sector leadership bodies (PSHE Association; NAHT)
- Via EEF and EEF tweets (i, ii)
- Through sector press stories (i, iii, iv)

Active ingredient 3 – Driving a focus on implementation quality

- One page 'getting started' infographic,** developed in-house, tested with practitioners.
 - Film clips** using 'credible messengers' from academia/practitioners explaining what quality SEL looks like.
 - Case studies,** developed in-house with input from practitioners, exemplifying a) leadership; b) classroom practice; c) whole-school approach.
- And, school-facing review tools created with academic and practitioner input, enabling reflections on implementation and based on similar EEF tools:

- RAG SEL self-audit tool:** Refining initial work done by advisory group.
- Lists of evidence-based SEL programmes:** Developed from EIF guidebook.
- SEL interventions health check:** Adapted from standard EEF tool.

All outputs shared via mechanisms **a, b, c** above.

Longer term: Training & development (possibly online) developed & delivered with Research School Network.

Active ingredient 4 – Policy influence

Policy briefing and initial comms products (see above) shared with national policymakers at DfE; Ofsted; new ministers post-election. Follow-up meetings where possible.

Aim for SEL guidance to be included in DfE guidance on Relationships, Sex & Health Education; Mentally Healthy Schools; Anna Freud Centre; NICE.

Longer term: further policy influencing (especially with Ofsted), armed with a set of products/resources.

Active ingredient 2 – Reinforcing schools' inherent support for SEL

Reach: Initial comms outputs (Feb/March) reach all primary schools in England; click rate increases from guidance publication day (EEF and EIF website).

Motivation: Schools report improved understanding of why SEL is important.

Active ingredient 3 – Driving a focus on implementation quality

Capability: Schools report improved understanding of what high-quality implementation of SEL looks like.

Longer term: Tools regularly accessed and used by schools; majority of teachers and school staff access at least some training or CPD on SEL. Those who do use our tools or access training, report increased knowledge about how to implement high-quality SEL, and motivation to do so.

Active ingredient 4 – Policy influence

Opportunity: Guidance linked to national-level advice or policy that influences school practice.

Longer term: The language of SEL gains prominence within policy and education sector discussions around improving children's mental health and wellbeing. Our guidance report is frequently cited in key policy announcements, publications or in key debates.

High-quality implementation of SEL is increasingly recognised by Ofsted within the 'personal development' judgment.

Active ingredient 2 – Reinforcing schools' inherent support for SEL

It becomes the norm for primary schools to describe SEL and the acquisition of social and emotional skills as being as important as attainment. The link to attainment is widely accepted.

Active ingredient 3 – Driving a focus on implementation quality

More schools establish a shared vision and schoolwide norms and expectations that support SEL; implement a planned SEL curriculum with dedicated curriculum time; implement an evidence-based SEL programme (e.g. PATHS, Good Behaviour Game, Incredible Years); and establish whole-school practices and routines that support SEL.

Active ingredient 4 – Policy influence

SEL is clearly supported within schools-facing national policy and guidance.

Ofsted inspections routinely pick up on high-quality SEL.

Improving social and emotional learning in primary schools

Knowledge mobilisation plan 2019–2021