

CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

**Systematic review of interventions aimed at
improving educational outcomes for children
& young people with a social worker**

Foundations – What Works Centre for Children and Families is seeking proposals from research organisations to deliver a systematic review which synthesises evidence on interventions that support educational outcomes for children and young people with a social worker. The review must be conducted between November 2025 to March 2027 to inform the development of a Practice Guide.¹

Introduction to Foundations

Foundations was founded in December 2022, following a merger of What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation. Both organisations were proud members of the What Works Network, and the new organisation maintains this status. As a What Works Centre, Foundations will continue to improve child and family outcomes by conducting research and promoting the use of evidence-based interventions and approaches.

Aim of this review

Foundations – What Works Centre for Children and Families, has been tasked with producing a Practice Guide which will focus on interventions aimed at supporting educational outcomes for children and young people with a social worker.

It is intended that the practice guides will emphasise interventions and practices that are supported by causal evidence – meaning that there is robust evaluation evidence linking the activity to improved child and/or family outcomes when delivered to a high standard. Ideally, there will be sufficient evidence for this review to identify effective practices and interventions that are relevant and implementable within the United Kingdom.

The aim of this review is to use robust systematic methods to:

- 1.** Identify interventions with strong evidence of supporting children and young people with a social worker to improve their educational outcomes.
- 2.** Identify the types of support available which can help improve these outcomes for children and young people. This includes components of intervention delivery and population characteristics which may influence effectiveness.
- 3.** Identify the enablers and barriers to successful implementation of interventions for children and young people.

¹ For more information on Practice Guides see: <https://foundations.org.uk/toolkit/practice-guides/>

Background and context to the requirement

Data shows that children known to children's social care² demonstrate statistically poorer educational outcomes when compared to children of the same age, and that this gap widens as the child progresses through the education system.³ In the 2019 review of children in need,^{4,5} 1.6 million children needed a social worker between 2012 to 2013 and 2017 to 2018. This is equivalent to 1 in 10 children of all children, or 3 children in every classroom. Evidence on understanding how these children can be best supported is beginning to grow.

What do we mean by educational outcomes?

We welcome potential applicants to provide discussion on the scope of educational outcomes. These outcomes can be observable and quantifiably measurable (e.g. grades, completion rates, attendance, exclusion rates), as well as outcomes which may contribute to a child's ability to achieve better outcomes. This can include, for example, attitudes towards learning, motivation to learn, wellbeing in the school environment, and the relationships shared with peers and teachers.

What do we know about interventions aimed at supporting children and young people to improve in their educational attainment?

In work funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, Sanders et al. (2020)⁶ reanalysed 63 randomised controlled trials, all of which aimed to support children who had a social worker. Findings indicated 10 interventions that showed 'signs of potential' and called on further evaluation to be done on these. On the whole, these interventions led to improvements in literacy, phonemic awareness and reading. Examples of these interventions include SPOKES, Families and School Together, and Catch Up Literacy. Moreover, this reanalysis suggested that interventions which aimed to help parents and carers be part of a child's education could be particularly promising.

In a 2012 scoping review, Forsman and Vinnerljung identified eleven studies which met their search criteria. Nine of these studies reported some form of positive result, particularly in the literacy space, and concluded that the interventions which demonstrated greatest impact were

² Inclusive of children in need, children on a child protection plan, children in care.

³ Higgins, A. O., Sebba, J. & Luke, N. (2015) *What is the relationship between being in care and the educational outcomes of children: An international systematic review*. Rees Centre. <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/What-is-the-Relationship-Between-Being-in-Care-and-the-Educational-Outcomes-of-Children-An-International-Systematic-Review.pdf>

⁴ Inclusive of children on a child in need plan, on a child protection plan; looked after children and disabled children.

⁵ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-children-in-need/review-of-children-in-need>

⁶ See: <https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/research-report/what-works-in-education-for-children-who-have-had-social-workers/>

those centred on tutoring and structured individualised support.⁷ In an early UK-based study, Bagley & Pritchard (1998)⁸ evaluated a three-year programme, finding positive effects on truancy, bullying and exclusion rates, when a social worker was placed in an economically deprived area.⁹

In 2014, the UK government introduced the Virtual School initiative. It serves as a team of educators attached to each local education authority who are responsible for overseeing the system of support for children and young people with a social worker.¹⁰ The remit of virtual school heads (VSHs) is to promote the educational achievement of specific groups of children, including looked after children and, more recently, those with a social worker or in kinship care. Their responsibilities include providing advice to schools, managing and allocating Pupil Premium funding, and advocating for the educational needs of these children and young people to improve attendance, attainment, and overall wellbeing.

Looked after children are automatically eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), which provides extra funding of approximately £570 per year to their early years providers (nurseries, pre-schools, or childminders) to improve their educational outcomes. The funding is intended to provide additional resources, experiences, and staff training to support the child's development. Children who have left care through an adoption order, special guardianship order, or child arrangements order are also eligible for the EYPP. In these cases, parents/carers must inform the provider and show evidence of the court order so the provider can claim the funding. The local authority's VSH is responsible for managing the funding for looked after children and consulting with the child's early years setting to ensure the funding is used effectively. The expenditure must align with the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP).

Findings in a 2023 report undertaken by Harrison et al. (2023)¹¹ suggest that while no specific model of Virtual School is more or less effective, efficacy was impacted by differences in stability of funding and skills/experiences of the virtual head. Ofsted's 2012¹² review of Virtual Schools suggested tentative evidence of effective support for some children, with enhancements in stability and wellbeing, but outcomes were variable. Drew and Banerjee (2018)¹³ also noted how Virtual

⁷ Forsman, H. & Vinnerljung, B. (2012) Interventions aiming to improve school achievements of children in out-of-home care: A scoping review. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 34 (6), 1084–1091.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.037>

⁸ Bagley, C. & Pritchard, C. (1998) The reduction of problem behaviours and school exclusion in at-risk youth: An experimental study of school social work with cost-benefit analyses. *Child & Family Social Work*. 3 (4), 219–226.
<https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2206.1998.00101.x>

⁹ Westlake, D., Pallmann, P., Lugg-Widger, F., Schroeder, E. A., Adara, L., Munnery, K., ... & White, J. (2025) A cluster randomized controlled trial of social workers in schools (SWIS) in England. *Research on Social Work Practice*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315251338227>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

¹¹ See: <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Final-report-effectiveness-virtual-schools.pdf>

¹² See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-impact-of-virtual-schools-on-the-education-of-looked-after-children>

¹³ Drew, H. & Banerjee, R. (2018) Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: What is the role of the Virtual School? *European Journal of Psychology of Education*. 34(1), 101–121.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0374-0>

Schools can provide enhanced learning opportunities. To date, much of the data on Virtual Schools has had a qualitative focus, rather than quantitative evaluations.

What do we know about factors which influence educational outcomes?

There remains a growing body of evidence which focuses on understanding factors which interplay with the observed attainment gap. In a systematic review by O'Higgins et al. (2017),¹⁴ both individual characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity, as well as placement characteristics, such as placement type and placement duration, were found to influence educational attainment in those who are care experienced. Those who enter care at an earlier age tend to have better educational outcomes, as do those who experience greater placement stability.^{15,16} Using latent modelling, Lowthian et al. (2025),¹⁷ explored predictors of educational attainment in care-experienced children. They identified foster age as being an important predictor. In children aged up to 6, those who experienced foster care which progressed to adoption experienced the highest attainment, while those who had been fostered after their fourth birthday had the lowest attainment. The authors argued that this finding suggested that additional support is required for those who have been fostered.

What do we know about implementation and acceptability of available support?

The evidence speaks to a broad range of factors which can inhibit both children and young people and parents to engage in available support.

Care-experienced children and young people may have a range of social, emotional, and mental health difficulties, potentially linked to previous life experiences. Findings in Berridge et al. (2020)¹⁸ suggested children, parents, and professionals felt that secondary schools were not always sympathetic or understanding of these difficulties and that the support available was not sufficient.

¹⁴ O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J. & Gardner, F. (2017) What are the factors associated with educational achievement for children in kinship or foster care: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 79, 198–220.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.004>

¹⁵ Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S. Thomas, S. Sinclair, I., O'Higgins, A., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I. & O'Higgins, A. (2015) The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data. Rees Centre. <https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Linking-Care-and-Educational-Data-Overview-Report-Nov-2015.pdf>

¹⁶ McClung, M. & Gayle, V. (2010) Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked after at home and away from home: An investigation of two Scottish local authorities. *Child & Family Social Work*. 15 (4), 409–431. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00688.x>

¹⁷ Lowthian, E., Bedston, S., Lee, A., Akbari, A., Griffiths, L., Crick, T. & Forrester, D. (2025) Children's early care experiences and their educational attainment: A population data-linkage study in Wales. *Oxford Review of Education*. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2025.2540036>

¹⁸ Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S. Cartwright, M., Staples, E. et al. (2020) Children in need and children in care: Educational attainment and progress. www.bristol.ac.uk/policybristol/policy-briefings/children-in-need-and-in-care-education-progress

Berridge et al. (2021)¹⁹ also noted the difficulties faced by children and young people in getting their SEND needs recognised. These findings speak to the need for targeted and individualised support plans. Positive, supportive relationships with teachers emerged as an important factor in giving children and young people confidence to engage with learning and has been a repeated finding in later studies.²⁰ Similarly, parents who said they were living in poverty inhibited their ability to afford what their children needed for school, including computers, internet access, and uniforms.

UK-based research exploring integrating a social worker in the classroom has tended to show that while their presence has high acceptability among stakeholders, statistical impact is limited. Sharley (2020)²¹ for example, found that integrating social workers increased opportunities to directly work with children and develop a greater understanding of the education system. However, in a randomised controlled trial of 278,858 children,²² there was no significant reduction in the rate of child protection enquiries in reducing children social care referral rates and improving educational attendance and attainment.^{9,23}

Research questions

1. **What works:** Which interventions are effective in supporting and improving educational outcomes in children and young people?
2. **For whom:** What are the different types of interventions, how are they defined, and which models are effective for different populations of children and young people?
3. **How and why:** What practice elements and intervention components are associated with successful interventions when supporting this population?
4. **Implementation:** What are the enablers and barriers to successful implementation of interventions in supporting and improving educational outcomes in children and young people?
5. **User perspectives and needs:** What are the views of intervention users and practitioners about the acceptability and usefulness of interventions?

¹⁹ Berridge, D., Sebba, J., Cartwright, M. & Staples, E. (2021) School experiences of Children in Need: Learning and support. *British Educational Research Journal*. 47 (6), 1700–1716. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3750>

²⁰ Luke, N., Harrison, N., Cartwright, M., Staples, E. & Brown, A. (2024) Understanding educational outcomes for children in care: well-being, engagement and attainment in school. In *The Routledge Handbook of Child and Family Social Work Research* (pp. 427–444). Routledge.

²¹ Sharley, V. (2020) Identifying and responding to child neglect within schools: Differing perspectives and the implications for inter-agency practice. *Child Indicators Research*. 13 (2), 551–571. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-019-09681-z>

²² Intervention: 136 schools; Control: 132 schools.

²³ Adara, L., Ayayo, S., Munnery, K., Pallmann, P., Rawlinson, S., Bennett, V., Forrester, D., Meindl, M., Roberts, L., Smith, P., Westlake, D., Daher, S., Petrou, S., Schroeder, E.-A., Lugg-Widger, F., Meister, L. & White, J. (2023) *SWIS – An evaluation of school-based social work: The Social Workers in Schools (SWIS) trial*. Cardiff University/What Works for Children's Social Care. <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/159907/1/SWIS-Main-Report.pdf>

Suggested approach and analysis

We invite applicants to suggest the most robust and cost-effective methodologies to meet the aims of the review within time and budget, providing costed options where appropriate. We encourage applicants to build upon the findings and methodologies used in meta-analyses when feasible.

Foundations encourages responsible and transparent use of AI innovation in our in-house and commissioned evidence synthesis work. Suppliers are welcome to suggest AI-based methodological innovations, though should ensure adherence with latest methodological guidelines on use of AI such as the RAISE framework jointly published by Cochrane, the Campbell Collaboration, JBI, and the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence.²⁴

Population:	Children and young people aged 0–18 who interact with social workers. These children may be considered a Child in Need, be on a Child Protection Plan or be Looked After. They may also be in any kind of care placement, for example kinship care, foster care, residential care, and children adopted/on special guardianship order/a child arrangement order. We exclude here young people in higher education.
Intervention:	Interventions delivered in an early years, school or college setting, or any intervention delivered in a community, clinical, early years, or other setting that is evidenced to improve educational outcomes for children and young people who interact with social workers. This could be classroom, extra-curricular, extended early years, and school support, school nursing, school-based mental health support, or other support delivered with the aim of improving educational outcomes for these children and young people.
Comparison:	No intervention (business as usual), or a comparable intervention.
Outcomes:	Outcomes can include: <i>Attendance</i> in educational settings up to age 18 (early years settings, schools, Pupil Referral Units, colleges/further education); <i>attainment</i> in educational settings up to age 18 (including vocational qualifications/apprenticeships); <i>exclusion</i> from these settings (a form of attendance); and <i>completion</i> of courses and qualifications in these settings. Outcomes may also include outcomes achieved in an educational setting (e.g. peer and/or teacher relationships, attitudes to schooling). In the bid we would appreciate a small discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of broadening outcome scope, such as attitudes towards education and learning or quality of relationships with peers and education staff.
Time:	≤ 12 months; > 12 months

We encourage applicants to suggest robust methods that can identify commonalities shared by intervention models, populations, and outcomes, as well as interventions/populations/outcomes where these commonalities do not apply, or where specific activities are contraindicated.

We also encourage applicants to make use of robust critical appraisal tools (for example, Cochrane RoB2) to inform decisions about the interventions included in the review. Given that a primary aim of this review is to identify interventions with strong causal evidence, it is important the extraction criteria utilise a high threshold for reducing study bias. Other critical appraisal tools (e.g. Robbins,

²⁴ See: <https://www.cochrane.org/about-us/news/setting-standards-responsible-ai-use-evidence-synthesis>

CASP) may be relevant where non-randomised studies and qualitative research could be synthesised to answer particular research questions. To ensure inclusiveness, we also recommend that the search strategy encompass evaluation studies from 2000 onwards.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE)

At Foundations, we are committed to promoting Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE) both in terms of the people who work in Foundations and the suppliers who lead, design, and deliver our work. To achieve this, we are keen to work more closely with organisations which actively promote diversity and inclusion. Within our evidence synthesis work, we expect suppliers to search for, synthesise, and report on variations in intervention effectiveness across populations and subgroups, as well as consider EDIE in project design and implementation. Within applications for this grant, we expect applicants to explain how the project will cover considerations around equality, diversity, inclusion, and equity (e.g. in review design, analyses, reporting, involvement of experts by lived experience, etc.). We also encourage applicants to make use of the PRISMA-Equity checklist and other relevant tools to guide the conduct and reporting of the systematic review.

Research outputs

The appointed bidder will supply the following outputs:

1. Regular slide packs to be presented to the advisory group at regular time points.
2. A final report consistent with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and the PRISMA-Equity checklists summarising the rationale of the project, the methodology, results, and discussion.
3. A list of interventions and effective practices detailing: the intervention/practice’s model; target population; eligibility requirements, format, duration, and delivery requirements.

Delivery timeline

Date	Milestone
w/c 17 November 2025	Proposal published
Wednesday 16 January 2026	Deadline for responses
By Friday 6 February 2026	Notify successful applicant
9 February 2026 – 3 April 2026	Setup period: This would include the signing of a grant agreement, development of a protocol, and the carrying out of due diligence processes. Please find details of what we will need from you in order to perform due diligence checks in the ‘Detailed requirements’ section below, and ensure that you are able to provide the required documents within a week of being appointed.

7 April 2026	Official start of work, including protocol development with input from advisory group
24 July 2026	Draft protocol near completion
w/c 24 May 2027	Early findings shared with Foundations Guidance Writing Advisory Group
30 June 2027	1st draft of systematic review report out for peer review
30 June 2027	Work on Practice Guides commences (undertaken by Foundations) with input from advisory group
29 October 2027	Systematic review draft finalised
31 March 2028	Systematic review published

Detailed requirements

1. Due diligence

All grantees are required to undergo due diligence checks as part of their onboarding. **If you are successful**, we will require you to send the following within a week of being awarded:

- The name and contact details of your organisation's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)
- Confirmation that the DSL will report safeguarding concerns to Foundations' DSL
- A copy of your organisation's Safeguarding Policy – has this been reviewed in the past 12 months?
- A copy of your organisation's internal reporting procedure – has this been reviewed in the past 12 months?
- A copy of your organisation's whistleblowing policy – has this been reviewed in the past 12 months?
- A copy of your organisation's EDIE policy – has this been reviewed in the past 12 months?
- Confirmation you have Vetting procedures such as DBS – if this is needed (don't need to see it)
- Confirmation your organisation has a Staff Code of Conduct (don't need to see it)
- Confirmation that your organisation has the following insurance – public liability, professional indemnity, employers' liability (plus any others specifically relevant to this project)
- Bank statement (in name of the organisation and dated within the past three months with bank account details).

Please also answer the following questions on data protection:

- Please provide details of your Data Protection Officer (DPO) – Please include: Full name of DPO, email and contact number

- Please provide your ICO Registration Number
- Please provide a copy of your organisational privacy policy (link or attach – multiple files can be uploaded if required)
- Does your organisation hold any IT certification such as ISO or Cyber Essentials? Please include the reference number(s) and attach a copy
- Have you had any data breaches in the past year that were reported to the ICO? If yes, how many?
- Do you review your security measures or perform audits? If yes, how often?
- Are your employees required to complete data protection training annually? Yes/No
- Do you have security measures that are applied to your devices such as use of password, access control and antiviruses? Yes/No
- Do you ensure your own data processors are compliant? Yes/No
- Do you have processes that would enable the performance of individuals' data protection rights? Yes/No
- Please confirm your organisation has Cyber Security insurance. Yes/No

2. Reporting

The output is expected to be a full systematic review and/or meta-analysis if applicable, with an Executive Summary and Plain English Summary.

3. Project management

Concerns the regularity of team meetings, ways of working, allocation of tasks and time to project team members, and project responsibilities for each team member.

4. Data collection, sharing, and management

Brief outline of data collection methods and how data will be stored and shared between teams. Please outline approaches necessary to comply with GDPR and data protection.

5. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE)

The outputs (including the review protocol and final report) are expected to include a section on EDIE outlining the approaches that have been taken to cover considerations around equality, diversity, inclusion, and equity (e.g. in review design, analyses, reporting, involvement of experts by lived experience, etc.). The successful applicant would be expected to search for, synthesise, and report on variations in intervention effectiveness across populations and subgroups, as well as consider EDIE in project design and implementation. Please include in proposals how this would be covered.

6. Budget

Foundations will assess and score bids on value for money and can make up to **£125,000** available for this project.

7. Risk management

Please include in proposals a risk plan with any mitigations.

8. Conflicts of interest

Please confirm if you are aware of any potential or actual conflicts of interest.

Once appointed, the successful research team will be expected to:

- Work with Foundations to refine the appropriate research questions, methodology, and approaches
- Submit due diligence documents (as listed above)
- Produce a research protocol that will be published on the Foundations website and registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF)
- Seek appropriate ethical approval, if required
- Conduct the systematic review process and analysis as set out in the protocol
- Produce monthly progress reports
- Attend monthly KIT meetings with the Foundations team
- Produce a full systematic review report with an Executive Summary and Plain English Summary
- Engage with an Advisory Group, to be set up by Foundations, through sharing of the review protocol with the group for feedback, presentation of initial findings from the review, and attending meetings as may be required
- Conduct all activities in line with relevant Data Protection Laws including and without limitation the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and all other relevant country specific legislation
- When requested and if required, assist with writing the project's Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)
- Delete all data captured for the project in line with a Data Sharing Agreement we have with you or at least five years after the project has completed, whichever is the least amount of time, and confirm the deletion in writing to Foundations shortly after deletion.

Applicant responses

How to apply

The format of the application is at the discretion of the applicant. All the section headers included in the 'detailed requirements' section of this document should be easily located within the supplier's response. Our grant terms and conditions can be found [on our website](#).

To apply please:

1. Submit your [Expression of Interest online](#) by **midday on 12 December 2025**

2. Submit your [completed application via our online portal](#) by **midday on 16 January 2026**.

Further information on how we process your personal data in relation to your application can be found in our [Privacy Policy](#).

If you have any questions that have not been answered in this document, please email practice_guides@foundations.org.uk. We aim to reply to your queries in two working days.

Assessment criteria

We will score all bids initially on criteria 1 (strength of the proposed methodology) and criteria 4 (relevant expertise and experience of the project team). We reserve the right to exclude any bid not scoring at least 4 or more out of 5 for each of these sift criteria – see later [evaluation criteria](#) for a description of the scoring system from 0–5 on each criteria.

The six elements of proposals that will be assessed for those passing the **initial sift stage** are outlined below.

1. Strength of the proposed methodology [Criteria Weighting 30%]

Proposals will be assessed in terms of the following methodological characteristics:

- a. Systematic search strategy, critical appraisal tools, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and population selection:
 - Please include a rationale for the population(s) that reviewers propose to focus on
 - Please also include an explanation and rationale for the search strategy to be undertaken for the different review research questions, and the critical appraisal tools relevant to each search and synthesis strategy.
- b. Analysis strategy (e.g. core components work, thematic synthesis, and/or where relevant statistical analyses).

We anticipate the systematic review consisting of a mixed-methods review, where RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 are answered quantitatively (e.g. through means of a meta-analysis where viable, or through other approaches such as narrative synthesis if more appropriate), and RQ4 and RQ5 have a qualitative component, reflecting ‘lived-experience’ and implementation enablers where possible. However, we welcome recommendations from applicants on the review methodology and options within the available budget and timescales.

Where a meta-analysis has been conducted, we require sensitivity analysis to be conducted if high risk of bias studies are included in the meta-analysis.

2. Considerations around Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity principles [Criteria Weighting 10%]

It is expected that applicants will provide explicit statements on their approach to EDIE, in terms of ensuring diversity of the research team, and a diverse panel of experts by lived experience, PPI/user involvements, as well as the approaches that have been or would be taken to cover

considerations around EDIE in the systematic review design, development of search strategies, data collection, synthesis, and reporting.

3. Methods for gaining sufficient information for inclusion in a practice guide [Criteria Weighting 20%]

A primary aim of this review is to gain sufficient information about effective practice elements so that they can be adequately described in a guide that will be used by commissioners and practitioners. We are therefore interested in understanding how the researchers will gather this information so that it can be communicated in a way that is consistent with the intervention model. This also includes suppliers' suggested approaches to PPI/user involvement in the systematic review.

4. Relevant expertise and experience of the project team [Criteria Weighting 20%]

It is expected that the research team will have previous experience of conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of interventions of interest to vulnerable children. Please describe the roles, expertise, and experience of each team member, including the principal investigator and other team members.

5. Approaches to project governance, project management, and quality assurance [Criteria Weighting 10%]

It is expected that the research team will have previous experience of managing and conducting research projects. Knowledge of systematic review standards to ensure quality assurance is essential. Please outline in the proposal how the project will be managed, staff roles and responsibilities of all team members, include an indicative timeline with key milestones, and how project risks and issues will be escalated. Please summarise approaches to be used for quality assurance of all deliverables, tasks, and outputs from the project.

6. Value for money [Criteria Weighting 10%]

It is expected that the outputs will demonstrate value for money. This reflects the need for the costings of the deliverable to be reflective of the output quality, the number of outputs, and the breadth and depth of topic matter to which each output covers. Proposals will also be scrutinised for how staff time is allocated and costed for various project tasks and outputs (see budget table below).

Evaluation criteria

The following scoring system will be used against each of the six criteria:

Assessment	Score	Summary	Interpretation
Excellent	5	Very strong evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills, or experience.	As well as addressing all, or the vast majority of, bullet points under each criteria heading, it will demonstrate a deep understanding of the project. All solutions offered are linked directly to project requirements and show how they will be delivered and the impact that they will have.
Good	4	Sufficient evidence provided of appropriate knowledge, skills, or experience. Have confidence in their ability to deliver the required service.	Will reflect that applicants will have addressed, in some detail, all or the majority of the bullet points listed under each criteria heading. Evidence will have been provided to show not only what will be provided but will give some detail of how this will be achieved. Applicants should make clear how their proposals relate directly to the aims of the project and be specific, rather than general, in the way proposed solutions will deliver the desired outcomes.
Acceptable	3	Reasonable evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills, or experience. Meets requirements in many areas but not all.	Will again address the majority of the bullet points under each criteria heading but will lack some clarity or detail in how the proposed solutions will be achieved. Evidence provided, while giving generic or general statements, is not specifically directed towards the aims/objectives of this project. Any significant omission of key information as identified under each criteria heading will point towards a score of 3.
Minor Reservation	2	Some evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills, or experience. Meets requirements in some areas but with important omissions.	Will reflect that the applicant has not provided evidence to suggest how they will address a number of bullet points under the evaluation criteria heading. Proposals will in parts be sketchy with little or no detail given of how they will meet project requirements. Evidence provided is considered weak or inappropriate and is

Assessment	Score	Summary	Interpretation
			unclear on how this relates to desired outcomes.
Serious Reservations	1	Very little evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills, or experience.	Will reflect that there are major weaknesses or gaps in the information provided. The applicant displays poor understanding and there are major doubts about fitness for purpose.
Unacceptable	0	No evidence/response.	Will result if no response is given and/or if the response is not acceptable and/or does not cover the required criteria.

Proposal timetable

Date	Activity
w/c 17 November 2025	Grant call issued
12 December 2025	Deadline for submission of Expression of Interest Form
Wednesday 16 January 2026	Deadline for proposal submissions
19–23 January 2026	Evaluate proposals
26–30 January 2026	Rebuttal period for clarification questions
By Friday 6 February 2026	Notify successful applicant

Budget

Please include a detailed breakdown of staff costs (stating the number of days allocated to each staff member, and the associated day rate). As a minimum, please also indicate what proportion of the budget is allocated to each of the research activities, analysis, and reporting. We offer a template below, but please do also use your own template.

Activity	Hours	Costs
Total cost		

Questions or clarifications

Any queries ahead of the proposal submission deadline should be directed to practice_guides@foundations.org.uk. Foundations will endeavour to respond to queries within two working days.