SEND Innovation:
A quick guide to getting started

Tools and tips for developing and sharing innovative approaches for children and young people with SEND

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone interested in developing new and better ways to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It is especially relevant for those who have an innovative idea, emerging evidence that it works, and the drive to share it with others.

It sets out what we learnt through supporting nine schools to develop their own SEND innovations over the last 18 months. We set up a programme called the **NASS SEND Incubator** through which we delivered workshops, coaching and expert input to help the 9 schools turn their ideas into resources that could be shared with other schools. Our aim was to find and share 'what works' for children with SEND, so that more young people might be able to access resources or approaches that help them live their best lives.

This is a quick guide to the process of supporting innovation we used on the NASS SEND Incubator. The independent evaluation of the Incubator showed that schools found having tools that helped structure their thinking very valuable, as well as being able to learn from other people like themselves, who were further ahead in their innovation journey. This guide includes some practical tools to help you think about your prospective innovations in a structured way, and advice from schools about what worked for them.

The Innovation process

1. Assess, refine and articulate your idea
2. Impact measurement
3. Routes to share and scale
4. Developing a marketable offer
5. Project planning
6. Developing your 'pitch'

For each of these steps, this guide includes practical tools to help you get started, or real-life examples from the schools that took part in the NASS SEND Incubator. Click the links in the examples to find out more about the innovations developed through our programme, or **download our SEND Innovation briefing** to read about them all. At the end of this guide you'll find our 'cheat sheet' – the best advice we heard on the programme

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1 Assess, refine and articulate your idea

A good first step is to assess the viability of your idea by mapping it against the 5 dimensions below. Answering the questions might help you think about strengths and challenges. Even better, find some 'critical friends' to help you think this through.

Commitment and Motivation
Weak or Strong?

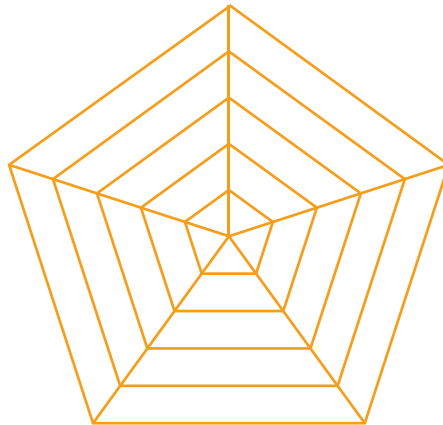To what extent are you personally committed to growing this work?

To what extent is your school committed to it?

Do you have dedicated time to do it?

Demand
Is there any?

Does your idea meet a well-evidenced need?

Does it transcend your local community or school context?

Fidelity
Is it clear (or not) what things make the idea work?

Do you know what makes the idea work?

Do you know what is OK to change, and what can't be changed?

Ownership
None, some, a lot?

Do you have a strong sense of ownership of the idea?

Is anyone else doing something similar?

Evidence of social impact
Weak or strong?

Does the idea create positive change?
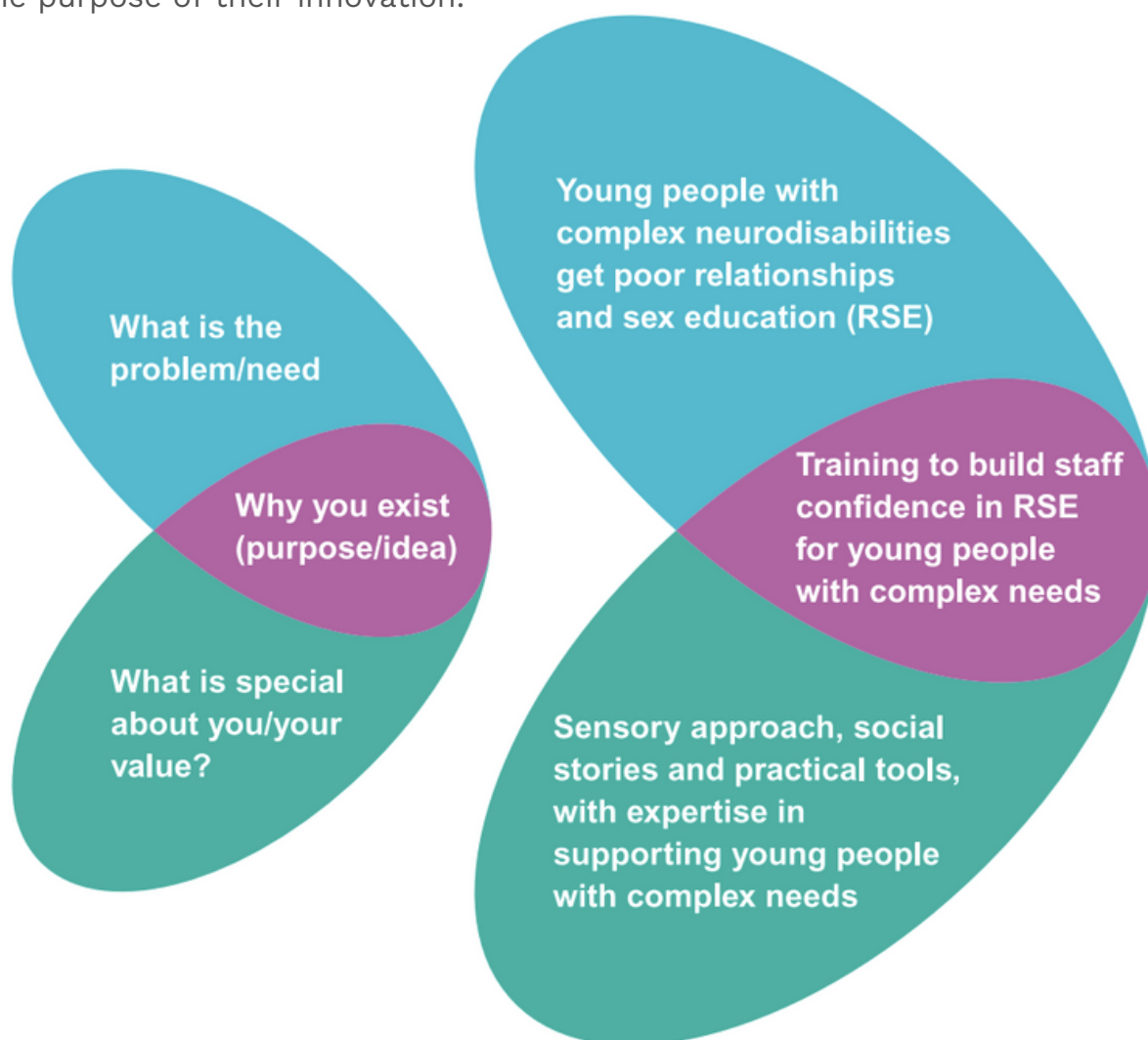
How do you know this?

> **Leadership need to be 100% with you, prioritising (the innovation) making sure it's something that's important.**

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Another key step is to clearly articulate the problem your innovation aims to solve, and why you or your school are the right people to help solve it. The 'purpose butterfly' (below) is a simple way to help you refine this, and explain it concisely. Here is an example purpose butterfly from Chailey Heritage Foundation, one of the schools on our innovation programme, which sets out what the problem is, the specific value they bring to solving it, and the purpose of their innovation.

What is the problem/need

Why you exist (purpose/idea)

What is special about you/your value?

Young people with complex neurodisabilities get poor relationships and sex education (RSE)

Training to build staff confidence in RSE for young people with complex needs

Sensory approach, social stories and practical tools, with expertise in supporting young people with complex needs

"

It gives you a language to explain things more clearly to people, helped to convey the product and the concept more clearly. It was a good discipline, having to be concise, to think about every word.

By clearly articulating and having a clear, accessible way of thinking about it, we've ended up with a clearer business case, which others have taken on board.
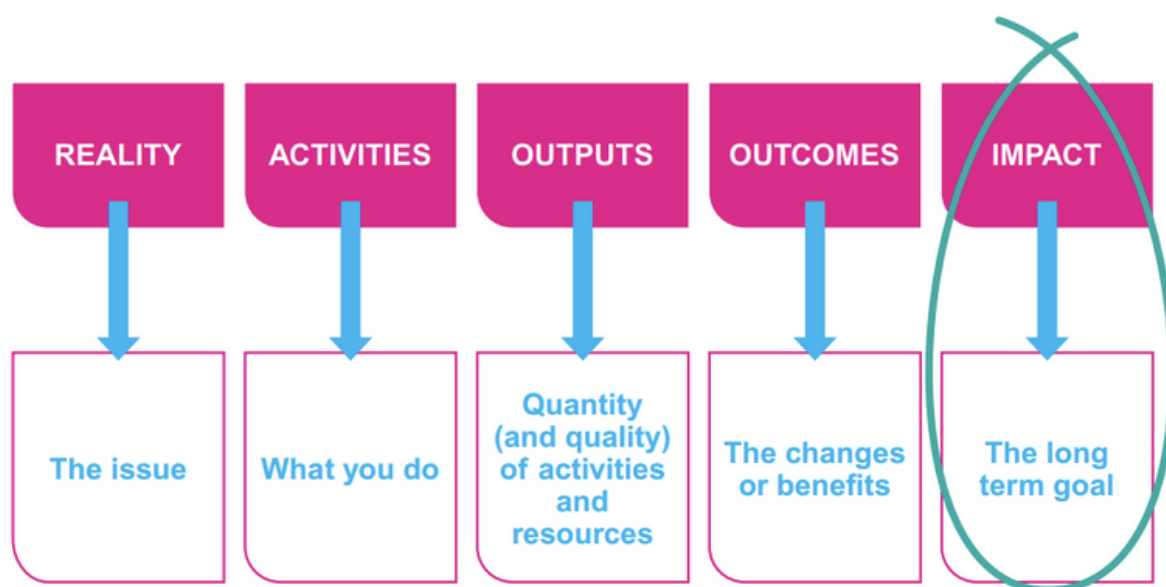
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2 Impact Measurement

The schools we worked with used different approaches to measuring the impact of their innovations. Examples included piloting their approaches, using surveys to assess the outcomes of training sessions and recruiting university research partners. How you measure impact will of course depend on your idea. A number of our schools found developing a Theory of Change a useful way to plan their approach to measuring impact.

A Theory of Change is a method of planning that focusses on the impact you want to achieve, and helps you map out the activities needed to realise your goals. You can find lots of examples online, and **Nesta** provide a free toolkit to help you develop your own.

Broadly, your Theory of Change should set out the five elements below for your idea. Usually people start with the impact, and work backwards.

REALITY	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
The issue	What you do	Quantity (and quality) of activities and resources	The changes or benefits	The long term goal

> **The Theory of Change was new to me and excellent... I had to think much more clearly about what I was trying to get done, and what I'd have to do along the way.**

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3 Routes to share and scale

> **The NASS Incubator has allowed me to think bigger... Otherwise we'd be a lone entity, we'd use it well in school, but there wouldn't be much scope for development. And we probably wouldn't have thought about how effective it could be in other environments.**

What are the different ways of sharing innovations?

One of the most important ways in which the SEND Incubator 'added value' for the participants, was by giving them the courage to share their innovations externally and opening their eyes to the demand for their product in other schools and settings. If you'd like your innovation to be used in other schools, you'll want to think about what the best models for sharing it are. Here are some examples from the schools we supported.

Knowledge sharing

Producing a resource or collection of knowledge that others can simply pick up and use – either costed or for free. Suitable for relatively 'stand-alone' knowledge that you've found an effective format for sharing, which doesn't depend on training, or your ongoing relationship with others using it. An example of this is the **Count on Words programme** developed by Mary Hare School through our innovation programme, which supports students with language delay to develop the vocabulary needed to succeed in Maths. Other schools can download and use the lesson plans and resources free of charge.

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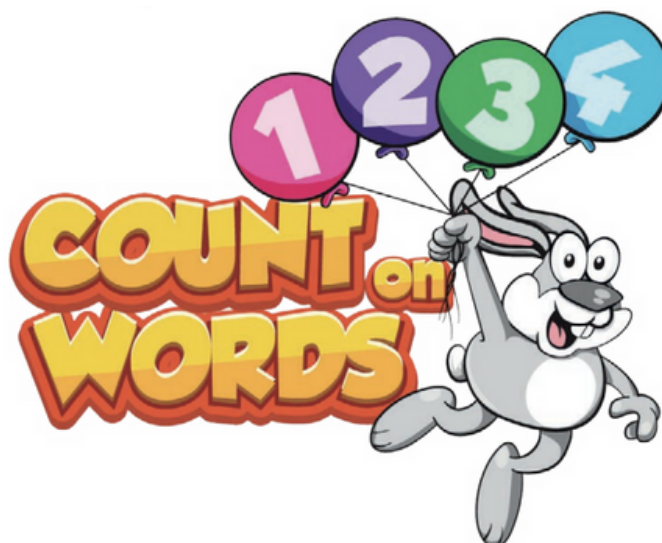
Delivery of training or consultancy

Does what it says on the tin! Your innovation is an approach that involves training or advising staff in other schools, or is a resource underpinned by training – either one-off or periodic. It might be an intervention you initially co-deliver with other schools, marrying your knowledge of the innovation with their knowledge of their learners. It may include a 'train the trainer' element, to extend your reach. It also helps you to gain direct feedback so you can continue to improve your innovation.

The Sex Factor, a relationship and sex education programme developed by Chailey Heritage Foundation, is an example from our innovation programme that uses this approach. It combines resources and training, tailored to a schools' needs.

Community of practice or network

This is a great choice if your innovation relates to a broad enough topic to attract interest from a number of schools, and if you're keen to continue refining your innovation over time. It involves creating a community of professionals – meeting in person or online – that you keep updated about your work, and offer access to all or parts of it, for trialling and feedback.

The SEND Incubator programme clearly demonstrated the value of connecting with others to drive forward an innovation.

Examples include the **Quality of Life Network** developed by Swalcliffe Park School, which aims to improve quality of life for students with autism and their families, by continually gathering their views and feeding them into all decisions made about school life – from governance to curriculum and beyond.
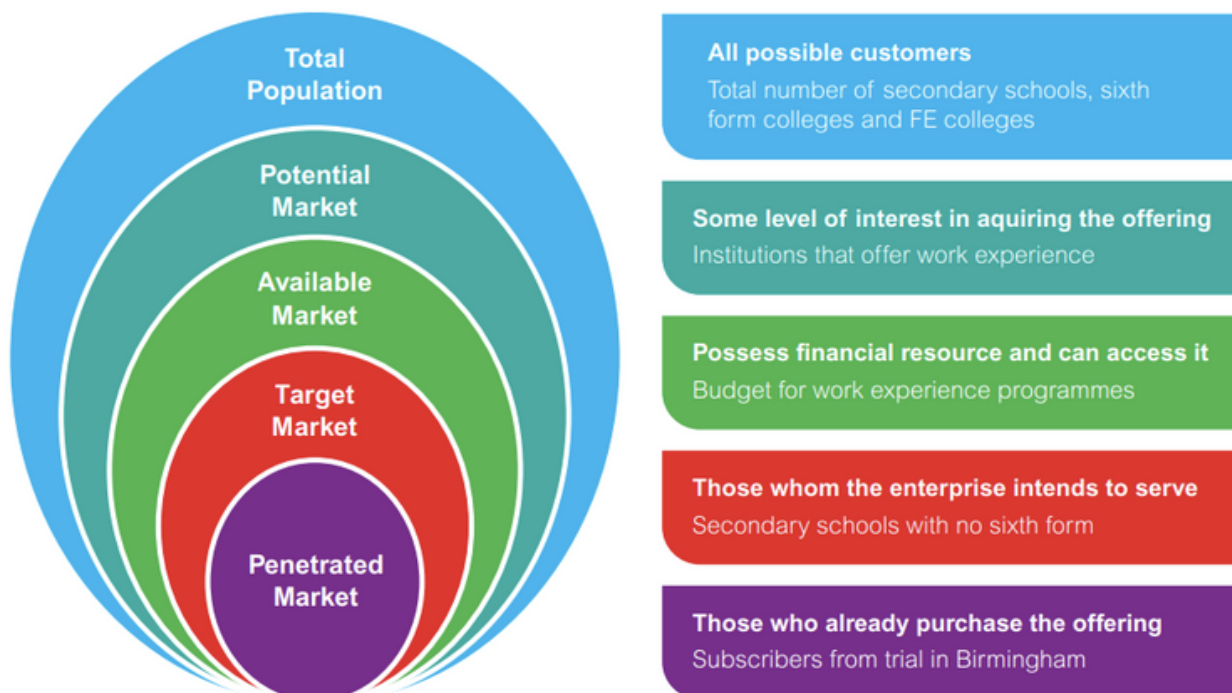
These different models can be used in combination as well as separately, costed or free. Further models might work better for your innovation, such as a franchise approach.

4 Developing a marketable offer

While 'market research' might sound a bit commercial, it's important to find out who else is doing something similar to you, why are you different or better, and whether anyone actually wants to use an innovation like yours.

This example might help you think about the target market for your innovation, and how it might develop over time.

Example: Work experience matching portal for employers and schools

Total Population — All possible customers. Total number of secondary schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges

Potential Market — Some level of interest in aquiring the offering. Institutions that offer work experience

Available Market — Possess financial resource and can access it. Budget for work experience programmes

Target Market — Those whom the enterprise intends to serve. Secondary schools with no sixth form

Penetrated Market — Those who already purchase the offering. Subscribers from trial in Birmingham

And this simple table is a way of starting to break down who might find your innovation useful, how they could use it, and how you engage with them about it.

Who?	What?	How?	Where?
Primary Schools Secondary Schools	Workshops Mentoring	Events Social media	London Rest of SE England
Your turn…			

> **You can't just pick up an innovation and transplant it into a school! You need to be like a consultant, think about a whole school change programme.**

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5 Project planning

As your innovation takes shape, you will have your own way of planning your activity and keeping it on track. Our key learning here was to plan carefully for the sustainability of the work. What happens to it if you – or the lead person – moves school or changes roles? How will you keep momentum going when a dozen things a day happen in school to knock you off course? Do you have time to develop the innovation on top of your 'day job'?

> **I wish I'd had dedicated development time. It's just had to fit into the cracks – evenings and weekend, and that's not sustainable**

The schools we worked with consistently referenced the benefits of coaching, peer support, and support from school leadership, as critical to creating momentum and progressing their work. Make sure you find a support system that works for you. Plan in regular points to check your progress.

> **It's not straightforward, it's not linear and that's OK – it's all part of the process, to hear how others found a way through is reassuring**

Dovetailing with your school's development or improvement plan – or your wider strategic plan – will embed your innovation, give you deadlines to hit, and make it sustainable beyond your personal involvement.

> **The CEO wanted it done and opened every door I wanted opening.**

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Our schools picked up some important things to consider in their project planning that hadn't been immediately obvious:

IT support for an App or platform

Bringing SLT with you

Intellectual property

Developing an infrastructure to support wider roll-out

Legal contracts

Getting impact data from partner schools

Monitoring use, getting feedback to inform continuous improvement

The Princes Trust has some **free planning templates and tools** to help you get started.

6 Developing your pitch

Why do I need a pitch?

Pitching is a great way to raise the profile of your innovation, and get other schools, partners or investors engaged in your work. It's essentially your 5 minute outline of why your work matters and why people should get involved or use it.

> **All these different opportunities to present your pitch, to people from different places, to be able to get that feedback was really good.**

What should it cover?

Your passion for supporting young people with SEND is likely to be your greatest asset. Even better if you have young people or families who want to help you demonstrate the impact of your innovation themselves. Feedback from critical friends on our innovation programme told us that this is what 'lit up' the work. Let it shine during your pitch where possible.

Broadly a good structure is:

1. Who you are
2. What you're doing
3. Why you're doing it

A free pitch structure which fleshes this out further is available from **PitchTape**.

Free online tools for creating a pitch

Having a video of your pitch means you have something more engaging than an email to send to people who are interested in your work. It can help you hone how you talk about your innovation even further.

PitchTape is a free service that will help you to record your pitch, as well as structure and script it. It has tele-prompting, timing prompts and simple editing tools. They have useful guidance on **how to record an effective pitch** as well as a **script template** and some example videos.

Loom is another free service. It allows you to film yourself in a 'window' while you talk through a website, powerpoint or other online content. It might work well if you have an online resource that you'd like to show people, or for follow up contact, when people have heard your initial pitch and are ready for more detail about your work.

You can view an example pitch video from Swalcliffe Park, one of the schools that took part in our innovation programme, about their **Quality of Life Network here**.

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Cheat sheet
key learning in a nutshell

We asked the teachers and leaders on our innovation programme what the best advice they received was. Here is their key learning in bite-sized chunks

Getting started

- Define the problem you are solving as well as you can, as soon as you can.

- Get support and buy in from key people early on – leaders in your school, colleagues in the classroom.

- Do your research. Finding out what else exists in your space means you might find someone else is already doing it better.

- Small is beautiful! So start small. School staff are often looking for simple, practical resources that meet their students' needs, rather a big, complex programme

Building your network

- Make connections wherever you can. Creating your innovation in a bubble means it will only work in a bubble. Talk to young people, families, and colleagues to trial and test it.

- Give people a 'gateway' to your innovation – a simple audit tool, a lesson plan that illustrates your approach. Give them a bite-sized way to understand it.

- Communicate about your work regularly and clearly – keep all your audiences updated.

Sustaining momentum

- Find resources to boost your resilience: a coach, a peer group, a supportive colleague or manager to give you feedback. Protect dedicated time to focus on your innovation.

- What seems like a set-back can be a spring board. Covid opened up online delivery routes, reaching bigger audiences. The delay allowed us time to rethink our approach.

- Your innovation may never be 'finished', and that's ok. Think iPhones: there's always an upgrade, an adaptation, a new angle. Good innovations continue to evolve.

Understanding your impact

- Some innovations won't work, and that's ok too. Finding things that don't work gets you closer to finding things that do. Be honest about the impact you're having.

- Measuring impact accurately is hard, but as teachers, you know more than you think. Think about what you can measure and where the gaps are. Draw on data already collected, existing research, tried and tested tools. Get a research partner if you need help.

- People will want to use your innovation flexibly, perhaps in ways that you never imagined. Let go, and trust schools to make your innovation work in new ways. But keep in touch, if you can, so you can learn from their experience.

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Find out more

For further information about about the NASS SEND Incubator, please contact NASS CEO, Claire Dorer at **cdorer@nasschools.org.uk** .

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National Association
of Special Schools

NASS is a membership organisation representing special schools in England and Wales providing support, advice, information, events, training, and a strong voice for non-maintained special schools.

Our vision is for all non local authority special schools to be centres of excellence, delivering and evidencing the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

We inform and support our members, enabling them to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

We represent our members, influencing policy and practice as the voice of non-maintained special schools.

We recognise, research and share approaches that deliver positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

⊘ Be informed   ⊘ Be recognised   ⊘ Be represented   **Belong at nasschools.org.uk**

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