

Research Manager

Reports to: Head of Policy, Esther Fisher

Start date: As soon as possible

Location: Hybrid with 50% office presence in London (Bethnal Green)

Contract: Permanent, 0.7-1.0 FTE, with options for flexible working

Salary: £40,000 - £50,000 depending on experience (+6% employer pension contribution and sector-leading parental leave policy shared with all applicants)

Closing date for applications: 9am Monday 6th July

First round interviews will be held: Wednesday 15th July

Second round interviews will be held: Tuesday 21st July

Our Organisation: The Difference

Every day, the equivalent of 5,500 children are suspended from England's schools. Their likelihood of being NEET (not in education, employment or training) by 24 will then double. Lost learning like this is happening to those children facing the most crisis in their lives: children facing mental health challenges, living in poverty, with threats to their safety, neurodiverse or already falling behind in learning, facing discrimination inside and outside the school gates. These are the children who need school the most. Today, they're getting the least.

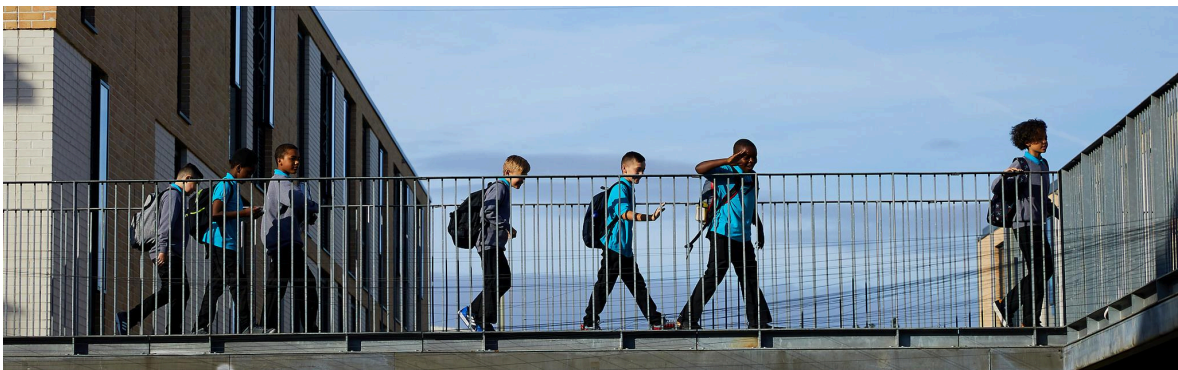
The Difference is a young education charity, founded to change this story on lost learning through whole school inclusion. Six years later, The Difference has shifted national inclusion through its three levers:

- **People** - The Difference has trained 1,000 headteachers, deputy and assistant heads, and begun working with MATs and LAs to measurably reduce lost learning. Through programmes we are changing how schools capture data to measure and reduce lost learning, and how everyday staff and student interactions change children's belonging and engagement.
- **Practice** - Having won a competitive research tender from Education Endowment Foundation and Youth Endowment Trust, The Difference is known as an expert in the growing area of internal Alternative Provision: an upstream approach to reducing lost learning. This year we have been sharing this via training with schools and local authorities across the country, and advising the Department and Ofsted on how to define good practice and inspect against it.
- **Policy** - Last year our IPPR report Who is Losing Learning convened a Council drawn from across civil society to define inclusion. This has already influenced the sector, with 60 organisations signing up to this definition, and Founder Kiran advising on Ofsted's approach to inclusion. We are now hoping to shape definitions within the white paper through Kiran's position on Minister Gould's SEND Development Group.

The Difference's Vision is to see lost learning falling nationally by 2030.

It feels schools are at a national tipping point. With changes in Ofsted and the biggest special needs reforms for decades, this could be the moment that England's schools become more inclusive. But the path ahead is challenging:

- As policy direction turns to practicalities, government plans must avoid perverse incentives.
- As the firing pistol sounds for multi academy trusts and local authorities to change the ways they operate, a new generation of middle-tier leaders must be supported to become sector-leaders.
- And with new expectations but few exemplars, school practice which *truly* changes pupils' outcomes (rather than hiding vulnerable children away) must be researched and codified.



The Opportunity: Research Manager

This is a hands-on research role at the centre of The Difference's practice and policy functions. The Research Manager will help generate sector-leading insights from our partner schools, convene the sector to build consensus on emerging areas of practice, and produce publications that shape national debate on lost learning and inclusion.

This role will suit someone genuinely flexible. The work moves between two registers: structured research projects with analytical underpinning (multi-month thematic publications; convening a Solutions Council-style framework around an emerging area of practice), and reactive policy work. You'll need to be comfortable in all modes, and able to make sensible judgement calls about when each is needed.

Key Areas of Responsibility

1. Lead The Difference's qualitative research and insight function

- Run the research workstreams tied to the Difference Schools Partnership (DSP) annual thematic priorities — Year 1: inclusion bases; Year 2: reintegration; Year 3: whole school inclusion — and the emerging strands on MAT inclusion (including data) and LA working.
- Design and deliver qualitative research with schools, MATs and local authorities — interviews, focus groups, school visits, thematic analysis.

- Develop analytical frameworks that translate findings into evidence and policy recommendations, working closely with colleagues across Strategy and Research.
- Where external research partners are commissioned (e.g. FFT Datalab, Pro Bono Economics for quantitative impact analysis), brief, manage and integrate their outputs.

2. Convene the sector around emerging areas of inclusive practice

- Lead The Difference's Harmful and Abusive Behaviours (HaB) research workstream – convening a sector council around a shared framework for how schools understand and respond to peer-on-peer harm, discrimination, abuse and serious behaviour incidents. Modelled on the Who is Losing Learning Solutions Council and the IAP Symposium approaches.
- Recruit and manage council membership; produce briefing material; co-chair facilitation; manage the route from convening to publication.
- Run roundtables, workshops and sector engagement sessions that feed into framework development and wider Difference publications.
- Apply the same convening discipline to other emerging areas as they arise.

3. Produce timely, citable evidence for policy influence

- Work closely with the Head of Policy to map policy windows against the evidence each will require.
- Draft briefings, consultation responses and evidence submissions on fast turnaround – this is often a matter of days, not weeks.
- Capture and develop case studies from DSP schools and the wider Difference network.

4. Launch publications with impact

- Project manage publication cycles from scoping through to launch.
- Work with external partners (e.g. coalition partners such as IPPR, or media partners such as Policy First) where co-publication adds reach.
- Work with the CEO, Head of Policy and Communications team on press and event strategy at launch.
- Track impact post-launch (citations, uptake, policy traction, sector engagement) and feed learning back into the next cycle.

The Difference is still a small and growing charity. This means that our work is fast-paced, our roles are broad, and there is a culture of being highly autonomous, reactive and flexible, as the needs of the organisation evolve.

Person Specification

Essential

We are looking for someone with most of the following, though you may be stronger in some areas than others.

- **Dual capability across reactive and structured research.** Comfortable producing a tight briefing or consultation response on a 48–72 hour turnaround, and running a multi-month thematic publication with proper qualitative analysis behind it.
- **Experience in education research, policy research or applied social research,** with examples of published, commissioned or internally-influential work.
- **Strong qualitative research skills** – interview and focus group design, thematic coding, framework development, synthesis across multiple sources.
- **Persuasive writing for mixed audiences.** Able to write for policymakers, school leaders, the press and the sector – clear, concise, and tuned to the audience. Comfortable ghost-writing for senior colleagues.
- **Project management discipline.** Able to design and run multiple workstreams in parallel, manage your own deadlines, and keep colleagues and external partners on track.
- **Comfortable working in a fast-moving environment** where priorities shift as policy windows open and close. Self-directed, flexible, and able to make sensible judgement calls under time pressure.

Desired

You are more likely to be successful in your application if you have one or more of the following:

- Strong working understanding of UK education policy, particularly around inclusion, exclusion, SEND, accountability and school improvement. You do not need deep expertise on day one, but you do need enough to be operational quickly and to develop expertise fast.
- Confident data literacy and basic quantitative analysis. Comfortable interrogating population level datasets – running descriptive analysis, spotting patterns, producing clear visualisations, and translating quantitative findings into accessible policy language. Experience with R, Python or similar tools is welcome but not required
- Strong understanding of why language matters when writing about behaviour, exclusion and vulnerability. Comfortable working within an editorial discipline that frames behaviour as a signal of unmet need rather than a characteristic of the child, and able to apply this consistently across drafting, convening and publication work. (We will share our Behaviour Language Guide as part of onboarding.)
- Familiarity with The Difference's programmatic work, theory of change or practice.
- Lived experience or insight into the school experiences of marginalised young people (e.g. those with experience of the care system, mental ill health, special educational needs, exclusion, racism, or LGBTQ+ identities).
- Experience of working in or with schools, multi-academy trusts or local authorities.
- Existing relationships in education research, policy or sector organisations.

We know that some people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, may hesitate to apply unless they meet every listed requirement. If this role excites you and you believe you could make a strong contribution, we warmly encourage you to apply.

We actively welcome applications from people whose backgrounds are under-represented in the charity sector, including but not limited to: people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, people with experience in the care system, non-graduates and first-in-family graduates.



The Difference Values

- **Relationships underpin success** - Strong relationships and the safety they bring are the foundation of achievement - for children, for school staff, in our workplace and in our collaborations. They enable higher trust, challenging feedback, bolder work and stronger impact.
- **We build stronger from assets** - Every child, family, school and community has strengths and successes. We avoid deficit-labels about teachers, children and families, and instead focus on building from what's strong.
- **Systems shape opportunities** - Actions always take place within systems. These can help or hinder individuals. We recognise the role of policy and structural inequalities and address them directly in our work.
- **Agency makes the difference** - Bold leadership by individuals can create significant and lasting change. We are proactive in addressing problems and seeking out opportunities.



Recommended Reading

If you'd like to understand more about The Difference and what we are trying to achieve, we would recommend the following:

- **Our research on the scale of the problem** [Who is Losing Learning?](#) (Sept 2024) and our recommendations, [Finding Solutions to the School Engagement Crisis](#) (March 2025)
- Our [2025-2030 Strategy](#) to reach our goal of lost learning, falling nationally
- [The Spark - Kiran Gill and Excluded Pupils](#) (2020) - **our founder Kiran Gill explores the genesis and mission of The Difference** in conversation with Helen Lewis, BBC Radio 4
- Our recent **research on** [Internal Alternative Provision](#)
- **Our latest** [Impact Report](#), sharing our work in 2023

How To Apply

Please click this [link](#) to access the application form.

Applications close at 9.00am on Monday 6th July

For an informal and confidential discussion about the role prior to application, please contact Rebecca Onumah (rebecca.o@the-difference.com), with a brief summary of your experience and questions that you have.

We are committed to building a diverse team and strongly encourage applications from under-represented groups in the charity sector such as people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities and people with experience in the care system.

As part of our commitment to fairer recruitment, all applications will be assessed with names and any protected characteristics redacted.

Come join the team!