





# SEND Top Up Tool

## Research report

01 December 2022  
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# Background

During the Beta phase our non-coded (Figma) prototypes were tested with a group of 30 Special Education Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo) 'super users' who were established as early adopters of the tool and the new process.

## How we did it

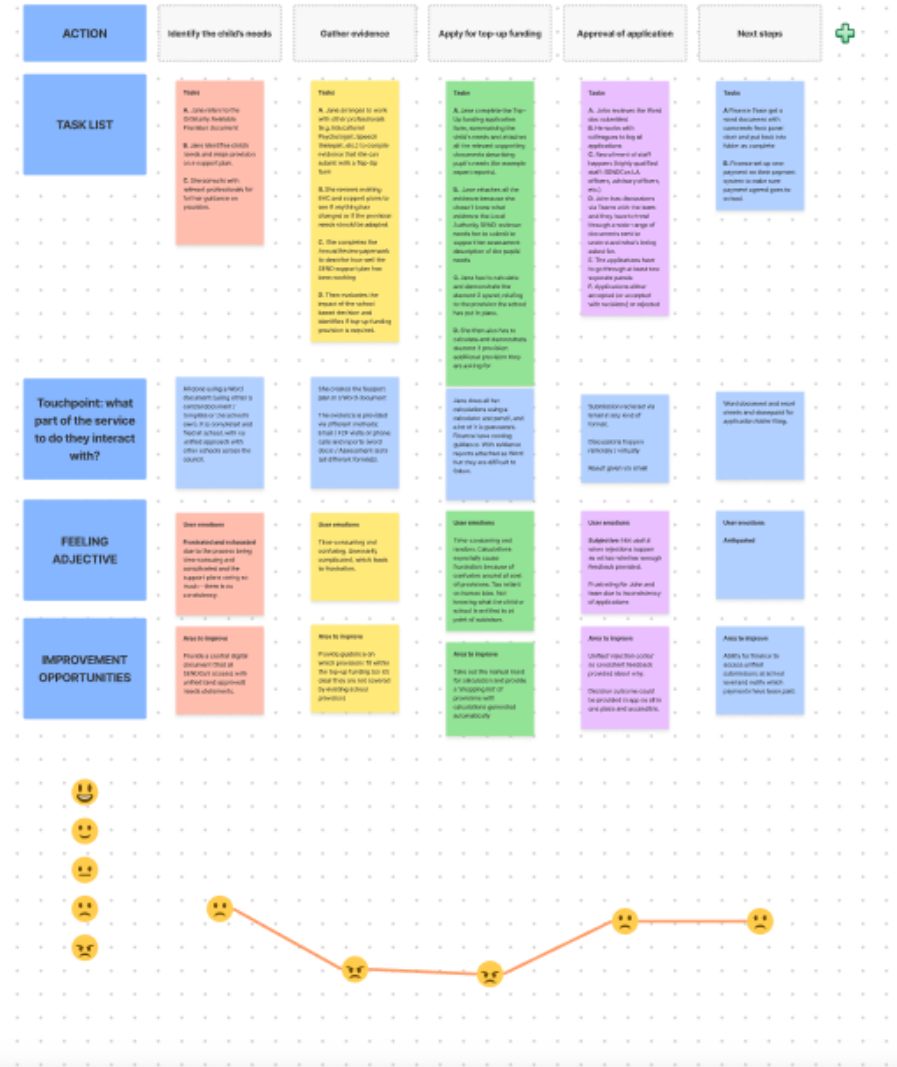
- Due to the lack of time SENDCos have, most sessions were carried out remotely using our Team's video conferencing software.
- We tried to focus on one step at a time, looking to answer the following questions:
  - Does this make your job easier and save you time?
  - Can you navigate this without training or explanation?
  - Does this make sense to you and the job you are doing?
  - Will this help the child you are supporting?

# As is User Journey

The current process heavily relies on lots of manual steps, which causes frustration, including:

- Assessments completed using various frameworks
- Applications in different formats
- Lack of standardised framework making it difficult for the fund reviewers to make a fair judgement about who should receive top-up funding.
- Provisions asked for across schools varies and so, again, the funding decisions are not standard across the council.

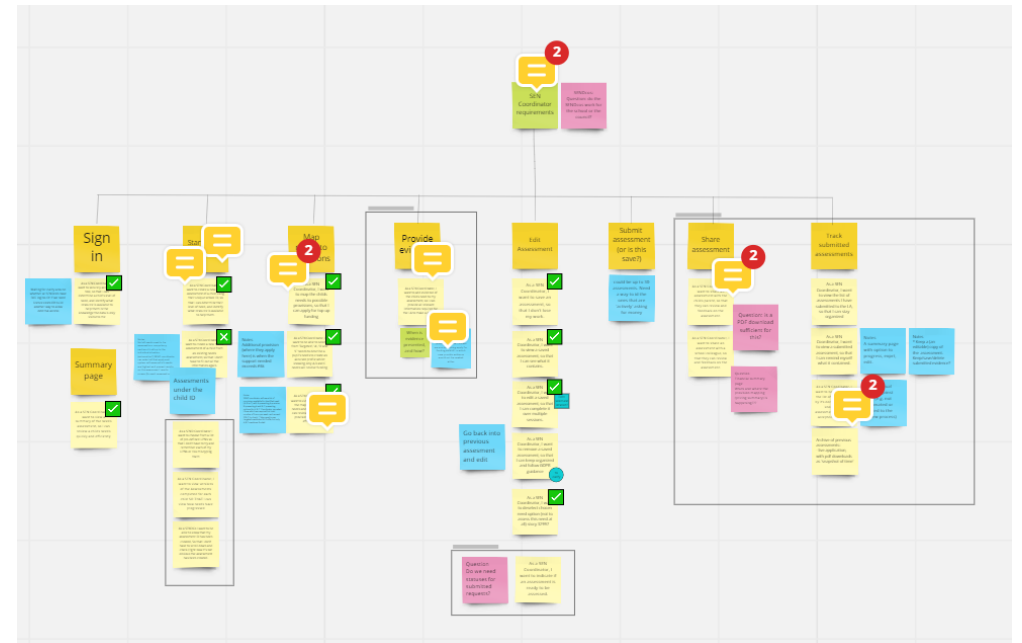
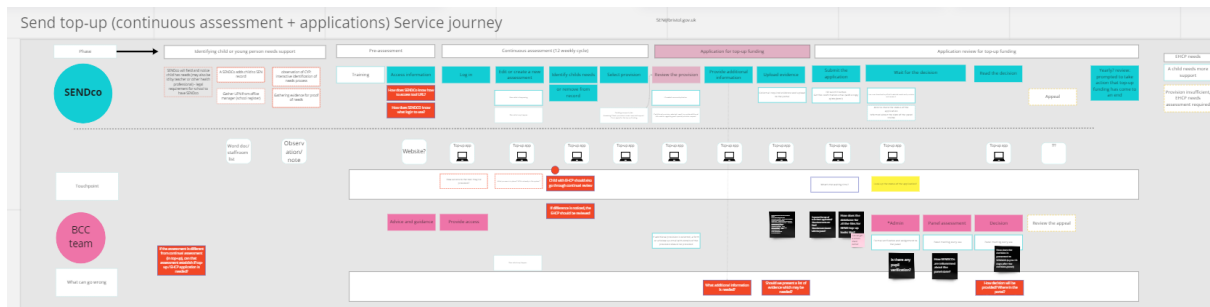
Persona A: Jane Doe SENDCo  
 Persona B: John Doe Reviewer  
 Scenario: Applying for top-up funding





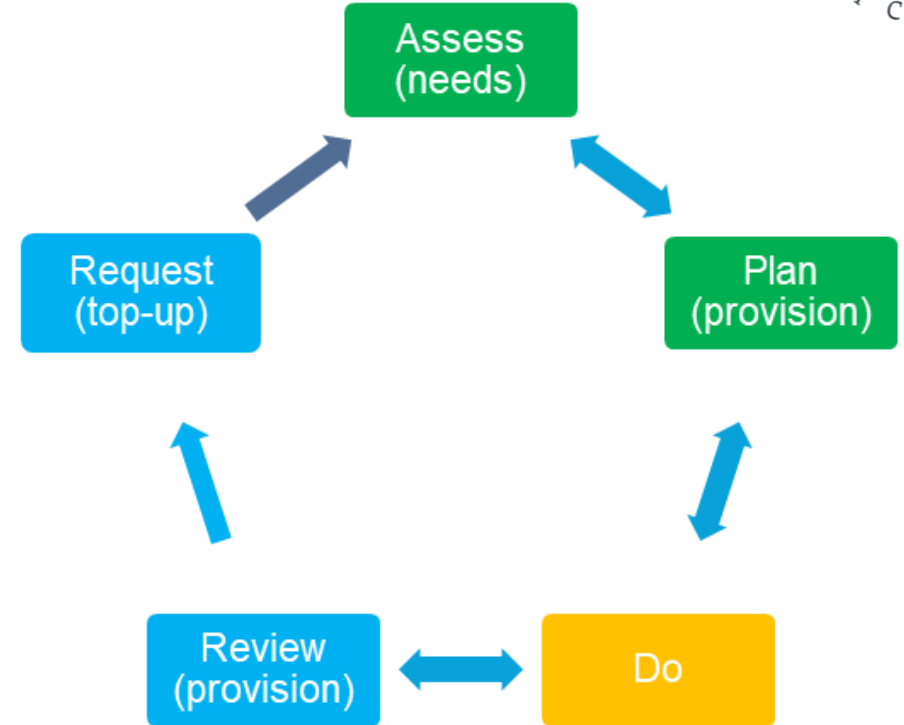
# What we did

- After talking to stakeholders we mapped out the ideal journey and started to look at opportunities which would improve the application process for all actors.



# What we did

- In phase one we provided coded functionality for the **Asses and Plan** steps of the Plan, Do, Review cycle which SENDCos already follow.
- In phase two we built in the **Review and Request** steps.



The Plan, do, review cycle is the foundation for creating a child or young person's support plan within school.

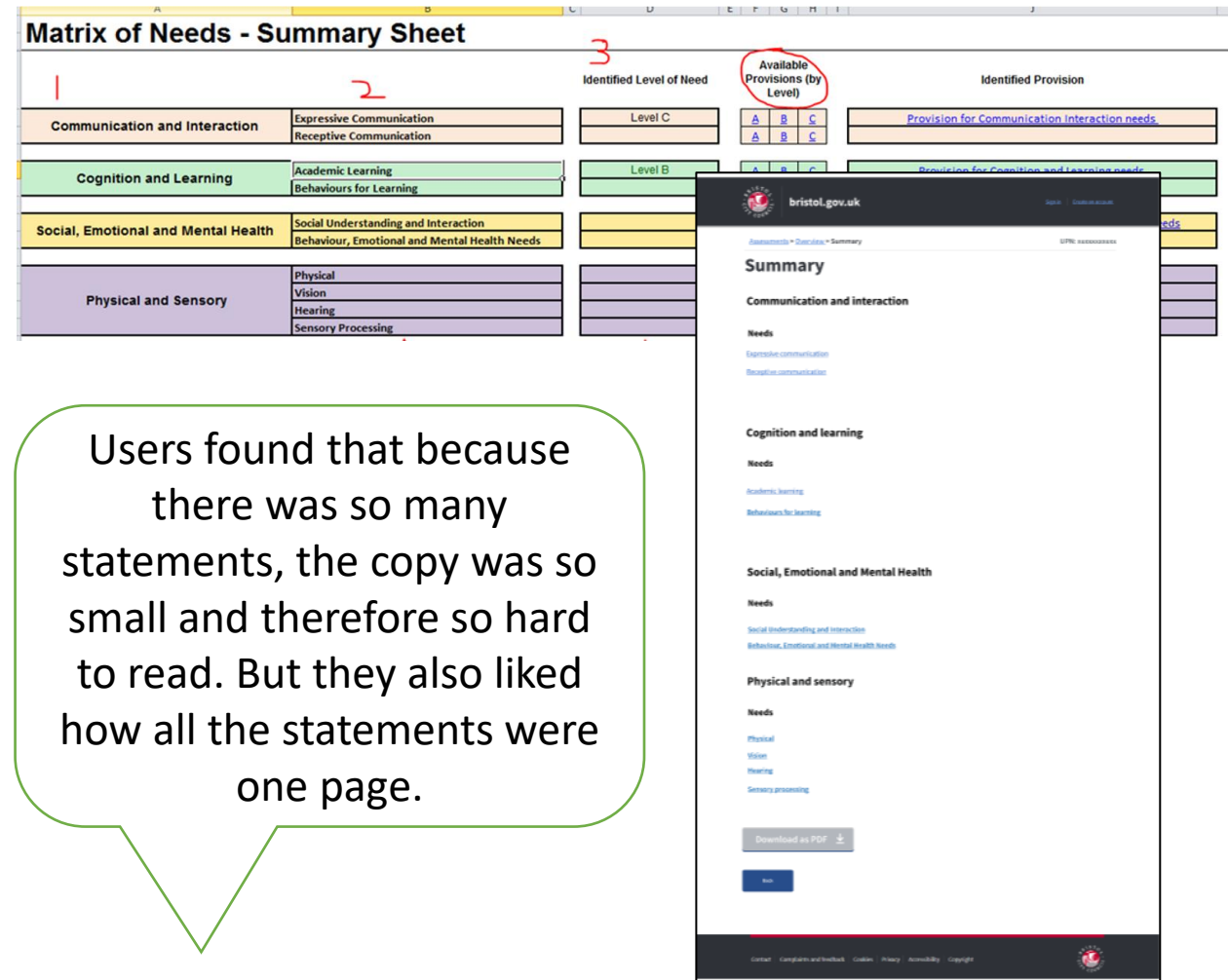
# Findings - Headlines

- **Form follows function.** Don't rely on colour to convey meaning, especially if the results are automated. Removing the colour coding frees up SENDCOs to focus on the need statements that best meet the child or young person's situation.
- **The application itself can't be the training material.** With the overall process changing, some things needed to be explained via training. Adding it to the tool would have made the experience more confusing.
- **Don't assume.** We assumed the provision drop down wouldn't be easy to read, but testing showed it wasn't an issue so saved us about a sprint's worth of work.

# User insights – Needs matrix

To build a code-based Beta minimal viable product, we had to translate the basic functionality from the Excel spreadsheet (alpha) into an application.

The needs assessments had a complex information architecture with a lot of content which we had to accommodate, whilst also avoiding information overload from the Needs Matrix.



**Matrix of Needs - Summary Sheet**

		Identified Level of Need	Available Provisions (by Level)	Identified Provision
Communication and Interaction	Expressive Communication	Level C	A B C	Provision for Communication Interaction needs
	Receptive Communication		A B C	
Cognition and Learning	Academic Learning	Level B	A B C	Provision for Cognition and Learning needs
	Behaviours for Learning		A B C	
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	Social Understanding and Interaction	Level A	A B C	Provision for Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs
	Behaviour, Emotional and Mental Health Needs		A B C	
Physical and Sensory	Physical	Level A	A B C	Provision for Physical and Sensory needs
	Vision		A B C	
	Hearing		A B C	
	Sensory Processing		A B C	

**Summary**

Communication and interaction

Needs

- Expressive communication
- Receptive communication

Cognition and learning

Needs

- Academic learning
- Behaviours for learning

Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Needs

- Social understanding and interaction
- Behaviour, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

Physical and sensory

Needs

- Physical
- Vision
- Hearing
- Sensory processing

Download as PDF

Users found that because there was so many statements, the copy was so small and therefore so hard to read. But they also liked how all the statements were one page.



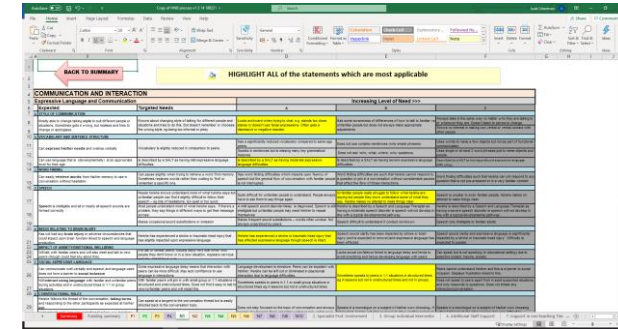
# User insights – Needs matrix

We had in total about **764 needs statements**.

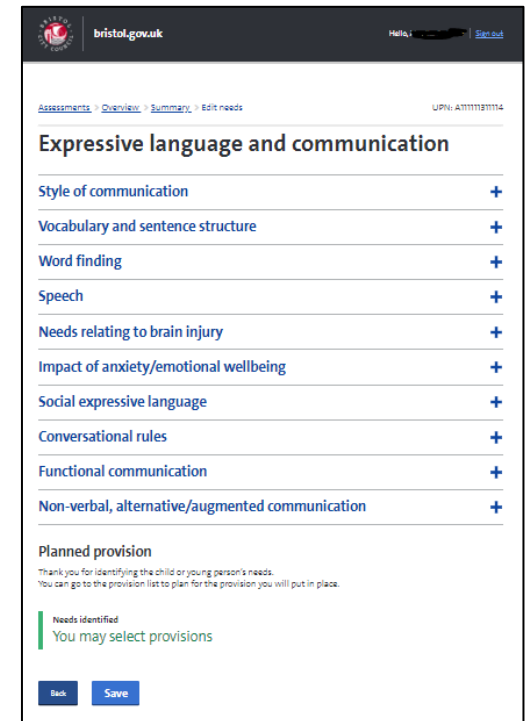
The Needs assessment part was divided into four categories with two or more subcategories for each and series of statements.

As we didn't want people to get overwhelmed, we used accordions so that the user is only presented with the need statements for the specific need type they wanted to assess.

**BEFORE**



**AFTER**





# User insights – Needs matrix

The colour coding on Need statements had a function in our Alpha tool where all actions were manual, thus the user had a need to understand and remember the level of need they were choosing.

In the Beta code-based tool we built, all associated provisions are automated so there's no need for the user to understand and remember levels. Instead they can focus on the need statements and matching those to the child or young person.

Overall, during testing sessions, SENDCOs had more comments about the wording of the statements than the functionality itself.

**Expressive language and communication**

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Style of communication +

---

Vocabulary and sentence structure +

---

Word finding +

---

Speech -

Select the most accurate statement

Expected  
Speech is intelligible and all or nearly all speech sounds are formed correctly.

People he/she knows understand most of what he/she says but unfamiliar people can find it slightly difficult to follow their speech – eg lots of hesitations, too quiet or too quick.

Most people understand most of what he/she says. If there's a problem, they say things in different ways to get their message across.

Makes occasional sound substitutions or omission.

**Quite difficult for unfamiliar people to understand. People always have to ask them to say things again.**

A mild speech sound disorder/delay is diagnosed. Speech is still intelligible but unfamiliar people may need him/her to repeat themselves.

Makes frequent sound substitutions – words often unclear. Not always understood by peers.

Unfamiliar people really struggle to follow what he/she are saying but people they know understand some of what they say. He/she makes no attempt to make things clear.

He/she is described by a Speech and Language Therapist as having a moderate speech disorder ie speech will not develop in line with a typical developmental pathway.

Speech difficult to understand if context not known.

Speech is unclear to even familiar people. He/she makes no attempt to make things clear.

He/she is described by a Speech and Language Therapist as having a severe speech disorder ie speech will not develop in line with a typical developmental pathway.

Speech only intelligible to familiar adults.

[Clear selection](#)

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Needs relating to brain injury +

# User insights – Activating provisions

We came to a similar conclusion with the confirmation panel which initially stated which level of provision SENDCOs can access.

Because the tool can automatically identify which list of provisions should be presented to the user, we replaced the confirmation with a more simple and actionable statement.

‘You may select provisions simply informs the user that they can access provision for that category.



Your selected need level is  
**Level C**



**Needs identified**  
You may select provisions

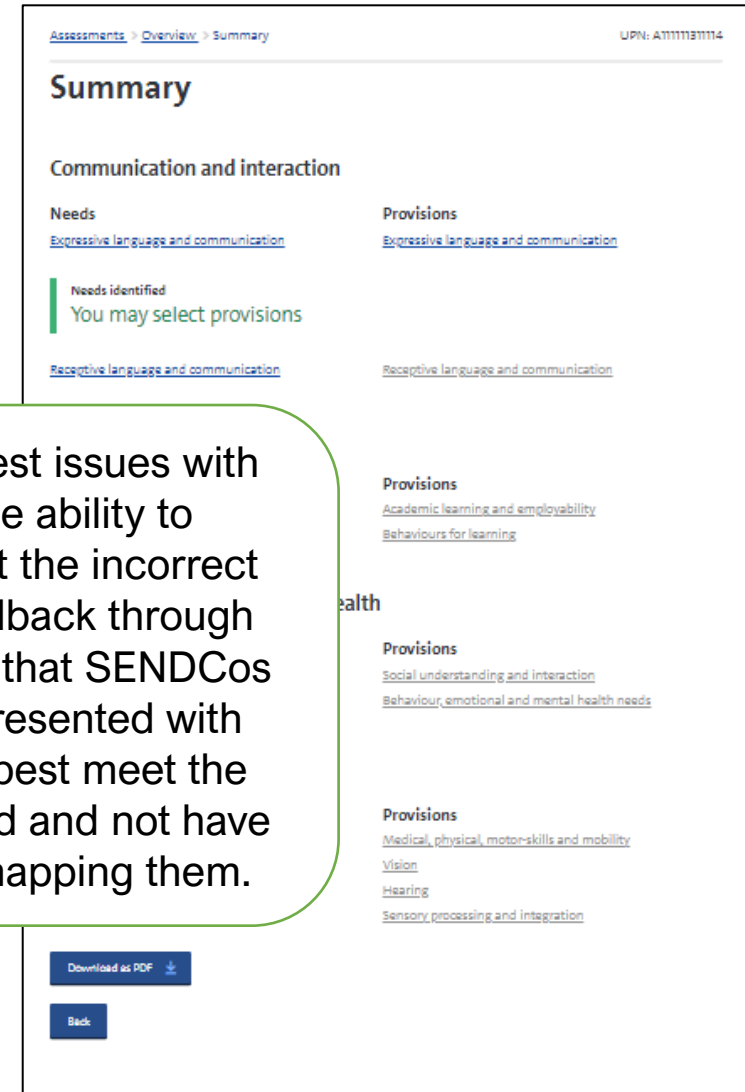
# User insights – Activating provisions

The Need statements are pivotal to the tool.

By selecting statements, SENDCos trigger an automated action which allows them to access a list of provisions relevant to the child's needs for the selected category.

By choosing and saving need statements, the associated provisions link is activated.

One of the biggest issues with Alpha was the ability to accidentally select the incorrect provisions. Feedback through testing indicated that SENDCos wanted to be presented with provisions that best meet the needs of the child and not have to spend time mapping them.



Assessments > Overview > Summary UPN: A1111131114

## Summary

**Communication and interaction**


<b>Needs</b> <a href="#">Expressive language and communication</a>	<b>Provisions</b> <a href="#">Expressive language and communication</a>
<b>Needs identified</b> You may select provisions	
<a href="#">Receptive language and communication</a>	<a href="#">Receptive language and communication</a>

**Provisions**  
[Academic learning and employability](#)  
[Behaviours for learning](#)

**Health**

**Provisions**  
[Social understanding and interaction](#)  
[Behaviour, emotional and mental health needs](#)

**Provisions**  
[Medical, physical, motor-skills and mobility](#)  
[Vision](#)  
[Hearing](#)  
[Sensory processing and integration](#)

[Download as PDF](#) 

[Back](#)



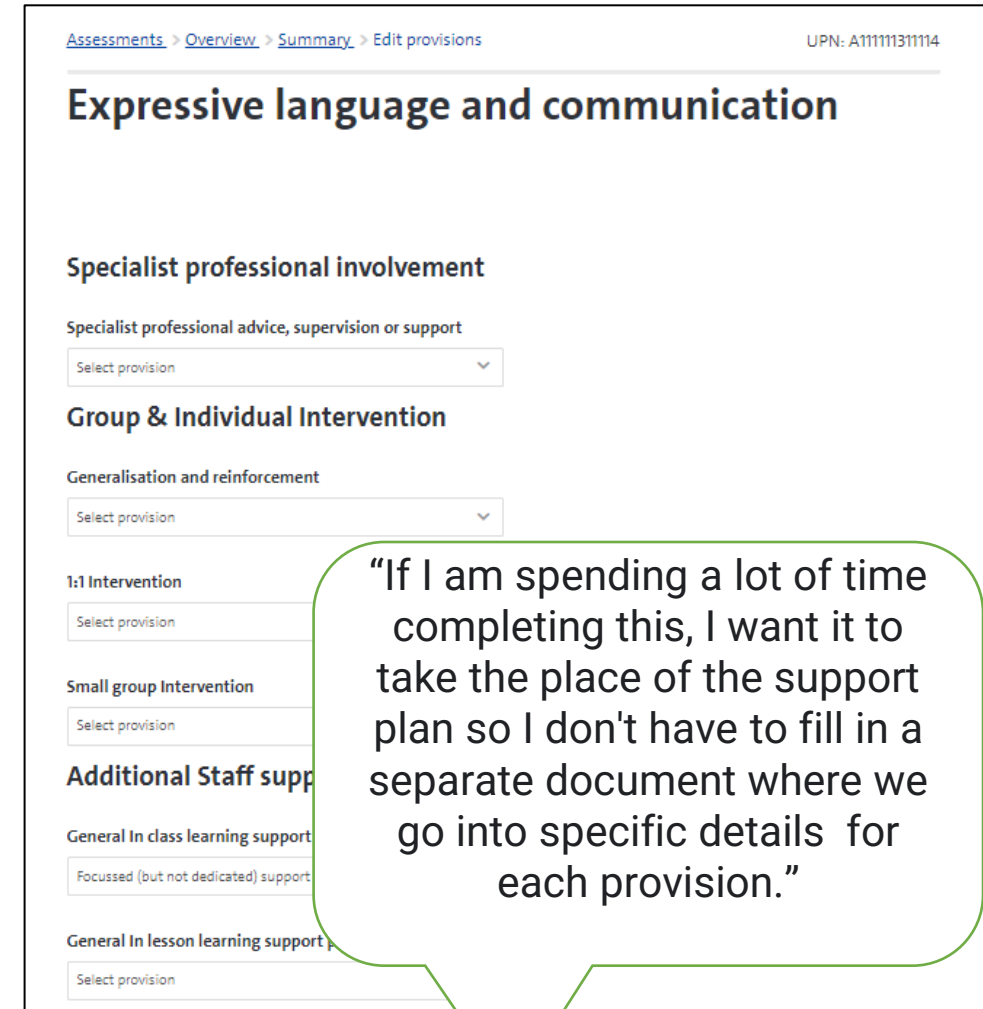
# User insights - Provisions

The available provisions have been categorised like the need statements. That way it is easy and quick to find a category and type of provision

Testing has highlighted that when selecting the provisions, SENDCos want to look up the need statements they selected previous to this step.

As a result a future backlog ticket is to add an accordion where they can preview the need statements selected for the category.

We also assumed that the drop down component wasn't ideal for this feature due to the amount of text. However in testing this didn't raise any concerns, so we have left it as is for now.



Assessments > Overview > Summary > Edit provisions UPN: A1111131114

## Expressive language and communication

**Specialist professional involvement**

Specialist professional advice, supervision or support

Select provision

**Group & Individual Intervention**

Generalisation and reinforcement

Select provision

**1:1 Intervention**

Select provision

**Small group Intervention**

Select provision

**Additional Staff support**

General In class learning support

Focussed (but not dedicated) support

General In lesson learning support

Select provision

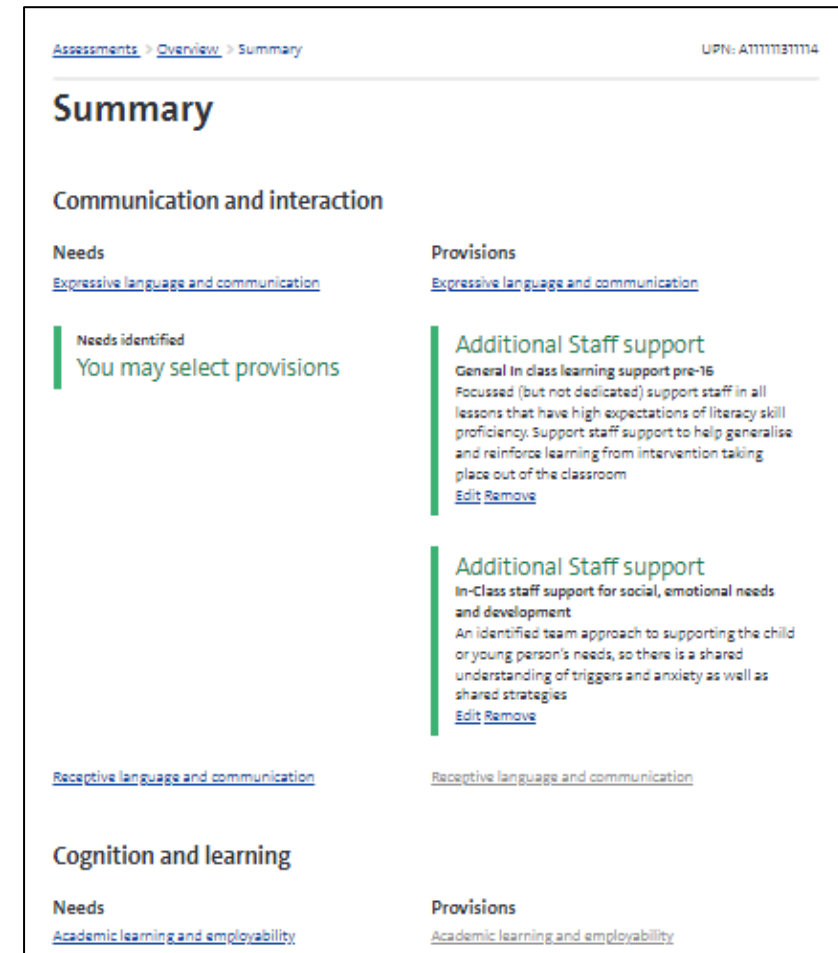
"If I am spending a lot of time completing this, I want it to take the place of the support plan so I don't have to fill in a separate document where we go into specific details for each provision."

# User insights - Provisions

Due to the hierarchical architecture of data, we wanted to keep users informed and reassured of their choices.

Every time they save their selection or change it, they see a confirmation panel confirming their selection. This continues as a consistent pattern across the tool.

On the summary page they can see the most important information which allows them to see what has been already completed.



Assessments > Overview > Summary UPN: A111111B11114

## Summary

### Communication and interaction

<b>Needs</b> <a href="#">Expressive language and communication</a>	<b>Provisions</b> <a href="#">Expressive language and communication</a>
<b>Needs identified</b> You may select provisions	<b>Additional Staff support</b> General In class learning support pre-16 Focussed (but not dedicated) support staff in all lessons that have high expectations of literacy skill proficiency. Support staff support to help generalise and reinforce learning from intervention taking place out of the classroom <a href="#">Edit</a> <a href="#">Remove</a>
<a href="#">Receptive language and communication</a>	<a href="#">Receptive language and communication</a>

### Cognition and learning

<b>Needs</b> <a href="#">Academic learning and employability</a>	<b>Provisions</b> <a href="#">Academic learning and employability</a>
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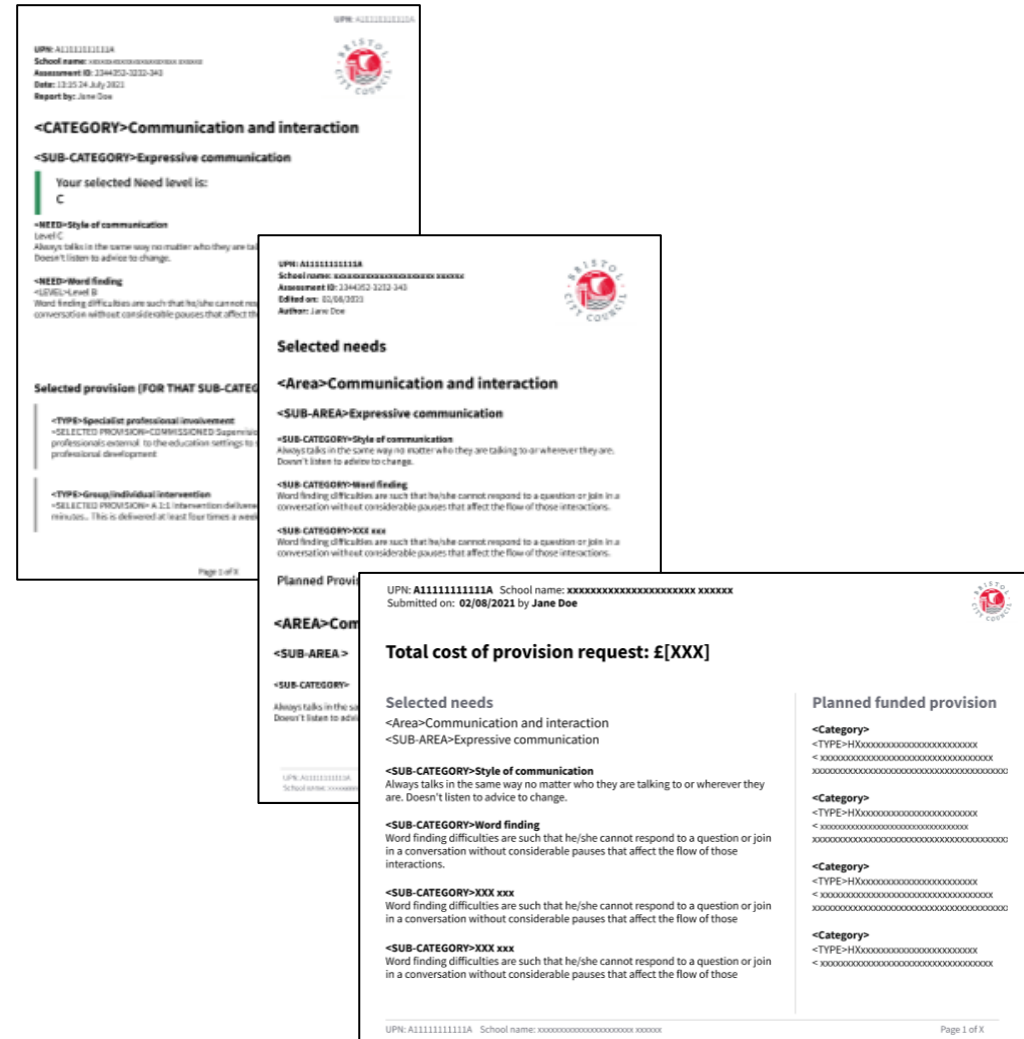
# User insights – Plan, Do, Review PDF

The PDF is an output once a SENDCo has created an assessment by selecting the needs and provisions that are in place to meet those needs – pre-application.

We iterated the layout of the pdf as we tried to make it as useful for SENDCos as possible. However, initial feedback suggested it had been simplified too much.

Users told us that it's important for them to see a list of all the selected needs and provisions next to each other, so it's clear what kind of interventions are planned for a selected area of need.

By making the PDF landscape, SENDCos can see the full picture of a child's needs and provisions so they can use the PDF to create a support plan and also share it with parents.



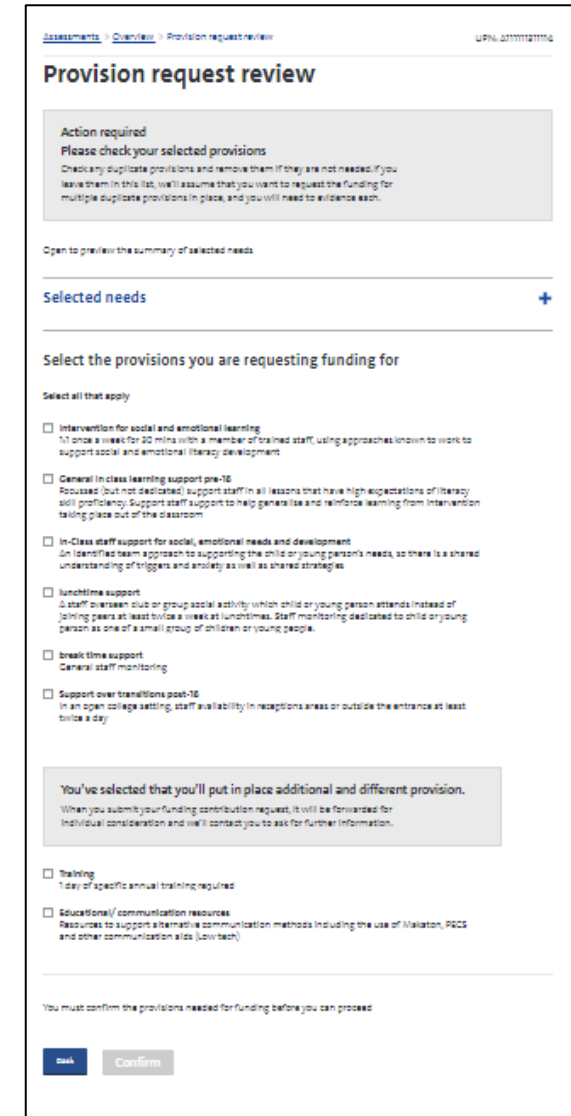
# User insights – Provision request

The provision request review page is the step whereby SENDCos can review all the provision they have in place to meet the child or young person's needs. Then select those that require top-up funding.

A user can:

- Review all selected provision
- Select which they want apply funding for
- Look up needs statements if required
- Get a final cost of planned provision

Testing has shown there is still some improvements needed to this page. If a SENDCo has chosen multiple same provisions, it isn't as clear as it could be that they need to only select one. This needs more testing.



The screenshot shows a web interface for reviewing provision requests. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Assessments', 'Overview', and 'Provision request review', along with a user profile 'UPN: admin@bristol.gov.uk'. The main heading is 'Provision request review'. Below this, a grey box contains the instruction: 'Action required: Please check your selected provisions. Check any duplicate provisions and remove them if they are not needed. If you leave them in this list, we'll assume that you want to request the funding for multiple duplicate provisions in place, and you will need to evidence each.' Below the instruction, there is a link to 'Open to preview the summary of selected needs'. A section titled 'Selected needs' is followed by a plus sign icon. The main section is 'Select the provisions you are requesting funding for', with a sub-heading 'Select all that apply'. It lists several provision options, each with a checkbox and a description: 'Intervention for social and emotional learning' (10 once a week for 20 mins with a member of trained staff...), 'General in class learning support pre-16' (Focused (but not dedicated) support staff in all lessons...), 'In-Class staff support for social, emotional needs and development' (An identified team approach...), 'Lunchtime support' (A staff overseen club or group social activity...), 'Break time support' (General staff monitoring), and 'Support over transitions post-16' (In an open college setting, staff availability in reception areas...). A grey box below the list states: 'You've selected that you'll put in place additional and different provision. When you submit your funding contribution request, it will be forwarded for individual consideration and we'll contact you to ask for further information.' At the bottom, there are two checkboxes: 'Training' (1 day of specific annual training required) and 'Educational/ communication resources' (Resources to support alternative communication methods...). At the very bottom, there is a confirmation message: 'You must confirm the provisions needed for funding before you can proceed.' and two buttons: 'Back' and 'Confirm'.

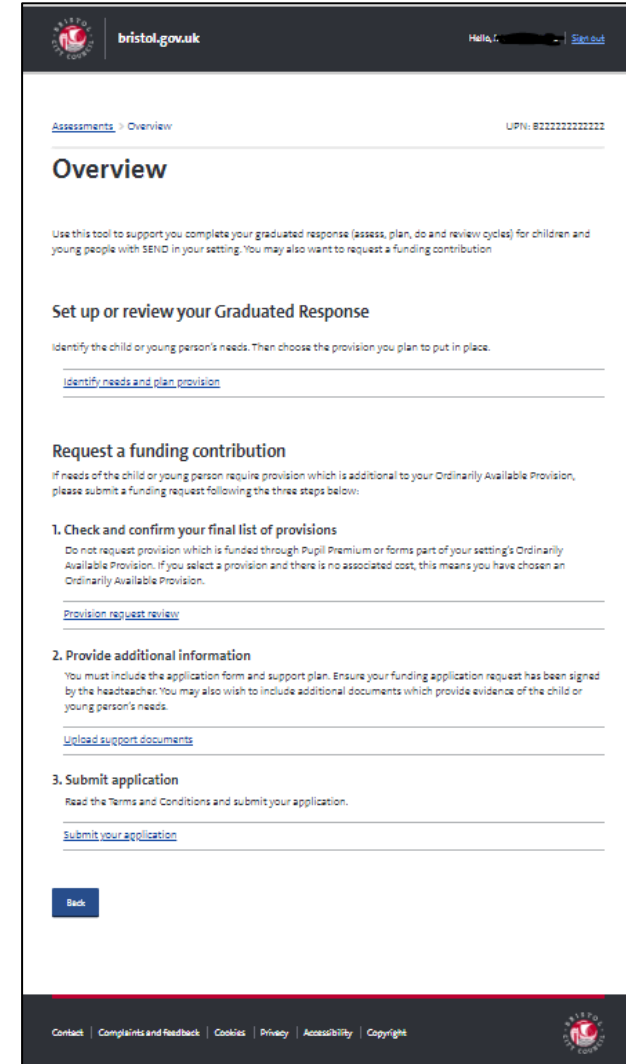
# User insights – Overview

The Overview page was a step which was added in phase two.

We designed a screen that leads SENDCOs through the full assess-plan-do-review process using the basic **GDS tasks pattern (without tags for now)**.

For MVP the screen is a simple way to navigate the steps. However, we understand that a tag component may help the user understand what step they are on when they have gone away and are returning to an assessment later on.

We realise more testing is needed on this page as it's the main navigation page and needs to be as simple to use as possible.



bristol.gov.uk

Assessments > Overview

UPN: 0222222222222

## Overview

Use this tool to support you complete your graduated response (assess, plan, do and review cycles) for children and young people with SEND in your setting. You may also want to request a funding contribution.

### Set up or review your Graduated Response

Identify the child or young person's needs. Then choose the provision you plan to put in place.

[Identify needs and plan provision](#)

### Request a funding contribution

If needs of the child or young person require provision which is additional to your Ordinarily Available Provision, please submit a funding request following the three steps below:

- 1. Check and confirm your final list of provisions**

Do not request provision which is funded through Pupil Premium or forms part of your setting's Ordinarily Available Provision. If you select a provision and there is no associated cost, this means you have chosen an Ordinarily Available Provision.

[Provision request review](#)
- 2. Provide additional information**

You must include the application form and support plan. Ensure your funding application request has been signed by the headteacher. You may also wish to include additional documents which provide evidence of the child or young person's needs.

[Upload support documents](#)
- 3. Submit application**

Read the Terms and Conditions and submit your application.

[Submit your application](#)

[Back](#)

Contact | Complaints and feedback | Cookies | Privacy | Accessibility | Copyright

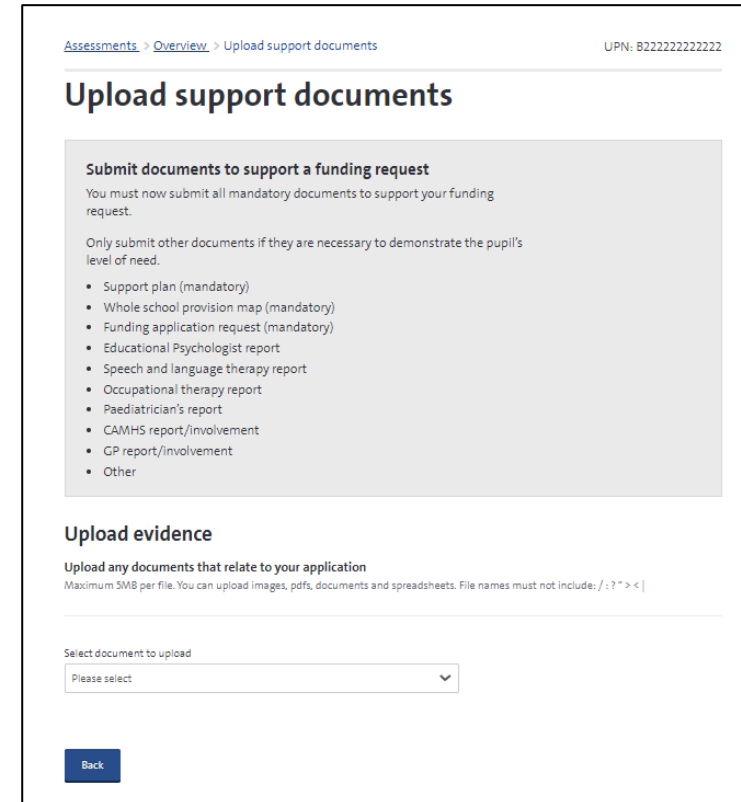


# User insights – Evidence upload

A big problem / pain point of the current process is the **incomplete applications**, which lack mandatory documents needed for the application to go to the panel.

**The solution** we provided was a document upload page with validation so that the SENDCo won't apply until they have a set of must have documents uploaded to the system.

Currently some of the documents may take a little while to upload and a testing workshop showed this left users wondering if it was not working. As a result we have added a loading icon whilst waiting.



Assessments > Overview > Upload support documents UPN: B222222222222

## Upload support documents

**Submit documents to support a funding request**  
You must now submit all mandatory documents to support your funding request.

Only submit other documents if they are necessary to demonstrate the pupil's level of need.

- Support plan (mandatory)
- Whole school provision map (mandatory)
- Funding application request (mandatory)
- Educational Psychologist report
- Speech and language therapy report
- Occupational therapy report
- Paediatrician's report
- CAMHS report/involvement
- GP report/involvement
- Other

### Upload evidence

Upload any documents that relate to your application  
Maximum 5MB per file. You can upload images, pdfs, documents and spreadsheets. File names must not include: / : ? \* < |

Select document to upload

Please select

[Back](#)

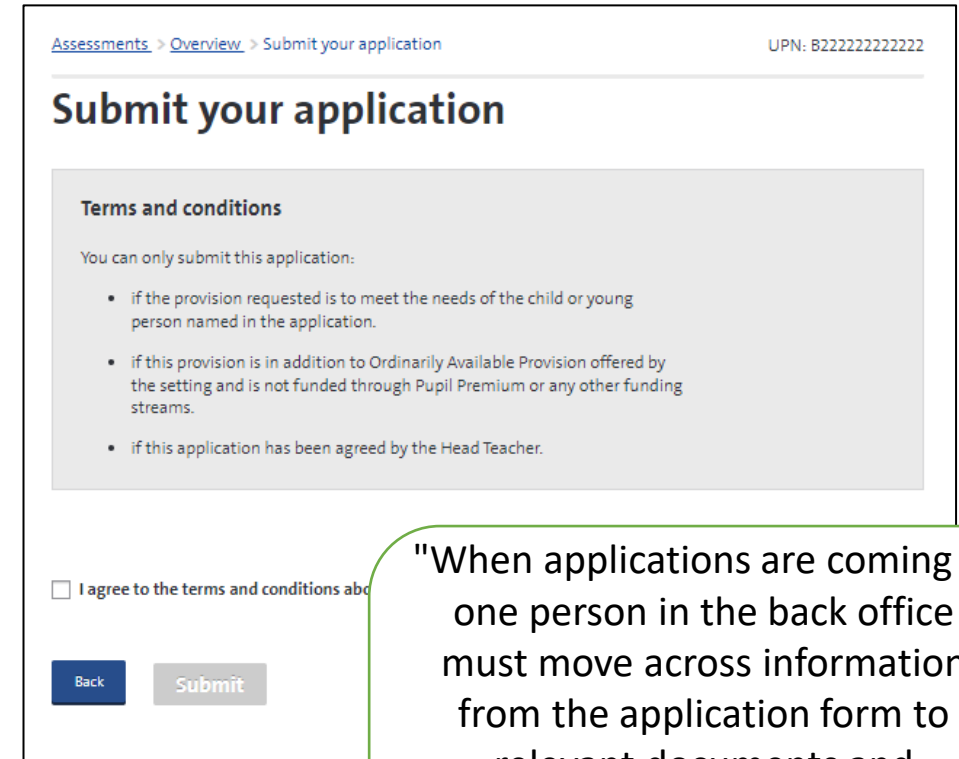
# User insights – Submit

The submission screen presents the terms and conditions of applying for Top Up funding. Once the tick box is selected, the submission button becomes active.

The biggest pain for the back-office is the manual processing which, during the application period, takes a few weeks.

## What we did

- Automated the process so that the documents uploaded for submission are filed in the existing folders (Sharepoint) and can be easily identified.
- The important information for the panel is submitted by the SENDCo in a format which can be used by the panel, removing the need to copy information across, which happened previously.

A screenshot of a web form titled "Submit your application". The breadcrumb trail at the top reads "Assessments > Overview > Submit your application" and the user ID "UPN: B222222222222" is in the top right. The main heading is "Submit your application". Below it is a section titled "Terms and conditions" with the text "You can only submit this application:" followed by three bullet points: "if the provision requested is to meet the needs of the child or young person named in the application.", "if this provision is in addition to Ordinarily Available Provision offered by the setting and is not funded through Pupil Premium or any other funding streams.", and "if this application has been agreed by the Head Teacher." At the bottom of the form, there is a checkbox labeled "I agree to the terms and conditions about" and two buttons: "Back" and "Submit".

"When applications are coming in one person in the back office must move across information from the application form to relevant documents and download, check and file all attachments. It takes them days."

## Feedback from the latest workshop

“When I am on the panel I see that everybody's prices are different. It's great, with the new application we'll be using standardised pricing for all”

Anon SENDCo tester

“Really user-friendly portal!”

Anon SENDCo tester

“I found the process really straightforward and having attended panel on Friday, it really highlighted the need for a more systematic approach to top up, as cases varied so much from school to school ”

Anon SENDCo tester

“It's a transformational piece of work”

Head of Accessible  
City at BCC

# Retrospective and learnings

- Testing with SENDCOs was a challenge because they are really stretched for time. A few sessions had to be cancelled or postponed. Therefore, we need to find a better way to quickly validate ideas with limited time from SENDCOs
- A good way to avoid finding out statements were wrong or had typos would have been to run another round of tests on the spreadsheet version before moving them across to the Beta tool.
- Not all SENDCOs have the same level of knowledge when using the tool. It's important to understand all the different levels of user and to map them out before starting.

# Key take aways

- The Beta tool has a lot more potential, especially for making it work with the existing support plan and possibly EHCP.
- The final SENDCo workshop has proven that the time it takes a SENDCo to complete an assessment and application is no more than a maximum of 3 hours (it was previously 8 hours on average).
- We still need to test how the tool has helped reduce time and effort for the panel.