

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2023 - 2024



# Table of contents

<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>2</b>
2. Service Delivery .....	3
3. Training .....	4
4. Ambassador Volunteer (AV) Programme .....	4
5. Strategic activity .....	5
6. Reference Group.....	5
<b>Service Overview .....</b>	<b>6</b>
7. Service Activity Overview for 2023-2024 .....	6
8. Outcomes and impact.....	14
9. Key messages from Parents and Carers .....	17
10. Key messages from Children and Young People .....	21
11. Conclusion and Recommendations .....	22
<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>25</b>

## Devon Information Advice and Support

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## Overview

There is a statutory duty for Education, Children's Social Care and Health to jointly commission impartial Information, Advice and Support (IAS) for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and their parents and carers. This is set out in the Children and Families Act and SEND Code of Practice.

Information Advice and Support Services (IASS) provide free impartial, confidential, and accurate information, advice and support about education, health and social care on matters relating to special educational needs and disability (SEND). This is for children and young people with SEND, and their parents. The remit of the service is described in the IASS National [Minimum standards](#).

Devon County Council (DCC) and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) meet their statutory responsibilities through the commissioning of the Devon Information, Advice and Support (DIAS) service. DIAS is an "in-house" service which means our staff are Local Authority employees. We operate as an "arm's-length" confidential, dedicated and easily identifiable service separate from the Local Authority and ICB.

DIAS is commissioned to support SEND improvement and transformation programmes. It provides strategic support and advice to improve services for children and young people with SEND and their families, including delivery of high-quality training. Any strategic messages to commissioners are managed under the clear need for DIAS to be impartial and confidential.

## 2. Service Delivery

DIAS delivers its commissioned service by providing information, advice and support, training and by supporting participation. This is provided through a team of fifteen part-time staff, including two lead officers who manage the team and supported by a cohort of volunteers. All DIAS staff have accredited legal training through the IASS national body.

### Information

The DIAS information offer has been developed with the intention of providing empowering self-help materials. These enable families to understand SEND law, local SEND processes, and how they can have constructive conversations with professionals and a voice in decisions.

DIAS has a specific and stand-alone [website](#), printed and online resources and a Facebook page. We have a designated member of staff skilled in information and communication delivery.

### Advice

DIAS advice and support levels are based on the national [SENDIASS Intervention Levels Guidance](#). DIAS provides advice through an enquiry line which is staffed from 10am to 3pm, five days a week. In general, the enquiry line provides level 1 and level 2 advice.

### Support

Support is provided for more complex issues or where service users' needs or circumstances are a significant barrier. The support is up to, and including, higher level legal processes such as Ombudsman complaints, disability discrimination claims, SEND Tribunal hearings, and judicial reviews.

Children and young people (CYP) access information, advice and support through the same routes as parent carers. DIAS can support CYP either alongside their parent carers, or independently.

DIAS has a group of skilled, trained volunteers who enhance the service offer by providing direct support for service users. This includes support at meetings, with paperwork, gathering and recording views and in some cases with mediation and appeals.

### 3. Training

DIAS has a remit to offer training for service users and professionals to increase knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local processes and participation. It provides a broad training offer tailored to the needs of service users which is developed based on feedback and types of enquiries to the service. The service also trains volunteers for the Ambassador Volunteer programme and DIAS volunteers who enhance the service support offer.

The service delivers online training and in person training for parents and carers. Information sessions are also delivered for professionals on the remit of the service and input to training for school SENCOs.

### 4. Ambassador Volunteer (AV) Programme

The [Ambassador Volunteer Programme](#) is a joint programme with Parent Carer Forum Devon (PCFD). Ambassador Volunteers connect parents within their own communities and more widely into a network across Devon.

The aim of the programme is a network of ambassadors for parents and carers of children with SEND, who act as points of contact in a school, group, or local area.

Local Authority and health services information is shared. Feedback is disseminated through strategic mechanisms.

A wide range of parents and professionals volunteer through the AV programme and are connected to a range of groups. The programme is managed by an AV coordinator working across DIAS and PCFD, and includes induction, training and ongoing support for volunteers.

## 5. Strategic activity

The minimum standards require an IASS to engage with regional and national strategic planning and training to inform service development. The IASS must also work with local partners, including local parent and young people forums to inform and influence policy and practice in the local area.

DIAS is involved with a range of strategic workstreams, has strong connections with the Parent Carer Forum, and links with regional and national IASS networks. Across Devon DIAS works with schools and other professionals to develop strategic relationships and support improved SEND practice. DIAS Lead Officers meet regularly with commissioners and SEND advisory services.

DIAS regularly report to Children's Scrutiny on annual performance and key strategic messaging from CYP and Parent Carers.

## 6. Reference Group

DIAS has a reference group of parents and professionals who are key stakeholders from education, care and health. Children and young people do not currently attend but their views and feedback are gathered and inform decisions. The purpose of the group is to monitor the service impartiality and enable the service to consult on development and delivery plans and outcomes.

The feedback and specific data contained within this Annual Report is provided for commissioners, to help them review service delivery and engagement with parents, carers and CYP.

# Service Overview

## 7. Service Activity Overview for 2023-2024

### Headline Data:

- 4459 **enquiries** where information, advice or support were provided.  
 ↑ **35%** from the previous reporting period.
- 88 **Children and young People** received information, advice and support in their own right.  
 ↑ **66%** from the previous reporting period.
- 772 service users were given **health** information, advice and support.  
 ↑ **22%** from the previous reporting period.
- 447 service users were given information, advice and support around **social care**.  
 ↑ **13%** from the previous reporting period.
- 601 enquiries where the primary area of need was **Social Emotional and Mental Health**.  
 Almost 20% of all enquiries, compared to 12.5% in the previous reporting period.
- A significant increase in enquiries relating to **school admissions and school placement**; 14.5% of all enquiries compared to 8.5% in the previous reporting period.
- A significant increase in requests for support with **EHC appeals and mediations**; 13.4% of all enquiries compared to 8.1% in the previous reporting period.
- An increase in the number of **website users**, from 24,000 to 28,000  
 ↑ **21%** from the previous reporting period.
- An increase of 66% in visits to the **DIAS Facebook page**, and an increase of  
 ↑ **178%** in content reaction
- 1,900 parent carers supported in person through the **Ambassador Volunteer Program**.

## 7.1 Enquiries

During the previous reporting period, 2022-23 we made significant changes to the way we provide information, advice and support and moved to a new helpline model and data recording system. The current data recording system was introduced in September 2022. As a result it is not possible to make direct comparisons with this reporting period for all data sets. Where direct comparisons are not possible, we have used percentages to enable comparisons.

### **Demand for the service continues to increase**

DIAS received a total of 4459 enquiries during the reporting period, 1163 more than in the previous reporting period, an increase of 35%.

As reported in the previous year, there was an upward trend in the number of enquiries month on month, with the highest number of enquiries received in March 2024; 488 compared to a mean of 370 per month, and the highest number of enquiries in the last reporting quarter (January-March) (fig.1.15). This reflects the continuing trend of an increase in enquiries to DIAS over the time since introducing the new way of working and recording system in 2022. This way of working has ensured that a higher level of support is provided for those who need it most, and has enabled the service to manage increasing demand. It has enabled the service to respond quickly to enquiries, with service users either typically waiting less than two working days for advice from the service. Service user feedback indicates a high level of satisfaction regarding accessibility and response time, as well as overall experience of the service. See Section 8.

### **Increase in enquiries for CYP with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs**

The primary presenting area of SEN is recorded for all enquiries to DIAS, where known. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) has consistently been the most common presenting need, and this remains the case, with 52% of all recorded SEN being ASC (fig.1.17). However, during this reporting period there was a marked increase in the number of enquiries where Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) was identified as primary presenting area of need (fig.1.17). Many of these enquiries related to access to SEN Support in school, Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA), accessing mental health support through early intervention services or CAMHS. The likelihood of SEMH needs becoming a barrier to learning and access to education appears to increase incrementally by year group from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 (fig.1.20)

### **Increase in Tribunal support**

The number of enquiries about tribunal and mediation appeals, and school placement, saw a marked increase from the previous reporting period (fig.1.21). Families often contact DIAS when they disagree with statutory decisions by the Local Authority, relating to EHC plans. The DIAS team discuss options with families, including their right to mediation and to appeal the decision through the SEND Tribunal. Advice always focuses on other options including liaising with school about SEN support; contact with the Local Authority to help them understand the reasons for the decision, and to explore whether there are informal



routes for resolving disagreements. During this period, DIAS gave direct support to 70 service users to access the SENDIST appeal process, including support at 12 tribunal hearings. In 24 cases, hearings were avoided with DIAS support, with a positive resolution being achieved ahead of the hearing.

### **Increase in direct support for children and young people**

DIAS provided information advice or support to 88 children and young people (CYP), compared to 53 in the previous year. Most CYP received support at Intervention Level 3 (fig.1.17). Most CYP who received support from DIAS were secondary school age, with the highest proportion in Key Stage 4 (year groups 9-11).

Children and young people requested support for a range of reasons. The most common reasons were:

- being part of the planning process for how they are supported at school
- sharing their views on why they are unable to attend school or college or what would help them to be able to reengage with education
- sharing their views, wishes and aspirations as part of an EHC needs assessment or review
- understanding their rights and how to participate in decisions around asking for a particular school or college placement.

We received an increased number of requests from SENDIST and the Local Authority SEND Tribunal Team to support young people to give their views independently of parents and carers, when an Appeal was in process.

### **Increase in enquiries from professionals seeking information and advice across education, health and social care**

DIAS received almost 200 professional enquiries, from a range of services across Education, Health and Social Care, including: Adoption Support; Children's Social Care; Action for Children; Early Help; Adult Social Care; CAMHS; Mental Health in Schools Team; Community Nursing, and the Charitable Sector. Enquiries from the Education Sector included requests for information and advice from School Staff, Early Years Settings and FE colleges across including mainstream and specialist settings, and the independent sector.

Professionals contacted DIAS to seek information and advice across a wide range of issues including:

- EHC needs assessment and review processes, and how to provide professional evidence
- their role in a SEND Tribunal, including how to write a witness statement and what to expect at a hearing
- access to support for children excluded from school or unable to attend due to medical needs
- access to specialist equipment in schools for children with disabilities

- mental capacity and deputyship for young people
- access to education and SEN Support for young people in Further Education settings.
- support for children and families around bullying
- post diagnosis support for children with Autism, and training and support for families
- Elective Home Education and the implications of a child with SEN being taken off school roll
- routes for clinical assessments including for ADHD and Autism
- access to support for families who have English as an Additional Language
- the process for requesting a social care assessment for families of children with disabilities
- peer support groups for families of children with SEND

## 7.2 Information

In response to service user enquiries and feedback, information and resources have been developed around the following key areas:

- New information about SEND funding and a SEN Support jargon buster and a short film about how to get the best from using the website.
- A comprehensive booklet for parent carers called SEN Support in Schools. This was the most viewed resource on the website.
- Development of two major topic areas for the parent carer area of the website - Social Care and Suspension and Exclusion. These are based on the questions that service users ask.
- A monthly and annual social media calendar was created, to help us focus on particular topics and themes throughout the year and steer users towards important information. We had a strong focus on SEN Support throughout the year, highlighting new resources.
- Making Sense Mondays on Facebook – opportunities each week to explain SEND terms and words.

The DIAS website continues to be a well-used resource. The number of users increased by 20% compared to the previous year, and the number of return visitors, compared to new ones, has also increased. The range of information topics web users looked at significantly broadened over the course of the year. At the start of the year, the top 25 most visited pages focused mostly on EHC processes, child and parent views and what the service offers. By the end of the year the mix was much more varied, with information about SEND support, key SEND terms and principles and meetings also included.

On Facebook, there was an increase in the number of posts, reach, followers, views and interactions. The response to Making Sense Monday posts was also positive, with users commenting on how much they liked it and how helpful it was.

A rolling review programme of DIAS information began this year. All DIAS information includes a publication date and is reviewed approximately every two years. This helps to increase trust in the reliability and accuracy of the site.

Our social media channel is Facebook, and the audience and interaction with our page has changed over this year. DIAS published over 500 posts across the year. There was a specific focus on particular topics at different points in the year, based on the trends in enquiries eg relating to school transition, applying for school places, and holiday activities. The number of page visits increased by 66%, to 4,400, and content interactions increased by 178%.

### 7.3 Training

In 2023-2024 DIAS delivered 10 training and information sessions to 160 people. This year there has been a review and revision of the DIAS Training offer. The service has appointed a specific Training Officer, working 0.2fte, who developed an overview training plan focussed on consultation with users and stakeholders and then created a new training offer based on the findings.

The virtual training sessions - EHC reviews, Demystifying SEND and Listening to your child's views - were modified and shortened. Over the year they were delivered to 120 parents at 9 sessions. A SEND training session for Multi Academy Trust staff was delivered face to face to 40 professionals.

Parent carers, DIAS staff and volunteers were asked to complete separate surveys about training needs for parent carers.

The top four were:

- mental health issues, including anxiety, absence and school avoidance
- support for specific conditions or special educational needs - such as ADHD, autism, trauma or dyslexia
- EHC plans and Reviews
- SEN Support in school

A staff and parent working group met to develop training about two of these – EHC plans and reviews and SEN support in school. The other two topic areas highlighted by the survey will need more specialist input.

## 7.4 Volunteers

DIAS works with a team of trained volunteers, who enhance the DIAS offer and capacity, by supporting in a range of roles including:

- Attending meetings with parent carers
- Supporting with completing forms including CFHD referrals; EHC needs assessment requests; Parental Views for EHC needs assessments and reviews, and SEND Tribunal Appeal forms
- Attending networking and training events to support DIAS staff
- Data Analysis
- Checking and Proof Reading DIAS resources and information

DIAS has 8 active volunteers, who are provided with regular training and supervision by the DIAS Volunteer Coordinator.

## 7.5 Ambassadors Programme

A new Ambassador Volunteer Co-ordinator (AVC) was appointed in June 2023

- There are 35 trained Ambassador Volunteers across Devon
- Volunteers have a wide reach on various online platforms (Facebook pages, websites, YouTube channels etc): 49,489
- Volunteers provided in-person support to approximately (1,900 parent/carers).
- The AVC has visited, or had meetings with, 18 secondary and primary schools across the county.
- The AVC met with Action for Children Managers to link the Ambassador Volunteer programme with Family Hubs. Children's Centre staff will be trained as AVs in April 2024, significantly increasing the reach of the programme into 2024-25.
- The AVC delivered 45 training sessions to parent groups, groups of professionals and volunteers

Feedback from AVs has been used to:

- Develop resources for Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA). A working group was formed with the DIAS Information Officer.
- Finalise DIAS 'At Risk of Exclusion' guidance.

- Inform the SEND Improvement Strategy. AVs are working with the Local Authority SEND Strategic Director, as part of a working group to develop the SEND strategy.
- An AV was part of the Neurodiversity Expert Reference Group, reviewing and giving feedback on the Autism Strategy development work.
- Inform SEND Strategic Team Managers of challenges and successes from the perspective of parents.
- Review changes to EHC Hub.
- Develop a survey for parent carers on Short Break provision.

**Feedback from Ambassador Volunteers on the impact they have made:**

“When given notice through the AV network of any training for parents I make sure it is communicated with parents and carers. I've had feedback from parents and the SENCO that they are of great benefit. It also gets passed through out the learning academy for a wider distribution” (from an AV who is also a Teaching Assistant)

“I supported a parent to access support and services they weren't aware of before.”

“informing parents of DLA and helping them fill in the form and seeing the difference it makes to their family when they are awarded DLA and then Carers Allowance feels most successful.”

“I talked to a parent at a drop in at a school who was really stressed. I managed to get the family support worker to speak to her. The support worker relayed that parent was grateful.”



For more information read the Ambassador Volunteer [Annual Report 2024](#)

## 7.5 Strategic Input to Improving Services for CYP and Families

DIAS connection with key strategic SEND improvement areas developed during the reporting period. DIAS leads and staff:

- made links with new Local Authority SEND managers and leaders to build their understanding of how we could contribute to strategic discussions of SEND improvement and provide feedback and themes from service users, to improve operational practice.
- met with the Councillors Children's Standing Overview Group to report observations of SEND delivery and impact.
- contributed to a review of SEND Improvement Task Groups.
- became active contributors to the Ordinarily Available Inclusive Provision (OAIP) development work, and supported parent participation through the Ambassador Volunteers network.
- engaged in the Local Offer development work utilising the information and website expertise of our Information Officer.
- became involved in the Local Authority SEND quality performance reporting and monitoring and sits on the SEND Transformation Programme Board.
- supported the agenda of improving coproduction with Education, Health and Care partners in Devon in strategic discussions and links with PCFD, including through the Ambassador Volunteer programme and running a workshop at the Devon SEND conference.

Health funding for the service was prioritised and confirmed to make the area wide partnership statutorily compliant. Work with the commissioners continued to confirm the Service Level Agreement and termly meetings with commissioners commenced. Commissioners reported that DIAS data and feedback was helpful in understanding impact of services and they wanted to increase the range reported. Strategic work with health and social care partners was discussed with commissioners to identify appropriate links but needs further development.

The DIAS Reference group membership was reviewed to improve representation from all key stakeholders, meeting again from June 2023. Engagement of children and young people in the Reference Group is still an area for development.

Links with a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) SEND departments continued, DIAS attended their SEND conference and provided input to SENCO training. DIAS linked widely across Devon with SENCOs but strategic engagement with MATs continues to be an area for development.

DIAS continued to actively engage in regional and national IASS networks.

## 8. Outcomes and impact

We are continually striving to reflect on and improve our offer to ensure that families get the support they want and need. We do this by capturing feedback in a variety of ways and making changes to reflect this.

### National reporting

Our service also reports nationally on its impartiality and effectiveness, gathered through an online survey of service users. This is what they told us:

#### Percentage of users who gave 4 or 5 stars (out of 5)

How easy was it to get in touch with us?

84%

How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?

90%

How neutral, fair, and unbiased do you think we were?

92%

What difference do you think our support made for you?

86%

Overall, how satisfied with the service were you?

91%

How likely is it that you would recommend us to others?

90%

## Service user feedback

### Feedback from Parent / Carers

“Thank you for all your help over the months. It has been an incredibly stressful process and your help shone a light in on the darkest days of it.”

“After our conversation I now feel much more informed and I have much more of the language to understand what I can ask for. I feel much more confident to be able to have a meeting with school rather than just asking ‘what can you do to help?’”

“It's been such a helpful call. I have been thinking what's the point of calling any services. They never call back or there is 2 year waiting list. I'm so impressed with your service - I can't believe you called me back!”

“Thank you so much for your time spent talking to me. I felt empowered and equipped on how best to manage the support for our son afterwards and I am so grateful.”

“I was very grateful for your email, it took me through step by step what I needed to do and am in a much better place than I was last week, thank you so much. I feel confident now to...find the information I need moving forward.”

### Feedback from Children and Young People

“I just tried the speech typing and it's so good, thank you for suggesting it. I love it just got a paragraph on a document in about 5 minutes, that would have taken me much longer normally.” From a Young Person the DIAS CYP worker was supporting – I've been trying to empower them to become more independent so suggested the dictation feature on MS word.

“Thank you so much for your emails and phone calls. Being heard has made such a difference to me.”



### Feedback on DIAS Resources

"I have contacted the school to arrange a meeting and I will use the DIAS forms as prompts, questions and my child's voice. Thank you so much it feels a relief to feel heard and offered some support." Parent / carer

"I contacted DIAS last year when I felt like I was getting nowhere with school. They helped me to prepare for the meeting and I also used the resources on the website. I felt much more confident going into the meeting and I got what I wanted from it." Parent/carers

"DIAS resources are excellent and have certainly helped us to feel confident in asking for our child's needs and challenges to be fully addressed." Parent/ carer

### Feedback from Professionals

Until DIAS Staff visited, I was unaware of the support DIAS can provide. This was really helpful to know. I will also share this with our Local SEND network." School SENCO

"Thank you for all your information, it's been really helpful" Professional wanting guidance on writing a witness statement for a Tribunal Appeal

"This is fantastic! (DIAS CYP Resources) Thank you so much! I think having this information up in the centre will be very valuable to young people in all of our sessions!:"

## 9. Key messages from Parents and Carers

### Education

#### SEN Support

Parents and carers often feel that their child will not receive SEN Support in school without an EHC plan.

DIAS receives a high number of requests for advice and support with completing EHC needs assessment requests. This is most common where children are not attending school or have low school attendance, where children are home educated or where parents feel that schools do not fully understand their children's SEN.

In some cases, families tell us that they have been advised by health or social care professionals to request an EHC needs assessment as their child will need an EHC plan to access support; for example when they have received an ASC diagnosis, are referred to CAMHS, or when they have requested a social care assessment or Early Help is initiated.

Many of the parent/ carers who contacted DIAS were unclear about how they or their child's school should seek advice or refer to external agencies. Often parents expressed frustration about the lack of clarity around whether they can make a referral themselves, or if it should be through their GP or school.

Parents often contact DIAS when their child is approaching transition from primary to secondary school. Many parents express concern that their child will not receive SEN support in secondary school without a statutory plan, or that secondary schools are less likely to make reasonable adjustments for children with SEN and disabilities.

#### EHCP statutory processes

The number of requests for advice and support from families experiencing delays with statutory processes has increased during this reporting period. DIAS often hears from parents who are expressing concern and want advice about next steps where the EHC process has exceeded the statutory timescales.

Families also contact for advice when they have been notified by the Local Authority that they will not carry out an EHC needs assessment. Parents often express distress or frustration as they don't understand the reason for the decision, and they are unsure of what options are open to them.

Where the Local Authority have made a decision that parents and carers don't agree with; for example not to carry out an EHC needs assessment, or where they have not named parents' preferred school or amended the plan following an EHC review, parents and carers tell us that they often find it difficult to get clear communication or answers to their questions about why decisions have been made.

## Mediation and Appeal

DIAS received a higher number of requests for advice and support with mediations and SENDIST appeals than in previous reporting periods. Parents and carers often express that they feel that there is no alternative and that they have been unable to resolve disagreements informally.

During this period, the number of appeals registered with SENDIST increased nationally, and the timescale between cases being registered to being heard extended significantly. Many parents and carers who contacted DIAS expressed concern and frustration at this, and felt that they were left 'in limbo' whilst waiting to appeal.

Parents and carers often expressed that where an appeal had been registered, particularly where the appeal was for a change in the placement named in the plan, there was often a lack of engagement from the mainstream school named, or from the LA to seek early resolution.

## Local Offer

Parents have often told us that they struggle to find information on the DCC Local Offer. In particular, families have expressed difficulty in finding information about choosing a school place with an EHC plan; the difference between maintained schools, Section 41 registered schools and independent schools. Many parents tell us that they have been signposted to DIAS to provide advice around school places, and find it frustrating that we cannot recommend specific schools. Whilst there is information on the Local Offer about maintained special schools, parents often tell us that they are told those schools are at capacity, and that they are unsure what other options are available.

## Health

### Awaiting Assessment

Many of the parents who contact DIAS express frustration at the wait for an ASC assessment for their child. Families sometimes tell us that their child has a 'working diagnosis' of autism, but they are sometimes unsure what this means. Whilst many educational professionals tell families that support is based on need rather than a diagnosis, many parents tell us that is not their experience, and that they feel access to services, or understanding of their child's needs are often based on a clinical diagnosis.

Where children have ongoing health needs, parents often express that they feel caught in the middle between school and health professionals, as schools will sometimes say that they are unable to make certain provisions without additional staffing, but that they are unable to fund this. Families often tell us that involvement of relevant health professionals at school or Team around the Family Meetings are helpful in addressing their concerns and ensuring that there is an holistic approach to their child's support.

## Health Referrals

There were a high number of enquiries to DIAS asking for advice and support with completing Children and Family Health Devon referrals during this reporting period. Many families told us that they found the forms overwhelming and inaccessible, particularly parents and carers who had additional needs themselves or who didn't have access to digital technology. DIAS supported a number of families face to face to complete the forms.

## EBSA and SEMH

The number of parents who contacted DIAS about difficulties relating to school attendance increased during this reporting period. Many felt that their children had unaddressed anxiety and mental health issues, but told us that they were waiting a long time for support from CAMHS, that their child's needs didn't meet thresholds for intervention, or that they were told that their needs were due to lack of SEN support rather than an underlying mental health need. Parents often tell us that school staff are willing to put support in place but that this can only happen within the school; where a child is unable to attend, parents describe feeling helpless and unsure where to turn. A number of parents have contacted us to ask about how much they should 'force' school; describing situations where they are physically carrying children out of the car, and where children are being restrained at school to prevent them leaving at the start of the day. Parents often tell us that school staff also feel unsure about how they should support in these situations, particularly where this isn't advice from health professionals about how to support with a child's mental health, and whether they are able to be in school.

## Social Care

### Experiences and challenges for families of children with Disabilities

Families who contact DIAS often describe very challenging home experiences, including supporting children and young people who struggle with social isolation, self-harm, managing online interactions and screentime, sleep difficulties and significant difficulties regulating their emotions and behaviours. Often parents feel that this is exacerbated because their child is struggling to manage the school environment, particularly where they feel their needs are not fully understood. Many parents share experiences of child on parent and sibling violence and are often unsure where to seek support around this.

Some families have shared positive experience of support through the Family Intervention Team and Family Practitioners. Many who are supported by voluntary groups, charities or Community Interest Company (CIC) express that having support in their own community has a positive impact on their ability to manage their situation and helps them to manage and access services and understand their entitlements, as well as providing peer support.

## **Social Care assessment and support for children with disabilities**

Parents appear to have varying experiences of social care involvement. Some parents tell us that they have had a large number of social workers in a short period of time, and are sometimes unsure about how social care involvement changes their situation. Many parent carers of children with disabilities are unaware of their rights under Section 17 of the Children Act.

Parents who contact DIAS often ask about the criteria and thresholds for a social care assessment through Disabled Children's Services. Many are unsure about the route for requesting this, and are sometimes unclear about the process or what support is available.

There has been an increase in the number of families contacting DIAS to seek advice around finding enabling services with the training and expertise to support children and young people with SEND. Many parents told us that they have difficulty knowing how to find information on what is available, and how to be sure that services are appropriate and quality assured.

## 10. Key messages from Children and Young People

Many of the children and young people who are supported by DIAS have clear views and aspirations for their futures. They are also able to identify the possible barriers to achieving these goals, and suggest things that might help overcome them.

Many of the CYP DIAS supported described peer relationships and social anxiety becoming more of a challenge in secondary school. For those young people who were of college age, many described looking forward to college as a new start, and positive feelings around being able to follow a course or study subjects they were interested in or would enable them to work towards a particular career path. But for those who had been unable to continue on their course, they often described feeling overwhelmed by large FE college environments, and struggling with the expectation to attend full time.

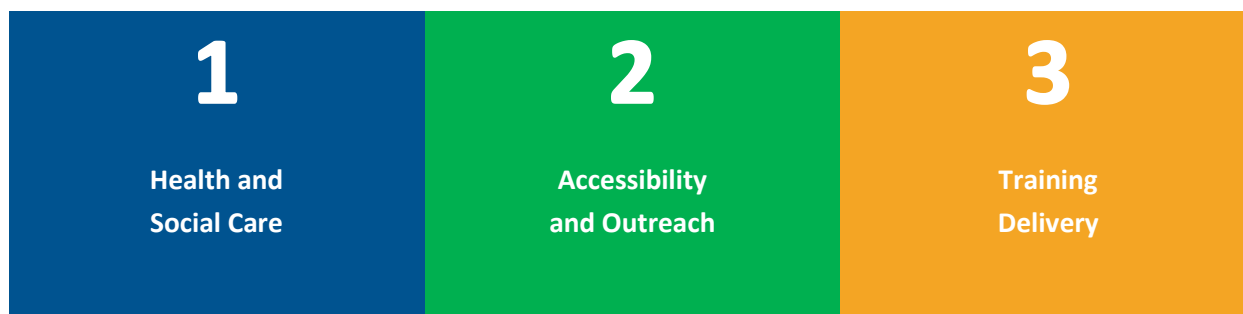
Many children and young people express the importance of friendships, and of having a sense of belonging and acceptance by peers. For some of the CYP DIAS supported, they identified this as a challenge, particularly those who were having difficulty attending school or college.

Many of the children and young people DIAS supported were experiencing challenges relating to poor mental health, and high anxiety. Many expressed frustration at the lack of mental health support in school or college, and about the long wait for support through CAMHS. For those who had received mental health support, many felt that they would benefit from longer periods of intervention and ongoing support.

For those children and young people who have been out of education for significant periods of time, many were able to describe their aspirations for the future, but were unclear of the steps to enable them to achieve these. Many children approaching college age who had either missed significant amounts of school, were home educated, or had received online education, had not had access to careers advice and were often unclear about what opportunities were available for them post-16.

## 11. Conclusion and Service Development

The DIAS operational plan for 2023-24 focused on three areas:



### Health and Social Care

DIAS staff received training on social care law, delivered by external partners and through the National IASS Network. DIAS staff developed operational links with teams from within Disabled Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Early Help, and Children and Family Health Devon. This has enabled the service to provide informed, accurate and broader advice and support around Health and Social Care. DIAS Leads linked with health and care commissioners and developed regular, formal meetings for reporting health and care data. DIAS links and routes for formal feedback and information sharing with strategic partners within health and social care services are not yet well established.

DIAS provide a wide range of information and resources around many areas of education. However, one of the areas that may require further development is around school attendance, SEMH and EBSNA. As reported above DIAS receives high levels of enquiries around these issues, and where resources and information available for CYP and their families are limited.

### Accessibility and outreach

DIAS staff were allocated time to develop links with schools, colleges and early years settings within all areas of Devon. This aimed to raise awareness of the service offer, particularly with those schools where there had previously been less engagement with the service. The Ambassador Volunteer programme enabled DIAS to reach families who were not in direct contact with the service, providing information, gathering feedback and facilitating peer support. DIAS staff identified Early Help practitioners as being a key link for increasing awareness of the service offer amongst the most vulnerable families. However, due to the restructure of Early Help teams, there was limited scope for establishing connections.

Requests for direct support from DIAS for children and young people increased compared to previous reporting periods. This included direct contact from CYP, but also a higher number of requests from parent carers and professionals. Most notably, requests to gather the impartial views of young people where tribunal appeals were in process, increased significantly. This included requests from families, the SEND Tribunal, and DCC Tribunals Team, who actively encouraged families to contact DIAS to provide this support. DIAS have one full time CYP worker, and it was a challenge to meet this demand.

## Training

With the funding from health DIAS were able to appoint a 0.2fte training post. This gave capacity to undertake a review of the DIAS training offer which included a survey to understand the training needs of families. From the findings a DIAS training plan and new training sessions were developed. This work has enabled more cohesion between the training, information resources, website and advice provided by the service. Families requested that face to face training be part of the DIAS training offer, this will need some consideration to find capacity within the service for delivery.

The number and complexity of enquiries to DIAS has increased markedly over the past three years. During 2022-23, DIAS managers observed through supervisions and team meetings, that providing support for more complex and stressful situations, often to vulnerable or distressed families, was having an impact on staff wellbeing. Through the national IASS network DIAS staff were able to access helpline training on how to manage complex calls and vicarious trauma. Strategies from this training were embedded in the processes for the service enquiry line. An additional two members of staff completed Level Three Safeguarding training, and the DIAS Safeguarding Procedure was reviewed, with training and support provided for all staff. As a result, DIAS staff report that they feel able to approach calls in a more solution-focused way, enabling service users to feel more empowered and clear of their next steps. Staff also report greater confidence in how to respond to safeguarding concerns and how to seek support from within the team or external services when dealing with challenging and distressing calls.



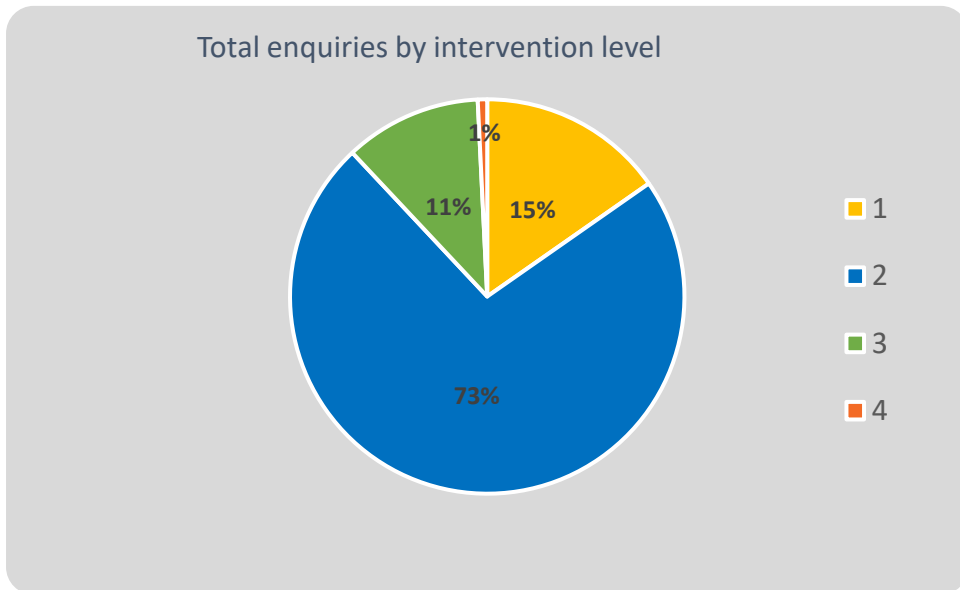
## Service Development Priorities

- DIAS leads to continue to strengthen links and formal feedback routes with strategic partners within Health and Social Care.
- DIAS to work with commissioners to ensure that there are clear arrangements for funding from Health and Social Care.
- DIAS to develop resources and information for parent carers and CYP around school attendance and EBSNA.
- DIAS to develop links with Early Help leads to ensure a clear understanding of the Early Help Structure and offer from their teams, and to facilitate connections between DIAS Staff in Localities with Early Help Practitioners and Family Hubs.
- DIAS Leads will need to work with commissioners to increase capacity of the team to provide direct support for CYP. This is in response to increase in demand and to develop a CYP steering group to ensure coproduction in designing and developing the service offer by developing a DIAS CYP Steering Group. This is essential to ensure that the service is compliant with IASS Standards and to ensure that the Local Authority and ICB fulfil their statutory duty.
- DIAS to develop a face to face training offer in response to service user feedback and ensure that there is capacity within the team to deliver this.

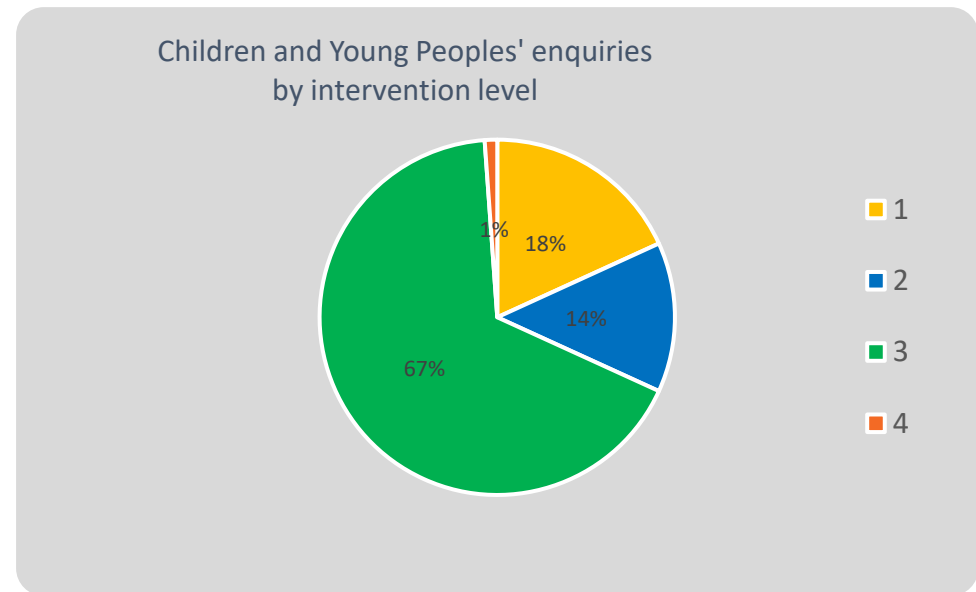
**Figure 1.11**

	Number of Enquiries
Parent / Carer	4175
Child / Young Person	88
Professional	196
<b>Total</b>	<b>4153</b>

**Figure 1.12**



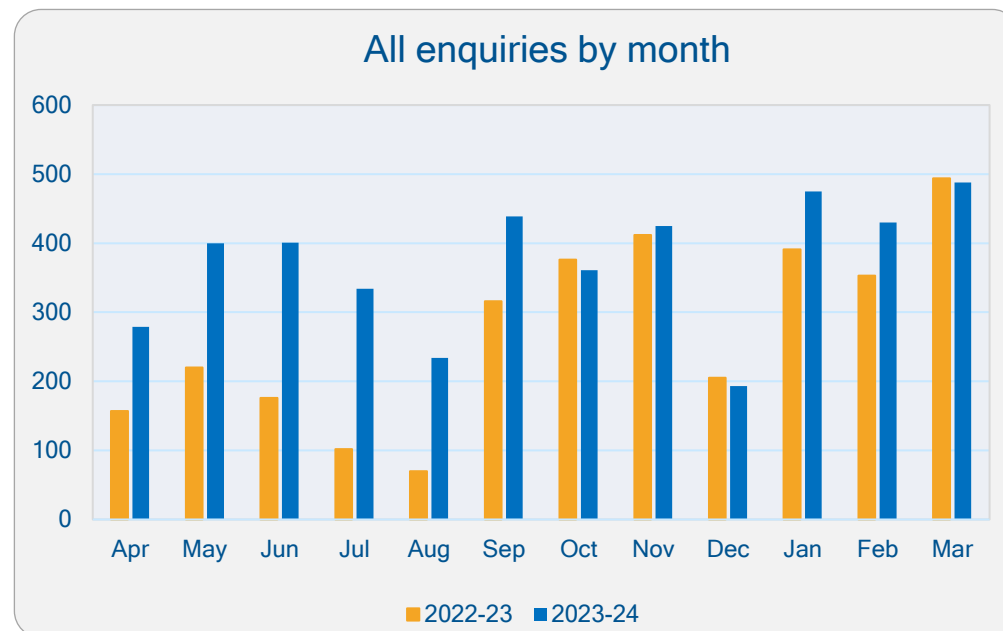
**Figure 1.13**



**Figure 1.14**

Month (23-24)	Number of Enquiries
April	279
May	400
June	401
July	334
August	234
September	439
October	361
November	425
December	193
January	475
February	430
March	488

**Figure 1.15**



**Figure 1.16**

Area of Need	Number of Enquiries
ASD	1651
SEMH	601
Learning Difficulties	253
ADHD	251
Other	193
SPLD	88
Medical	85
PD	47
Multisensory impairment	19
Not known	1271

**Figure 1.17**

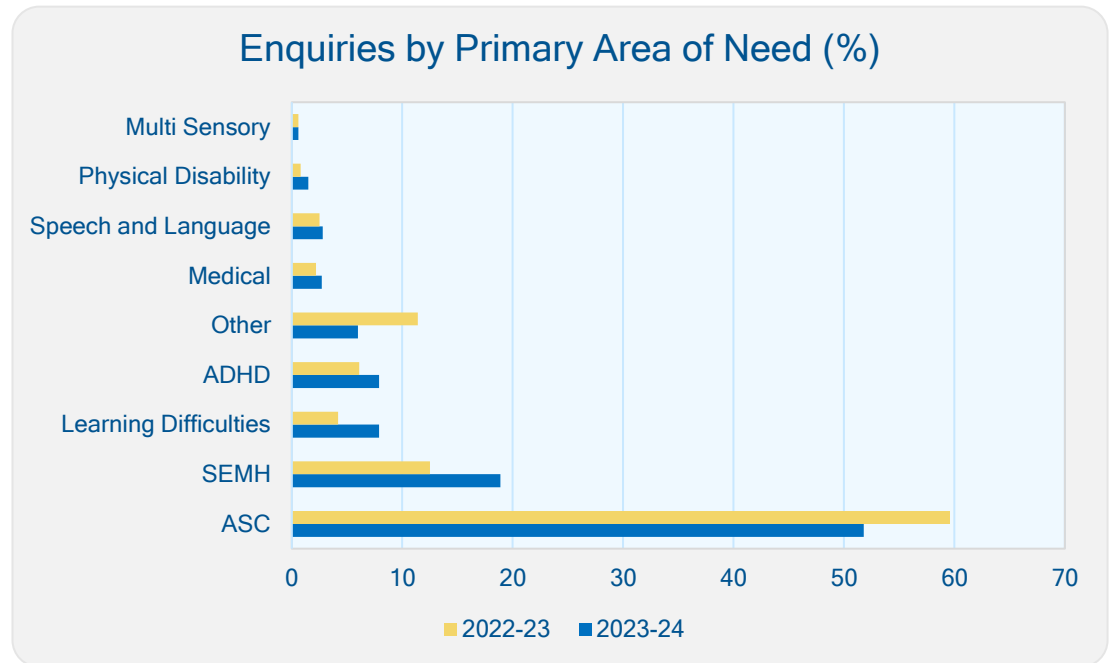
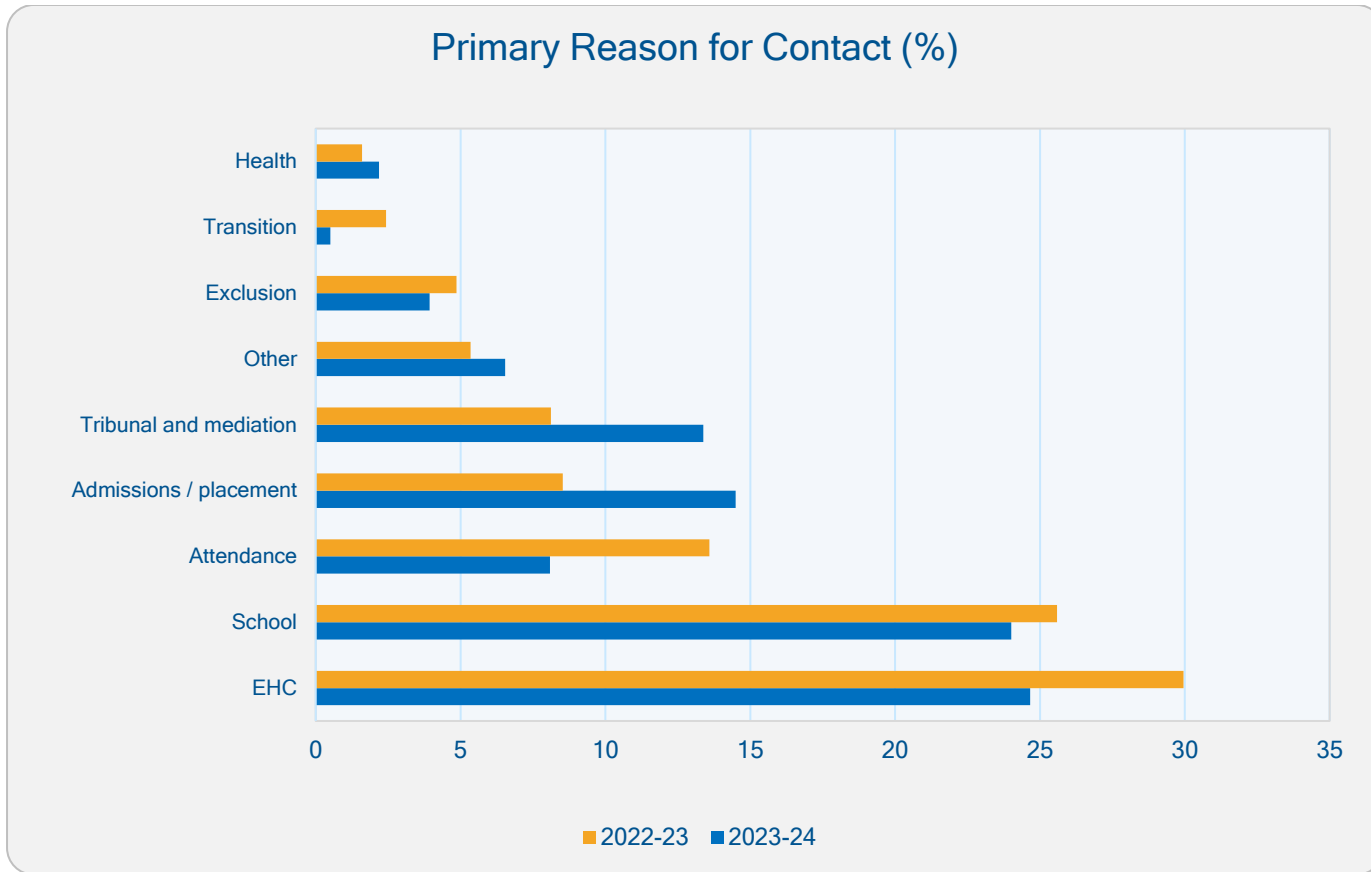


Figure 1.18



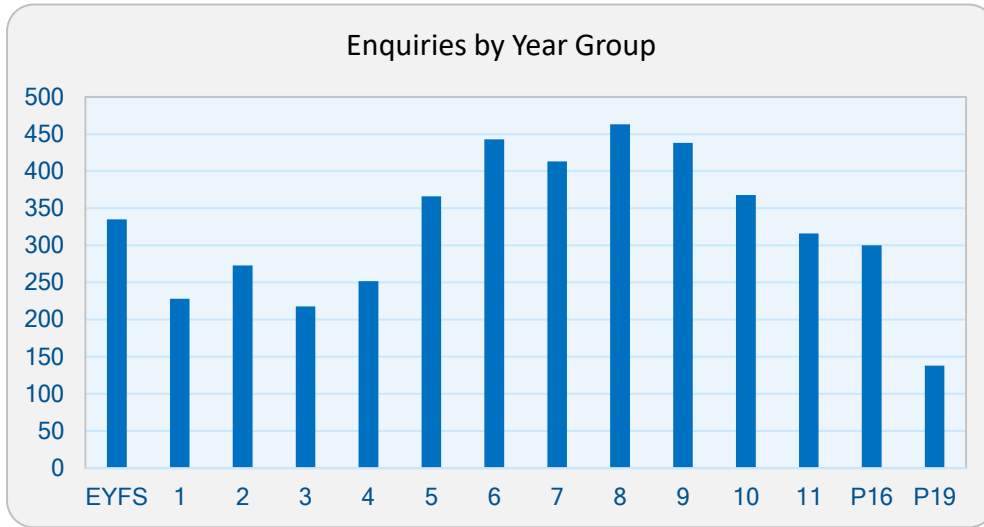


Figure 1.19

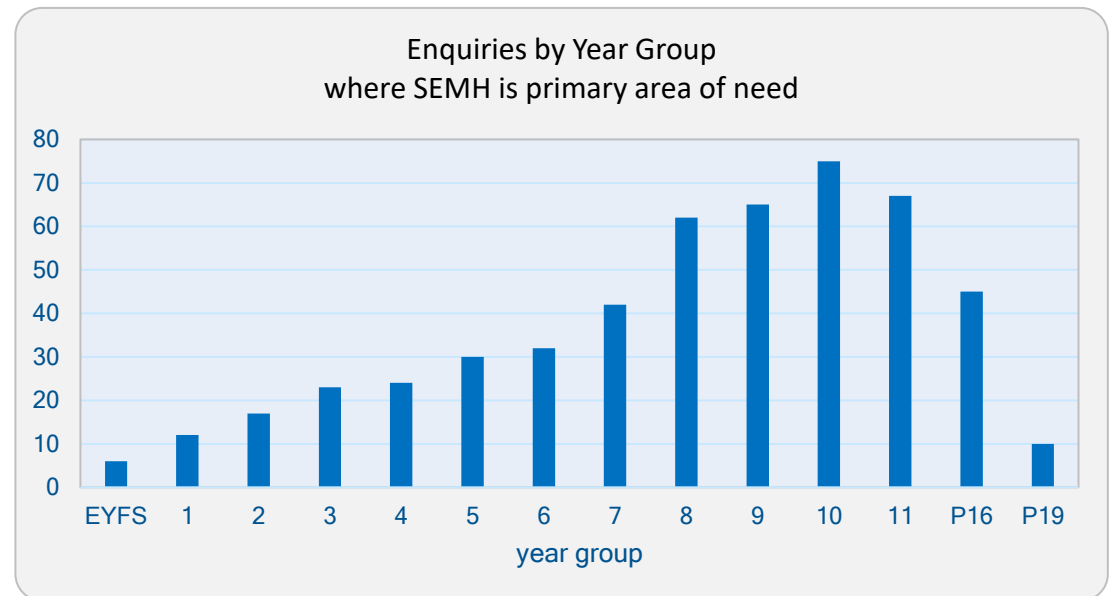


Figure 1.20