



National Audit Office

SRA

Accessing hard to reach groups in value-for-money audit

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The National Audit Office

Our aim is to improve public spending

We never question policy, only delivery

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending for Parliament.

We have access rights to Departments' data and staff

BUT

We have NO access to service users, the public and distinct samples within that

Challenge to recruiting and accessing users

We need to understand a policy area from the users' point of view

Our aim to get a rounded view of the policy area and be able to make a conclusion from the point of view of the Department, the contractors, the taxpayer and the service user.

NAO studies take approximately 7 months from planning to publication

Both our budget and timings are restricted by ensuring that our work remains relevant upon delivery. So the quicker the better. For example our investigation into Kids Co was planned and delivered within 6 weeks.

Making recommendations for improvements is getting harder

In the past our recommendations were very financially and savings driven. Increasingly we are moving towards a user focus and making recommendations that will enable the improvement of services and the experience of the users.

Targeting users that are hard to reach

A lot of our work needs the contribution of users that are difficult to reach (prisoners, asylum seekers) or in some cases impossible (toddlers, children in care). This means we have to think creatively about how to approach these groups and how to gain their insights.

Children in care

User group: Children and young people aged 0 to 18

Challenge: Hard to assess the experience of children in care without getting their perspective and impossible to sample within a group of minors and without a sampling pool.

What we did:

In the interest of the children in care and the NAO staff we carried out no interviews with the children that use the local authority services.

Instead we interviewed foster carers, social workers, charity workers, care leavers and triangulated with data collected by the Department for Education and local authorities on children's outcomes and care leavers' experiences.

Funding for disadvantaged pupils

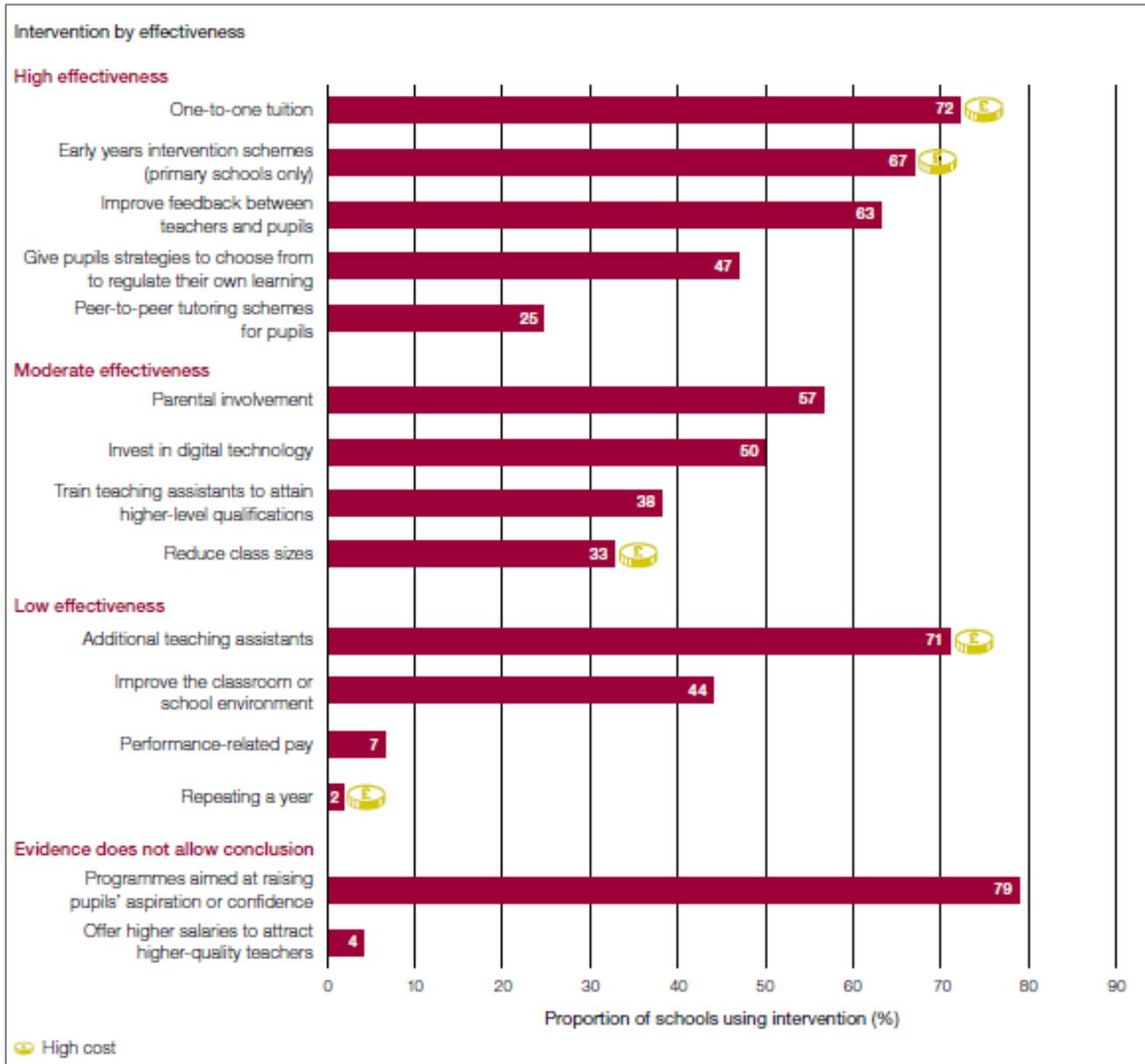
User group: Schools in England: primary and secondary

Challenge: Schools are known for having a low response rate to surveys and there is no accurate and complete sampling frame

What we did: Outsourced the survey to a third party, which had a panel of schools it could use. Some of the benefits of this approach:

- They were able to pilot the questionnaire with respondents from the population;
- Good response rate;
- They could guarantee anonymity and we never held identifying data;
- Gave us time to visit a sample of schools and collect qualitative data to triangulate with the survey

Funding for disadvantaged pupils



Care Leavers

User group: Adults that have at some point experienced being in a foster or care home

Challenge: With no data on a wider sample pool it became really difficult to ensure that we covered or types of experiences.

What we did:

We had to resort to 'gatekeeper' sampling. We arranged for interviews and focus groups via charities and local authorities' post care services to give us access to the service users. That meant that we did not get access to users that are not receiving ongoing support (presumably either because they do not need it or their experience in care was so poor). We triangulated the data collected with documentary evidence and statistics that are collected by the Department and the local authorities.

Financial Sustainability of Police Forces in England and Wales

User group: Individual police forces, of which there are 43 with quite different characteristics.

Challenge: Ambiguous access rights, typically closed group

What we did: 9 in-depth case studies of police forces including 50 one to one interviews and some smaller discussion groups.

Since 2010 we have been building our credibility with the forces, attending CIPFA conference, using social medial, building relationships and publishing reports on systemic issues such as police accountability and mobile technology. This enabled us to gain access to the case study forces.

We used Atlas to analyse the data we collected on-site and triangulated our qualitative data with quantitative data to inform our findings.

Useful Links

National Audit Office website: <https://www.nao.org.uk/>

Links to reports:

[Children in care](#), November 2014

[Funding for disadvantaged pupils](#), June 2015

[Care leavers' transition to adulthood](#), July 2015

[Financial sustainability of police forces in England and Wales](#),
June 2015

Thank you!