

Addressing the surge in SEND educational psychology assessments in England



How Comensura enables local authorities to meet legal and educational obligations efficiently.

England has seen a sharply increased demand for Educational Psychology assessments, straining local authorities due to recruitment issues, service disparities, and assessment backlogs. This case study examines these challenges, highlights Comensura's tailored procurement solutions, and details the positive impacts achieved for local authorities, children, and families.



The Challenge

Recent government figures show the number of pupils identified as having SEND in England has grown by 87,000 since 2022, now exceeding 1.5 million.

This surge has resulted in more EHCP requests, each requiring input from an educational psychologist. However, **88% of local authorities have reported severe difficulties recruiting EPs, citing pay and workload as major barriers.** The shortage has created a national bottleneck, resulting in long waiting lists and increased pressure on permanent local authority teams whose morale is declining under the strain.

Service inequality further complicates access, with some local authorities offering free EP services and others charging high fees, creating a "postcode lottery." The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated educational and emotional challenges, intensifying the need for psychological support.

As a result, **local authorities face legal risks for failing to obtain EP advice during statutory assessments, including tribunal challenges, ombudsman rulings, and financial penalties for delays.** The backlog of EP assessments continues to grow, adversely affecting children, their families, and schools.

The Solutions

Comensura's service procurement solution addresses these issues by enabling local authorities to access proven EP specialists through a bespoke bidding process on c.net.

This approach enables local authorities to select partners based on historic performance data and supplier proposal assessments. **Suppliers offer flexible delivery models tailored to the local authority's requirements, including face-to-face assessments and quality assurance measures.**

Pricing is fixed per assessment, and payment is contingent on satisfaction with completed work, giving local authorities greater visibility and control over expenditure. Essentially, c.net serves as a central hub for project information and spend tracking.

Outcomes

By managing the process and offering service procurement solutions that adapt to specific organisational needs, **Comensura helps local authorities meet demand efficiently - even accommodating variable assessment allocations within a 3-12 month timeframe.**

Local authorities now have a clear process for quickly procuring EP services, whether through direct awards or competitive bidding, enabling them to respond proactively to future backlogs. **To date, Comensura has managed over £4.2 million in EP-focused spend across six local authorities, completing approximately 2,800 assessments.**

They contract with 29 social care specialist providers, 10 of which are EP-specific. Local authorities that have adopted Comensura's service procurement solution are no longer at risk of breaching the Children and Families Act 2014 or the SEND Code of Practice, ensuring that **children receive timely and tailored care.** Permanent teams benefit from reduced pressure and improved morale, minimising the need for temporary staffing.



Testimonial

"I found the Comensura Service Procurement solution very, very easy and their team extremely support throughout the process. My issue with our temp supply route is that it's so labour intensive and I have to go through lots of information and process to get anything done.

Now, I choose SOW every time! I need flexibility with our EP solution as the amount of assessments needing completing (allocation) can vary within a 3-12 month timeframe so I needed an adaptive partner who can respond quickly and efficiently and upscale or downscale their operating model to meet my needs."