Education Development Trust was appointed by National College for Teaching and Leadership to train 345 teachers on how to use randomised controlled trials to measure the effectiveness of seven pre-determined education interventions, the first education programme ever to use a schools-based RTC approach.

The challenge
In England, schools receive a ‘pupil premium’ to help them close the attainment gap and ensure pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds leave school on an equal footing with their peers, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Following a consultation phase, the National College for Teaching and Leadership - an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Education in England - identified seven interventions most likely to close this gap, named as: 1stClass@Number; Achievement for All; Growth Mindsets; Inference Training; Numicon; Response to Intervention; and Research Lesson Study. To help schools identify which of these interventions would prove most useful, Education Development Trust was asked to train 345 teachers in how to use randomised control trials (RCTs) and coordinate training sessions for intervention providers.

Our approach
Randomised Controlled Trials are a fairly straightforward yet robust method of measuring the impact of a specific change. By applying one of the seven education interventions to one group, and not to another, teachers could assess the impact of that intervention and ensure that the most successful approaches - which support academic success of the most disadvantaged children - are identified and spread as appropriate.
Case Study: Closing the gap: test and learn

Closing the gap: test and learn was the first programme in the world carried out by teachers in schools to trial multiple interventions at the same time across a large number of schools. To date the vast majority of randomised controlled trials have been implemented and managed by bodies outside of the school system. This programme was all about embedding research in schools - to show teachers how they can learn and improve from the research process and identify effective improvements to close the gap in educational attainment.

Our training programme, Experimental Research Design for Teachers, trained teachers to execute and deliver successful RCTs using our Excel based StatsWizard programme - an effective and accessible alternative to expensive research software.

During this programme, teachers learnt that RCTs are indeed a straightforward, robust method which can be used to drive key decisions on what to start, stop, or continue, to improve the attainment of underprivileged students. This was not simply a practical exercise. To be successful, hearts as well as minds needed to be engaged to change behaviours and ensure evidence begins to inform daily practice and practitioner development, as it does in the medicine and healthcare fields.

We not only delivered the RCT training, but, following the initial appointment of intervention providers, Education Development Trust was appointed lead provider. Managing this large-scale programme called on our tactical and collaborative expertise in coordinating hundreds of accessible training appointments (ensuring a geographical spread of training locations nationally), deploying the expertise of the intervention training providers, and bringing together multiple providers to fulfil the programme objectives.
Case Study: Closing the gap: test and learn

This also included setting up 118 online, face to face, or development and networking events; writing training materials; and being the main point of contact and support for schools on the programme.

The impact

As the trusted lead provider, we were the cornerstone of this successful programme, bringing our unique blend of tactical and logistics management skills with our academically-based research methods and international education knowledge.

By the end of the programme the NCTL programme was already deemed a success, with teachers and head teachers reporting that their involvement in the programme had resulted in a greater awareness of using research to inform their teaching methods. Not all interventions were successful in every setting, but the research allowed teachers to understand, measure and evidence the effectiveness of the intervention and start, stop or continue the intervention accordingly.

Teachers also had an increased awareness of research methods, scientific literacy and knowledge of available training. Participants spoke of the impact on learning and on teacher and teaching assistants’ behaviours and subject knowledge, and that they also had a better understanding of how children learn. The benefit of the school-led approach meant teachers were aware of the research capacity in their own or neighbouring alliances, and involvement in the interventions had also given the schools experience and confidence to embed strategies across the school.

Feedback also showed a shift in teachers’ views of what research is - with some participants suggesting that their views had ‘radically’ changed – as participation in the project had demystified research.