

What We Know

A reflection on the implementation of the
extended childcare entitlement of 30 hours childcare 2016-2020

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This publication was prepared in January 2020 at the end of the Childcare Works contract with DfE (2016-2020) to support the national implementation of 30 hours childcare, and the continuation of funding for least advantaged two-year-olds. It is a legacy document and was finally published and shared with local authority early years and childcare teams in March 2021. Its aim is to support local authorities in their delivery of these entitlements and other early years and childcare initiatives.

Publication of this report was delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. We thought there was still value in sharing what we all learned from working with local authorities and providers as some of the delivery challenges and potential solutions are just as relevant today.

This is a legacy document, and its contents were correct at the time of writing in January 2020. Any statistics such as take-up figures that this document contains will have changed between writing and its publication.

Foreword

A word from Childcare Works

Supporting and challenging the roll-out of 30 hours, and two-year-old funding before that in England, has been a privileged and unique position. It has been a challenging period for all concerned, and its impact continues to be important for the sector. We all aim that the early years sector maintains and grows its value and role in wider government strategies, supports and empowers all children and families, and reaches and benefits least advantaged children in particular. In recent years, the sector has proved its worth and has relished the opportunity to deliver, all while increasing the quality of provision. What is vital is the voice, learning and experiences of all involved (providers and local authorities) are used to inform future strategies and their implementation.

30 hours has been highly popular with hundreds of thousands of parents, supporting them to balance work and life, and reduce childcare costs. Many two-year-olds remain at greatest risk of falling behind their more advantaged peers by the time they start school. 850,000 of them have accessed 15 hours of early learning each week since the two-year-old entitlement began in 2013. These are things to celebrate. However, there is still more to do so we can achieve better outcomes for children, quality of provision, and financial stability and sustainability.

Achieving the delivery of 30 hours and two-year-old funding so far has been a hugely collaborative and challenging task. On behalf of the Childcare Works team, I would like to thank everyone; partners, providers, practitioners, local authorities and DfE for working so hard to make this happen. Thank you also to everyone who helped bring What We Know to fruition including the LAs who contributed case studies to illustrate lessons learned.

We have used this collective experience to develop this learning and reflection document, called What We Know. We hope it is useful to support everyone involved in future policy and strategy, and national and local delivery in the vital area of early learning and childcare. We think it is a must-read for all involved in this policy area now and in the future.

James Hemsall OBE, National Programme Director.

1. Introduction

What We Know is a collection of Childcare Works' reflections and lessons learned throughout the implementation of funded early years and childcare entitlements; especially those during the full national roll-out of 30 hours for three- and four-year-olds of eligible working families (since 2017). It also includes elements of connected learning from the initial national roll-out of 15 hours for least advantaged two-year-olds.

Both of these early years and childcare initiatives have driven huge and unprecedented change in the early years sector, and throughout this period, the Department for Education (DfE) has funded two national support and challenge programmes: Achieving Two Year Olds (A2YO 2012-2016); and Childcare Works (CW 2016-2020). Both programmes, delivered by Mott MacDonald and Hemsall's have offered support and challenge to the Department (DfE) itself, local authorities (LAs), partners, stakeholders, and early years and childcare providers.

A massive part of both programmes has been the facilitation of collaboration, partnership, coproduction, and shared experiences. Throughout we have organised the sharing of knowledge and information between hundreds of stakeholders from local areas (local authorities, stakeholders, membership organisations, and providers), DfE, HMRC, and the Childcare Works and A2YO team of Programme Advisers (PAs) and colleagues. In doing so, thousands of conversations have been held in one-to-one meetings, in our online forum, at termly networks, through termly data returns, and in focused workshops, national meetings, provider seminars, and training sessions. The outcomes of all of these discussions and action learning sets have driven and shaped the Childcare Works programme at every turn, tracked milestones and achievements, identified barriers and challenges, and have directly informed the reflections and learning we are pleased to share in What We Know. We have come to learn:

- From the outset, local authorities need to have good childcare sufficiency reports and data and use them to drive and inform their market management role.
- Local authorities cannot, and do not, act alone in discharging their strategic leadership and market management role.
- Providers have needed to respond as 30 hours funding was made available and patterns of parental employment and childcare demand have changed. This has been challenging and requires continued support and attention.
- It is important early years and childcare provision responds to needs and demands.
- There needs to be different models of delivery to offer choice and match provision to the needs of children and families.
- Particular efforts need to be given to reaching and engaging least advantaged families

- Parent to parent communication really helps build motivation and confidence to take-up entitlements.
- The national support contract provided a mechanism for an effective conduit between key relationships.
- A data informed approach is enhanced by fieldwork, Programme Adviser contact, and a mix of universal and targeted actions.

It is these lessons that form the structure of What We Know, illustrated with case studies from local areas drawn from across England, collected during the delivery of the Childcare Works' contract to support the early years and childcare entitlements. Section two sets out recent public policy and outlines local authority roles and duties, which is something extended in section 4 where useful detail about the evolution of the sector can be found. It is section 3 where lessons learned and case studies are shared. Finally, section 5 includes sources of further information and references.

1.1 The early years and childcare entitlements

Nowadays, early years and childcare entitlements are used to achieve a range of different and inter-linked outcomes. The universal 15 hours for all three- and four-year-olds aims to provide all children with pre-school early learning to support them to grow and develop and be ready for school. 30 hours offers additional hours to working families, so their children can benefit from quality childcare, thereby supporting parents to work. Two-year-old places aim to reach the least advantaged young children who are believed to be at risk of falling behind their peers by the time they start school. This is an entitlement to 15 hours up to a year earlier, so that children can be better supported in their early learning journeys, and so their parents can be enabled with their own learning and employment journeys.

All the entitlements are offered by the different types of delivery models in the sector: home-based childminders, sessional pre-school groups, full day care nurseries, nursery classes and schools, and children's centres. As of August 2019, 96% of providers in the Early Years Register who have been inspected by Ofsted were judged good or outstanding.

1.1.1 Early years and childcare changes lives

Early years and childcare services have the potential to improve outcomes for children, provide an early and essential safeguarding service, and lift families out of disadvantage by supporting parents' economic and employment choices and opportunities. Research has consistently found early years and childcare:

- Supports children to grow, develop and learn, whilst preparing them for life and school.
- Helps us all to reach children earlier, and identify if they have unmet needs, so we can develop ways in which early help can be offered.

- Enables parents to make choices for their own families, education, training and/or employment
- Creates employment in the early years and childcare sector.

The case for children's and families' participation in early years and childcare is strong, which is something reflected in this quote from the DfE funded Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) research about the current childcare and early education model in England:

"...more hours spent in formal and informal ECEC (early childhood education and care) between ages two and four has benefits for child cognitive and socio-emotional development at age four... Increased time spent in ECEC in both PVI and maintained settings was associated with cognitive benefits, and ECEC received in PVI settings was also associated with socio-emotional benefits." SEED (2018)

A whole range of research reports, evidence, tools and resources to support the sharing of these arguments is available. One such invaluable source is The Early Intervention Foundation who champion and support the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes <<https://www.eif.org.uk/reports>>. Another useful website is Foundation Years <<https://foundationyears.org.uk>>. Funded by DfE, it contains information about all the early years and childcare entitlements and related topics including SEND, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and business health.

1.1.2 The universal entitlement for 15 hours of early learning

All children aged three- and four-years-old in England are entitled to a universal offer of 570 hours a year over no fewer than 38 weeks of the year. The entitlement is usually taken as 15 hours each week; sometimes fewer hours are taken spread or stretched over more weeks of the year. Available since 2010, 15 hours was gradually phased in since 1996, and has increased in hours and flexibility throughout this time.

Take-up of funded early education remains high among three- and four-year-olds at 1,277,100 (DfE, 2019). 92% of three-year-olds, and 95% of four-year-olds benefited from this funded early education in January 2019. Whilst parental awareness and demand is high, it is important to retain a focus on ensuring least advantaged families are reached and enabled to access their entitlements.

1.1.3 The two-year-old entitlement

Since September 2013, two-year-old funding has been made available nationally to least advantaged two-year-olds. Two-year-olds are eligible for 570 hours of free early years provision if the parent(s) are: in low income employment or in receipt of specific benefits including out of work benefits and low income support, where the child has a statement of Special Educational Needs or is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, is Looked After by the local authority or is no longer Looked After as a result of an adoption order, special guardianship or a child arrangement order.

Local authorities are provided with a list of potentially eligible children by the Department of Work and Pensions seven times a year, to support reaching and engaging with families. The Department for Education provides a mechanism for local authorities to verify whether children meet the eligibility criteria based on parental receipt of benefits, via an Eligibility Checking System (ECS).

The total number of two-year-olds benefiting from funded early education was 148,800 in January 2019, a decrease of 6,200 (72% of estimated eligible children to 68%). This was thought to be mainly due to a change in the calculation of the eligible population and the dynamic effect of 30 hours entering the market.

1.1.4 30 hours childcare

Since September 2017, three- and four-year-olds of working parents, who meet set eligibility criteria, can access an additional 15 hours each week, generally known as '30 hours childcare'. This is an extended early years entitlement which includes the 15 hours universal early years entitlement and an additional 15 hours (per week up to a maximum of 38 weeks, or 570 hours stretched across more weeks of the year), totalling 1,140 hours. Eligibility for 30 hours childcare is based upon both parents working in a couple household, or a single parent working in a lone-parent household, with minimum and maximum income thresholds applied (including those on zero hours contracts and self-employed workers, and parents on sickness or caring benefits). Parents apply to HMRC via the Childcare Service found at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk and if eligible, are given a code which their chosen childcare provider validates with the local authority before a place is taken up. Over 328,000 children benefited from the extended funded early education (January 2019), up 11% on January 2018 figures.

1.1.5 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

It is commonly reported by local areas, providers and parents, that take-up of the entitlements can be lower for children with SEND. We have found it is important local areas are able to coordinate, share information and manage the funds available for the purpose of supporting take-up. To do this effectively relies upon a shared responsibility across different departments across the whole local authority. Providers play a critical role in being confident to offer places and deliver services in ways that are tailored to the particular needs of children and build confidence in parents as they access their entitlements.

1.2 Funding and the cost of childcare

1.2.1 Government funding

All early years and childcare entitlements receive Government funding which is intended to deliver high quality, flexible early years learning and/or childcare. Funding is not intended to cover the cost of meals, extra consumables, or additional services/activities or hours. DfE states parents can therefore be expected to pay for such services offered by their provider.

1.2.2 Parents' fees and additional financial support

Parents pay fees for non-government-funded hours and services over and above the universal and targeted 15 hours and/or 30 hours for working parents. To support parents' payment of fees, a range of different additional funding or support is available, such as:

- Childcare/employer voucher schemes.
- Workplace provision.
- Tax Free Childcare.
- Universal Credit or the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.
- Care to Learn.
- Grants to support further and higher education students.

Detailed information about financial support for childcare can be found here:

<<https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting/childcare>>

Within Tax Free Childcare arrangements, for every £8 parents pay into their online account, the Government will pay £2, up to a maximum contribution of £2,000 per child each year, for children aged under 12 (or £4,000 per child per year for disabled children). Further information can be found at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk Furthermore, tax credits allow working families with children under 16 (or under 17 if disabled), to claim 70% of childcare costs, up to a cap. Working families claiming Universal Credit in England with children under 17, can claim up to 85% of eligible childcare costs, again up to a cap.

Parents need clear information about what they can claim, and how, and so this informs their purchasing choices. Providers also need clear information so they can factor this into their business financial models, as another important finding stream.

1.2.3 Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)

In addition to the local early years funding arrangements which can contain SEND supplements, other funding streams are available to support children with SEND, these are:

- Disability Access Fund (DAF).
- SEN Inclusion Fund.

- High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
- Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).
- Parents' fees supported by Tax Free Childcare (paid at a higher rate of up to £4,000 per year per child for SEND).

1.3 About Childcare Works' role

The Department for Education (DfE) awarded Childcare Works a national support contract in 2016. The programme worked with providers and local authorities on the implementation of the extended entitlement of 30 hours childcare for working parents. The programme is a partnership between Mott MacDonald and Hemsall's – called Childcare Works. It followed success in delivering the Achieving Two Year Olds (A2YO) national support contract (2012-2016). A2YO worked to support and challenge the implementation of the free early learning entitlement for least advantaged two-year-olds. A project that saw take-up levels rise to nearly 70% of eligible children by 2016.

Childcare Works had similar aims, with a focus on achieving the delivery of 30 hours childcare linked to all early years and childcare entitlements for two- three- and four-year-olds. It aimed to support high-quality childcare that was accessible, flexible and affordable. In doing so, it worked directly with providers, local authority early years teams and their partners, membership organisations, and central government.

The additional 15 hours for families where both parents are working has brought significant opportunities, enabling parents to make work pay and support local job creation in the sector. Childcare Works' key role aimed to realise these benefits for families and children across the country. Not only have childcare providers offered extra funded hours to families, they have done so while improving the quality of their service.

However, despite the positive outcomes, we knew such reforms would bring many challenges and we assembled a team experienced in finding solutions – as we did with the two-year-old entitlement. We provided a data and intelligence led approach, where a universal offer to all local authorities in England was overlaid with an allocation of resource for a targeted programme. This programme focused on addressing barriers to implementation and directed time and effort where it was needed most and would have the biggest impact.

For example, during the second year of two-year-old funding roll-out (2014), the Achieving Two Year Olds programme started working with a number of local authorities to explore a radical approach to reaching least engaged families and to streamline to a minimum the hurdles and barriers in the way of accessing places. The golden ticket approach was born. This meant families contacted through the DfE/DWP list of eligible families receiving an automatic place for their two-year-old and all they needed to do was present the ticket to their chosen provider who would liaise with the LA to ease the parents' burden of application and checks. Such arrangements continue in many places, sometimes temporarily or in targeted ways. Places can be offered automatically or subject to eligibility checking.

Childcare Works had a robust programme of practical and effective support, challenge and solutions for all types of providers and every local authority. We were strongly focused on sufficiency, flexibility, two-year-olds, and access for children with SEND. Our role was to support many of these outcomes.

Key elements of the programme:

- A termly **Progress Review Form (PR Form)** to self-evaluate, challenge and monitor LA progress and identify support and challenge needs.
- Each local authority had a nominated **Programme Adviser** for key contact, relationship brokering, questions and query resolution.
- **Progress Sharing (PS) Meetings** for local early years team leads held regionally each term, and two annual national meetings.
- **Direct support for local authorities** on a targeted basis: one-to-one and small group, business and action planning, childcare sufficiency assessment, local strategy and partnership facilitation, management support/briefings.
- A programme of **In-depth** sessions looked at issues, barriers and effective solutions in detail such as childcare sufficiency, increasing take-up, SEND, and school delivery.
- **Childcare Matters** information sessions for all types of early years and childcare setting were held to provide information updates and business remodelling support for over 12,000 providers.
- **Training** for trainers and key **local authority staff and partners** on approaches to support 30 hours. Including **Changing Lives Through Childcare** a programme focused specifically on raising the awareness of least advantaged families and securing increased take-up of all entitlements.
- **Training and information for providers:** on a range of issues such as flexible staffing, occupancy rates, business remodelling, economies of scale and scope.
- **Online resources for local authorities** posted on LGA Knowledge Hub.
- **Online resources for providers** posted on www.childcareworks.co.uk with signpost information on the Foundation Years website and newsletter www.foundationyears.org.uk.
- **A suite of information sheets and signposting documents** shared widely with local authorities and available online.

2. Childcare Act (2006) (2016): local authority roles and duties

The Childcare Act (2006) (the Act) required all local authorities in England to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, a sufficiency of registered childcare (for children aged 0-14 years or up to 18 for disabled children or children with special needs). The duty to secure sufficient childcare (section 6) and the annual sufficiency report helped LAs shape and support the development of childcare. This was in order to make it flexible, high quality and sustainable, and be responsive to how the local community wished to use it – within agreed considerations. This role was described as a market management function; supporting the diverse early years and childcare sector in the maintained, private and voluntary sectors (including childminders) to meet the needs of parents, children and young people, and stakeholders alike.

Section 7 of the Act required local authorities to secure and fund early years provision which was free of charge to parents. This provision was for children aged two-, three- and four-years-old.

Section 12 of the Act placed a duty on local authorities to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents relating to the provision of childcare, services or facilities that may be of benefit to parents and prospective parents, children and young people.

Section 13 of the Act required local authorities to secure information, advice and training for providers in their area on meeting the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), meeting the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), vulnerable and disadvantaged children and effective safeguarding and child protection. Local authorities are required to support providers registered on the Ofsted Early Years Registers who are judged less than 'good' in their most recent inspection report, and for providers newly registered on the Early Years Register who had not yet had an inspection report published.

The sufficiency duty (section 11 of the Childcare Act 2006) was repealed in the Children and Families Act (2014). DfE Statutory Guidance now states local authorities should report on sufficiency annually to elected members and parents. The report should provide information on the local supply and availability, and how sufficient it is to meet local demand for early years and childcare. Statutory guidance provides a clear indication of what should be included in the report, and an indication of what is planned in the future.

The Childcare Act (2016) extended the 2006 Act to include new early years entitlements to be delivered by local authorities, namely 30 hours. The section 12 duty was strengthened by requiring local authorities to publish information electronically on the local authority website and update it at a minimum termly on 1 January, 1 April and 1 September.

The Childcare Act (2016) can be found here: <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/enacted>> and the statutory guidance can be found here: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-education-and-childcare--2>>.

Further information can also be found in the Childcare Works signposting briefing: 'Childcare Early Years and Childcare as a local authority priority' January 2019.

The key tasks for local authorities remain as:

- Collecting, collating, and publishing information assessing the local sufficiency of childcare and identifying any gaps.
- Reporting this to local elected members and parents.
- Taking actions that are 'reasonably practicable' to address gaps in supply identified by the sufficiency assessment.
- Ensuring local provision of the targeted and universal early years and childcare entitlements.
- Acting as the 'provider of last resort' to address gaps the market cannot address alone.
- Making available access to information, training and support for early years and childcare providers.
- Making available clear and accessible information to reach parents, including particular strategies for reaching disadvantaged families.
- Involving and including early years and childcare providers in strategic planning, Schools' Forum funding discussions, and change management.
- Supporting providers to balance high quality and sustainability in equal measure.
- Supporting providers who need to improve quality as identified through Ofsted inspection outcomes.
- Enabling children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to have access to early years and childcare services and making best use of funding available.

3. What we know

We know...

From the outset, local authorities need to have good childcare sufficiency reports and data and use them to drive and inform their market management role

The early years market has had to rapidly adapt to changing Government policy, funding arrangements (National Early Years Funding Formula NEYFF), parental need and demand, and to sustain financial and quality delivery models. Local authorities in turn have had to constantly assess sufficiency to deliver the early learning entitlements (in context of the wider statutory duty to have sufficient childcare to meet the needs of working parents of children aged 0-14 years and up to 17 years for disabled children), monitor and assess changes in the market, and use this information to both shape an emerging market and support existing and future early years and childcare providers' business health and future planning.

Childcare Works has found developing and maintaining robust childcare sufficiency assessments is a resource and capacity challenge for local authorities. Without prescriptive guidance on how to undertake a childcare sufficiency assessment and without a statutory requirement to do so, local authorities have required considerable support and guidance from Childcare Works. This support has included:

- Childcare sufficiency, market management, and back-to-basics In Depth sessions in response to the high level of demand for sufficiency assessment support, and staff team change in local authorities. Publishing and sharing of tools and resources to help the planning and implementation of childcare sufficiency assessments (CSAs).
- Project managing and undertaking the entire childcare sufficiency assessment on behalf of the local authority.
- Completing particular elements of sufficiency assessments (principally estimating demand).
- Linking CSA findings to market management strategies and childcare place development.
- Offering critical friend and mentoring support to review and give guidance on sufficiency assessment data analysis and reporting.
- Mentoring local authority officers through design, project management, analysis and reporting childcare sufficiency assessments.

Case Study: Structuring the early years team to increase collaboration and partnership in Doncaster

Childcare Works has persistently promoted the need for local authorities to have robust childcare sufficiency assessments (CSAs) that provide evidence of current and future supply and demand, identify gaps in supply and services and inform market management strategies that address such gaps. We have offered one-to-one support for planning, project management and completion of CSAs. We believe it is essential there are strong structural and practical links between data collection and analysis processes and operational planning and fieldwork. In-Depth sessions and PS Meetings have shown how to link CSAs with proactive market management strategies. Our signposting documents and resources help LA teams to get the message across to their leaders and managers.

Full sector approach from early years to post 16

Doncaster merged their school place planning, childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA), and early education funding functions. The resultant service was badged as 'Learning Provision Organisation', with the aim of providing a full sector approach from early years through to post 16. Their aim and purpose was underpinned by a Learning Provision Organisation Strategy governed by a multi-agency board comprised of the local authority, schools and academies, multi academy trusts, early years PVLs, and post-16 providers. Together, this strategy and board steered the work of developing the learning provision landscape with a child-focused approach.

The early years team believed this way of working had significantly raised the profile of childcare sufficiency and early education funding. It had enabled them to tap into school place planning data, housing and demographic knowledge, and report it in a consistent way. Using this data in addition to an annual CSA, Local Area Plans were produced which combined information and action plans for the whole learning provision sector identifying pressure points and setting out potential plans for resolution. The Families Information Service (FIS) had become part of the wider Information Pathways Service which again worked in close partnership.

Each local area plan comprised of two reports, both linked to the Learning Provision Organisation Strategy as appendices. The first report pulled together top-level data and set out the current status of the full learning provision sector. It highlighted any pressure points in terms of places using supply and demand as key indicators. The second report was an options paper, containing all of the identified pressures and set out potential opportunities for the way forward. These options were presented to the board, and once ratified informed the early years team's work moving forward.

Higher early years profile

As a result, the profile of early years is said to have been raised much higher than before. Relationships with providers are strong, with good levels of engagement and information return from providers and schools. The team collected provider occupancy data from childcare providers

termly, using Survey Monkey with an average 90% response rate. A non-return of data is listed within the LA funding agreement as a breach of contract.

To ensure close partnership working we have established a 'settings of concern' core group which includes all of the above services and mirrors the local 'schools of concern' process. At this group, core information about providers is shared, and strategic decisions and recommendations are agreed about the way forward.

Doncaster said "We achieved this, by shouting out about the benefits of joining-up services and the efficiencies this brought in terms of resource. Being placed within the correct service area and linked with the most appropriate services really helped. The service sits under the Learning and Opportunities; Children and Young People's directorate. We sit under Learning Provision Organisation, which combines two top level services, School Admissions and my Service, Pupil Place Planning. Make strong links with your school place planning team. There is a wealth of information out there which is already collected as part of the statutory school capacity (SCAP) responsibility. This goes a long way to address childcare providers' feeling of coming second place to schools; anything you can do to remove this barrier works well. It is a slow process though, we are two years in and many of our providers still do not fully understand what we are doing or why, but as time passes we are gradually improving this with ongoing communication and engagement."

We know...

Local authorities cannot, and do not, act alone in discharging their strategic leadership role.

Working in partnership with key partners and early years and childcare providers across the maintained, private and voluntary sectors is essential. This helps ensure the availability of high quality, sustainable childcare that meets the needs of local parents and carers.

Key partners and stakeholders include:

- **Group-based early years childcare providers and childminders** – as the organisations funded for delivery of the services.
- **Parents and families** – whose needs and demands shape the type of provision available locally.
- **Families' information services or directories** - who hold an important role in informing and advising parents about their entitlement, how to use it, and where to find it.
- **Early years membership organisations** – locally and nationally.

- **Housing, economic development, planning and research** – whose actions in terms of new housing developments and held data can support local authorities anticipate and plan for provision where it is needed.
- **Children's centres and/or early help services** – who join up with early years and childcare providers to provide family support, early identification and early intervention services.
- **JobCentre Plus** – who support parents to enter or re-enter employment and navigate the barriers commonly experienced by parents seeking childcare provision and financial support.
- **Health Visitors and social care** – who play a key role in raising parents' awareness about all the entitlements to increase take-up and provide support for young children and their families.
- **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) practitioners** – who offer additional support where children with SEND need it.
- **Primary and secondary schools, academies and colleges** – as providers themselves, or partners and linked services for early years and childcare.
- **Community and voluntary groups** – who can play a vital role in raising awareness and promoting take-up of all the early years and childcare entitlements.

Case Study: Work with JobCentre Plus in Buckinghamshire

Childcare Works has championed the connections between the early years entitlements, childcare and supporting parental employment opportunities. This includes connecting in meaningful ways with colleagues in employment supporting roles such as JobCentre Plus, housing or community programmes.

Buckinghamshire raised awareness of the various early education funding offers with both JobCentre Plus (JCP) staff and customers and how it supports families back into the workplace. They promoted childcare as a career and childminding as a business, and know at least one person became a childminder as a direct result of this.

Initially, LA early years staff attended a JCP staff training session. They also attended sessions aimed at specific groups, for example, one parent families, to explain their childcare options. This resulted in the offer to allow them to work out of the JCP office one morning a month to be available to answer direct questions on all aspects of early education, childcare and childcare as a career.

What impact is this work having?

Officers are able to link the benefits of two-year-old funding as a way into the career market and the option of 30 hours if working when their child turns three. They have also been able to signpost to other local authority services, including Buckinghamshire Family Information Service and Early Help.

Buckinghamshire said: “Be persistent and don’t give up. Although we can ensure JCP staff have the information, it is often easier for LA staff to link together the services available to them.” They added they would welcome more support in encouraging the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in this arrangement. It has worked successfully in one area of Buckinghamshire but they have struggled to engage with the other JCP offices, as it takes valuable time to connect with busy professionals and to get the message across to secure partnership working.

Case Study: Lead member engagement in Calderdale

Childcare Works has supported, equipped and encouraged LA colleagues to share and distribute information within their management and leadership structures, and across their local provider markets. A key aspect of this approach is connecting in meaningful ways starting with lead members.

Calderdale early years team enjoyed engagement from their Lead Member for Children’s Services right from the start of 30 hours. They had begun to build this relationship in the early days of rolling out the two-year-old entitlement by providing regular updates to the Director of Children’s Services who met with the Lead Member each month. These updates included a breakdown of take-up rates by ward in recognition that councillors like to see what is happening in their ‘patch’ and to get some understanding of how key political agendas are affecting their constituents.

The lead member gave press interviews and the early years team issued several social media posts on their behalf about how they were supporting 30 hours and the positive impact on working parents in Calderdale. The Lead Member received the twice monthly E-Bulletin with a round-up of local and national news pertinent to the childcare and early years sector.

Providers valued by councillors

The team said: “We promoted the positives of 30 hours – for providers and for parents. We helped the council leadership interpret the sometimes scary national press stories about the negative impacts of 30 hours. We put them into context and reassured it was not necessarily the picture in Calderdale. When a nursery did close (publicly citing the 30 hours) we were able to explain the other key factors influencing their decision to close. Having high profile support for government policies was vital. It said to providers and parents the council valued this and we wanted it to succeed. Providers felt included and they had a route to the Lead Member through the Early Years Team.”

“It is important to remember politics do matter in today’s early years environment. A councillor’s decisions are made on the basis of political values, and the concerns of local residents, as much as they are on information and facts. It’s vital in early years that we try and understand that and ensure there are no difficult surprises, only good ones. It is important though to be honest without fear or favour. You may have to give unpopular advice and shouldn’t avoid difficult conversations.

Get to know your Lead Members’ particular interests, and what drives them so you will be more ‘in tune’ with what they want. Brief carefully using jargon-free language that offers good, useable soundbites. Take some time to really understand the local decision-making process, if you can; attend Council and Cabinet meetings as an observer to get a feel for the political landscape. We offer every new Lead Member for Children’s Services the opportunity for accompanied visits to outstanding providers or those providers who are working well to understand and meet the challenges of a specific community need. We take these opportunities to be positive and not talk about problems from the get-go.”

We know...

Providers have needed to change and this has been challenging and needed support

Every time new funding or flexibility has been introduced, or the number of hours has incrementally increased, providers have been required to examine their business and delivery models. This is so they can adapt to meet the challenges and opportunities such change presents.

The impact of change differs across the diverse parts of the sector, as well as across different local areas and various regions. What works in one place is not always an option somewhere else. Whilst many providers are very able to manage their response, others need more information and resources, as the challenges can feel unsurmountable.

A variety of support does need to be locally available to enable the market to make sense of what change is needed. Large group events are limited to information dissemination, which is all well and good but these cannot always meet the specific needs of all settings in attendance. Their usefulness is enhanced when linked to small- to medium-sized group training or workshops as they provide more opportunity for richer discussion, peer-to-peer support, and action-learning opportunities.

Of course, talking openly about one’s own business challenges is difficult, and a private matter. So one-to-one sessions should provide the opportunity to confidentially and specifically problem solve on-site in tailor-made ways.

In such a diverse sector, it is important we work hard to bring different types of providers together so we can break artificial barriers and encourage inter-sector respect, collaboration and partnerships. This can be both informal and with formal partnership arrangements.

It is equally important schools, childminders and PVI group providers can access subsector-specific support and training at the times of the day, week and year that works for them. For example, business planning may be standard across all sectors. However, the modelling element for each is different - childminders' ratios being one major difference. Full day providers have become well-adept at offering flexibly, whereas schools and sessional providers have needed to think very differently as they move from traditional morning and afternoon models, to ones of longer days - and increased flexibility.

There are lots of examples of how providers have changed and sought to achieve the balance of achieving high quality and sustainable settings on our website:

<<https://www.childcareworks.co.uk/resources>>

Case Study: Shared Foundation Partnership Model in York

Childcare Works made early connections with all types of developments in local working arrangements, such as the partnership hub model. The lessons from these models were widely shared within PS Meetings and one-to-one work with LAs to identify what works and useful ideas for different local areas.

The Shared Foundation Partnership model was created by City of York Council in 2000 and created a network of 25 partnerships. Each Shared Foundation Partnership included schools, childminders, private nurseries, playgroups and out of school clubs. There was a focus on ensuring sufficient high quality and flexible early years and childcare places to meet demand in local communities. The model was well-researched and evolved to respond to changes in policy. The relationships between providers and the LA were cemented through regular meetings to discuss quality and childcare sufficiency.

Creating an evidence base

The model was instrumental to the success of 30 hours, which started a term earlier in York through the DfE Early Implementers programme, as there were already strong arrangements in place with providers. This was evidenced by Frontier Economics who evaluated the programme and showed partnerships and provider representation on special forums acted as local facilitators due to the quality of provider commitment and engagement.

30 hours prompted a further expectation and commitment from the LA that the partnership model should play an important role in supporting delivery. The partnerships supported childcare sufficiency planning as providers were able to discuss their plans for responding to 30 hours, how it would affect other local providers' financial viability and how they would ensure expected parental demand was met.

Signposting vacancies maximised entitlement

Partnerships also supported other settings within the partnership by signposting to each others' vacancies. This enabled parents to use more than one provider to maximise their entitlement, including out of school childcare provision. Providers could share learning about the programme's developments and discuss the many potential challenges. Good practice was identified so it ensured continuity of care when children were looked after by two providers. This included exchange of information on daily activities and issues, termly reports and assessments, and on planned activities for the term to ensure complementary input from different providers. Such positive partnership arrangements have been a regular feature of Ofsted Inspection Reports, which resulted in 98% 'good' or 'outstanding' (national 95%) and 75.6% achieving good levels of development at the end of the EYFS (national 71.8%).

To build upon early implementation, partnerships were regularly asked to focus on ensuring high quality provision, strong transitions, closing the word gap, and childcare sufficiency planning. Invitations were given to bi-annual LA information sessions that explored these in more detail.

York said: "All areas should create a vision for partnership working between the LA and providers, and provider-to-provider. The vision should explicitly link to strategic and statutory duties securing long-term senior leadership and political support in the process. Key partners need to be identified and involved such as teaching schools and academies. And take a development approach - consider testing a pilot in the first instance, then deploy staff resource to build capacity, seeking to reduce this in time as partnerships are able to be more self-sufficient. Start small and gather learning that could be shared more widely, and be patient enough to embed the change you want. Be prepared to increase and decrease development work inputs as the need arises due to the natural ebb and flow of capacity and capability. The result will be greater trust and mutual respect for effective collaboration and professional challenge.

Case Study: Early years communities creating a model of collaborative working in Somerset

Somerset trialed a number of different ways of supporting providers to improve outcomes for children. With financial pressures and a reduced early years team, there was a need to streamline good practice and identify a viable and effective way forward. The aim was to empower providers, enable access to the resources and training they need, and to provide a robust communication channel in a cost-effective way to support a self-sustaining community.

The team consulted with providers who were concerned that approaches needed to be consistent across the county, with clarity about roles and reporting, and assurances around the whole local authority's support. With this information, and examples of good practice, 11 Early Years Communities were formed in November 2018. There was a minimum of four lead practitioners in each community and they formed the committee; the voice of providers. These leads represented

the different early years sector's schools, nurseries, pre-schools, childminders and health links. Their purpose was to:

- Raise attainment levels, supporting children to have good levels of development.
- Support practitioners with continual professional development.
- Support peer-to-peer learning.
- Share good practice.
- Represent early years providers' voice within local authority.

Standardising documentation

In response to providers' concerns and ideas the early years team provided standardised pro-forma documentation, job descriptions, terms of reference, termly recording and reporting frameworks, case study forms, and spreadsheets and budgets. Strategic endorsement was secured from the Director of Children's Services and a named lead officer supports each Early Years Community.

The communities have become established and hold regular CPD events. After the initial launch events various training and workshops have been delivered via the communities which have included: letters and sounds, early English and maths, moderation for early years, managing difficult conversations and supporting children's emotions and behaviours.

Peer-to-peer support

By coming together, the communities were able to support each other, share their knowledge, skills and specialisms and provide informal peer-to-peer support. They also had a collective buying power for resources and training.

The community leads worked together to provide a strong communication channel to ensure the sector had an equitable and consistent opportunity to engage across Somerset. This was said to reinforce the model's values and linked with all agencies such as Early Help and SEND services. An app was developed and made information accessible for all providers, managers, teachers and childminders to support easy communication.

Early Years Head Teacher Champions were created and are said to have been a major influence by raising the profile and importance of early years in the Infant and Primary sector. They have been advocates by acting as 'change ambassadors' and positive role models. The role has been influential in building cross sector relationships whilst ensuring an equal opportunity for all providers and breaking down barriers between the diverse early years sector. Specifically, they have:

- Raised the early years profile at the various strategic meetings they attend.
- Been trusted and respected early years advocates.

- Listened and been prepared to be contacted about early years.
- Shared good practice with other head teachers.
- Encouraged participation across the communities to support improving outcomes for children in line with Good Learning Development Outcomes.

Somerset reported: “All eleven communities are up-and-running, some are further ahead than others. They are certainly gaining momentum and initial feedback from providers is good. We have noted some of our least engaged providers are now communicating more effectively and using the app. We are also receiving more requests from our partners to deliver information and training via the communities. For example, we are hoping to deliver Autism Education Trust (AET) Tier 1 training next academic year.”

We know...

It is important provision responds to needs and demands

Alongside the growth and change in the early years and childcare sector, there has been a strong movement to respond to the changing needs of families. Which in recent times has meant increasing the flexibility of what is on offer. This has primarily been a reply to demand from parents for provision that fits with their modern working week, family routines, and the needs of their children.

Flexibility is an essential element of any delivery model for early years and childcare, and it supports settings’ future business sustainability. Flexibility offers new ways to fill places on offer, and claim funding from the local authority. With growing demand for flexibility, all-year-round provision, and the increased availability of it, parents have the opportunity to choose settings that meet their needs, sometimes at the expense of settings delivering once traditional models.

Flexibility is by no means easy to deliver, but it is not impossible; delivering flexibly impacts on many things, and all need considered attention:

- Staff routines.
- Models of delivery.
- The use and availability of places.
- Compliance with regulations and statutory guidance.
- Planning and premises restrictions.
- Funding contracts.
- Financial management of income and expenditure.

Throughout 2016-2019, the Childcare Works programme worked with 1,000s of providers and has identified four key areas that have assisted providers to manage and plan for continued success:

1. A business planning cycle continuously reviewing and reflecting on internal and external factors affecting delivery.
2. A financial review process which looks at how to make funding work.
3. Clear and transparent communications with parents that manage parental expectations, and satisfy conditions of early years funding.
4. Action planning which embraces change as it happens to ensure continued success.

Projects that directly helped support providers to respond to needs and demands were Childcare Matters, Coram Family and Childcare Toolkit, Childcare Hubs and Action for Children's Working in Partnership to Meet Children's Needs.

Childcare Matters - direct delivery by Childcare Works, in partnership with one LA or a small group or cluster, of briefing and information for providers on national progress, successes and lessons learned so far, and ideas for change and business remodelling.

The sessions included setting the scene, consideration on meeting the needs of children with SEND, the national perspective, making the most of funding, networking with other providers and local authority teams, as well as cross border working. The sessions were well attended and generated a good level of discussion and further debate, settings were more informed about what was available and how to access it, as well as having a chance to consider the impact of 30 hours funding on the marketplace. They also thought that the opportunity to hear key messages with a national message was helpful for providers, and allowed them to compare their own experiences with those from across the county. It allowed providers to think more about how they can market what they offer and how they balance affordability with sustainability. Local authorities also shared plans to cascade the content of the day wider to providers who had not attended.

Coram Family and Childcare Toolkit, developed the 30 Hours Mixed Model Partnership project, commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and designed to support mixed model partnership approaches to delivering the extended free entitlement for three- and four-year-olds. This interactive toolkit helped providers set up or join a partnership, maximise the benefits of working together and tackle the challenges joint working can bring.

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/dfes-30-hour-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit>

Childcare Hubs. Action for Children's 'Early Learning and Community Childcare Hubs' was originally funded by the DfE in 2013 as a two-year programme with additional funding in 2015 to produce the SEN and Disability in the Early Years Toolkit with the Council for Disabled children. It received additional funding in 2015-16 to test different ways of extending the programme. Each

Hub is a Good or Outstanding school, children's centre or PVI setting that works with at least eight settings including childminders to develop an action plan that:

- Improves the quality of provision.
- Supports the provision of new childcare places focussing on funded two-year-olds where this is seen as a gap.
- Supports parents with their working patterns by offering blended childcare and early education.

Most of the Hubs that were part of this funded programme have remained sustainable and continue to thrive. Good practice from the Hubs is captured in case studies

[<http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/hubs/>](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/hubs/)

Action for Children's Working in Partnership To Meet Children's Needs. This toolkit is designed as a step-by-step guide for schools and childcare providers (including childminders) to establish partnerships to meet the childcare needs of their community. It focuses on school aged children between the ages of 4-12 years. https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/In-partnership_Childcare-Needs_Final.pdf

We know...

There need to be different models of delivery to offer choice and match provision to the needs of children and families

It remains vital that a variety of different models of early years and childcare delivery is available to meet the diverse needs of different children and families. Home-based childcare provided by childminders and group-based childcare have equal value and different things to offer.

Parents and families, partners and stakeholders, and parent-facing professionals, all need to understand the facts about early years and childcare provision, and key information about the different things each type of provider can offer.

It is amazing the myths and misunderstandings the public and professionals alike can hold and they all have real potential to present barriers to participation and use. The result can be that children and families remain on waiting-lists for non-existent places, rather than finding a local solution to enable them to access their entitlements. Not everyone, for example, knows all funded provision is registered and inspected by Ofsted and required to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), whether it be in a childminder's home, or in a maintained nursery school. Often, and by no means intentionally, the messages given about the range of providers can give the message some are better than others or imply advantages to one over another.

It must be the case that everyone holds each part of the early years and childcare sector in equal regard and supports families to make informed and appropriate choices around what is best for them and their child/ren.

Information about the different types of childcare are widely available, nationally, and on local authority websites. We like this one published by PACEY:

<<https://www.pacey.org.uk/parents/choosing-great-childcare/types-of-childcare/>> and this one by Coram Family Childcare: <<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/childcare-guides>>.

Information about the entitlements and how to apply is available at:

<<https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>>

Case Study: Increasing the numbers of childminders in Greenwich

Childcare Works has promoted the need for all types of childcare provision to be in place to meet the needs of all children and families. The LA market management role includes taking a proactive approach to creating and supporting places where there is a need and demand.

Against the trend, in Greenwich the number of childminders has remained constant and there has been an increase in funded places in childminding recently. This is the result of a determined and deliberate strategy of the local authority.

Churn in childminder numbers is a natural and expected pattern. Often childminders are working whilst their children are young or having got a taste of working in childcare take up roles in group childcare settings or in schools. Or, after their children have grown older, and having run their own business for a few years they move into other employment opportunities. However, there has been a downturn across the country in the number of childminders, which is a consideration in any market management strategy as their unique role in offering flexible, home-based, individualised childcare is absolutely crucial in offering choice for families.

Greenwich said they have maintained the number of childminders in recent years; as people move in or out of the sector, or retire, new childminders have been joining the sector. They said they were “sitting steady at a rate 420-430 childminders”.

“We offer childminder briefings to help people explore whether childminding is for them, and to understand the process - as well as showcase our support for them once registered”.

That alone isn't that remarkable, although our experience is that such briefings are much less common than they were a few years ago. So what else forms part of the jigsaw puzzle approach?

“We particularly used DfE Delivery Support Funding to promote childminding to parents as a good choice for early learning provision, along with supporting childminders to deliver the places. This has led to a 200% increase in the number of childminders delivering funded places offered and taken up in childminding. Our Families Services Directory (managed by Families Information Service) promotes and showcases all childcare provision – with individual pages that providers can populate demonstrating their unique selling points so they stand out from the crowd (training has supported this process too)”.

Ongoing support.

This is key, because working in childminding can be an isolated experience.

“Of course we ensure we meet our duty and provide targeted support after not met, inadequate, and requires improvement inspection outcomes. But we wanted to do more than that. We continue to offer business support, ready access to an Early Years and Childcare Advisor and children’s centres, and training. We have a duty phone-line and email for any queries, questions or support. It is essential the training is excellent, responsive and affordable and delivered at times convenient to childminders. There has also been a focus on the use of assistants and support on safer recruitment and supervision skills”.

Recent innovations.

“Last year we started having an annual childminder conference. That really develops a sense of energy and a shared commitment. We have also set up an approved supplier list and referral process for colleagues in Social Care who needed childcare for their clients. Childcare is a huge barrier to families who need to go to court, attend drug counselling, or participate in child protection meetings. These placements are delivered entirely by childminders who are matched to the needs of the family. It is a specialist and highly valuable role in supporting families and partner agencies.”

The difference it is making.

“Quality is good; poor quality is challenged and improved; and more children are accessing childminding services. Our EYFSP results are really positive and we are confident this is a reflection on the early learning and childcare experiences of our children. Childminder engagement in training and other events continues to be high and feedback is really positive.”

What advice would you give to other areas?

“Promote childminding at every opportunity and regularly remind other professionals that childminders also need to meet the same EYFS requirements as all other providers and schools. Include childminding as an option first (or nearly first) in all publicity. Showcase childminding when you can, using parent feedback and the benefits it has for their child. Deliver training and CPD in-house where possible to develop strong links to LA officers to help with building relationships. Set-up an approved supplier list for referral work from Social Care – this helps parents’ understanding of childminding (and use of childcare generally) and builds their confidence as well as helping the professional network understand the expertise and skills in the sector.”

We know...

Particular efforts need to be given to reaching and engaging least advantaged families

Many hundreds of thousands of families are reached by general and national messaging about the entitlements, or are part of networks in which such information is readily shared. However, some families are not reached by such messaging methods, need different messages or methods, or are more isolated. They may also experience more barriers to information, engagement and participation. Whilst many parents will be able to take action very easily when learning about them for the first time, others need much more support.

Substantial research has been published in this area and has consistently found the main barrier for many parents is lack of awareness and information about their entitlements and support for childcare costs. A common finding has been the need for a systematic way of informing parents of their entitlements. Providers do a great job of informing parents but this does not reach all families, especially those not engaged already, or those disenfranchised by services and communities, this means they are less likely to find out.

Whilst there have been significant improvements in how parents find out about the entitlements, there are found to be a continuing number of factors impacting on low take-up, including:

- “English as an additional language (EAL).
- Ethnicity.
- Population mobility.
- Employment status.” *DfE. Take-up of free early education entitlements (2018)*

We have found a need for differentiated messaging to connect with different families’ priorities for participation, specifically by highlighting the three main benefits for children:

- Childcare – so children are safely looked after by trusted professional adults.
- Learning – so children grow and develop and be prepared for school and life.
- Play and social skills – so children are having fun and making friends.

What is useful, is all these three messages are present in such strategies, and used proportionately in response to the diverse needs of particular communities. By understanding the key motivators and demotivators of a family, the messaging can be better tailored to their needs.

All parent-facing professionals have a role to play. That means everyone who works in early years and childcare, schools, health, social care, JobCentre Plus, children’s centres or early help takes action so we can all raise awareness and support take-up of entitlements. This is why Childcare Works developed Changing Lives Through Childcare, a programme focused specifically on raising

the awareness of least advantaged families and securing increased take-up of all entitlements. These information and training sessions have shown how parent-facing professionals can make a difference by:

- Being informed and up-to-date about all the entitlements, and being positive and excited about them.
- Carrying information to share with parents or being readily able to access information online.
- Using jargon and value-free language.
- Identifying the motivators for parents and using differentiated messages to stimulate families to find out more.
- Keeping up-to-date with early years and childcare provision in the local area, by making links, visiting settings, and dispelling personally held myths or misunderstandings about the types of provision or the services of local settings.
- Valuing all types of early years and childcare provider (including childminding) and understanding how different providers match up to the different needs of families.
- Connecting parents to childcare providers, helping them find them, or accompanying them on a visit.
- Knowing the local processes to find places and the support offers available by signposting parents to schools, providers, children's centres, early help, or similar services.
- Helping parents to get online and find out more, including working out the costs using the online costs calculator.
- Helping parents apply and reminding parents to reconfirm when they need to.
- Promoting other sources of childcare costs support e.g. Tax Free Childcare, and for children with SEND.
- Including information and links in literature, newsletters, and/or on websites, discussing in team meetings. Holding a training session, with a speaker from the local authority or a local childcare provider.
- Including the entitlements in family or other plans.

Case Study: Changing Lives Through Childcare (CLTC)

Childcare Works' Changing Lives Through Childcare (CLTC) programme offered 2-3 hour information, briefing and motivational sessions for parent-facing professionals working with local authorities, children's centres, health visiting, JobCentre Plus, and community or other groups (for

example, housing, employment and specialist groups). They aimed to support a greater connection between such professionals and offer information about:

- All early years and childcare entitlements.
- The activities that can best support take-up by least advantaged children.
- Tax-Free Childcare and other financial help towards parents' fees.
- Shared roles to support parents to understand and use their entitlements.
- Awareness of barriers and factors affecting take-up.

The sessions supported those who work directly with families so they can better have a positive initial and ongoing conversation with parents about taking up childcare.

Each session aimed to:

- Explore the details of early years entitlements.
- Consider why we have childcare and early years entitlements.
- Explore the difference they make to outcomes for children and their families.
- Outline the different eligibility criteria for funded two-year-olds and least advantaged families, the universal 15 hours for three- and four-year-olds, and 30 hours for three- and four-year-olds of working families.
- Unpick other schemes and government initiatives that support families to reduce the cost of childcare, alongside the government funded entitlements.
- Examine the role parent-facing teams play in supporting families to take advantage of the entitlements, take-up their places, and other funding support so we can all better support outcomes for children and families.

The sessions combined information giving with practical exercises which could be used by attendees themselves with their own teams afterwards. To support this, resources were freely available through the Childcare Works Knowledge Hub and circulated to participating and other local authorities.

Both PACEY and Coram were included in planning to support participation at each event, enabling the sharing of information about both the Early Years Disadvantage VCS grant programmes (Parent Champions and Childminders Promoting Two-Year-Old Take-Up), as well as some shared case studies to illustrate the impact on children and families.

Involvement of Parent Champions was beneficial and highlighted the power of parent-to-parent information giving:

“Hearing from a Parent Champion... worked really well as it enabled them to hear first-hand a parent’s experience of the two-year-old offer, including her initial reluctance and eventual positive experience; she also talked about how she supports other parents in feeling positive about the offers.” (Islington)

According to attendees, the most useful part of the sessions, which could indicate a previous gap had been filled were:

- Information about the various childcare entitlements and support available to families (the various criteria and processes for claiming).
- Information about why we have childcare (the benefits and outcomes for children and families).
- Information about the different types of childcare.
- The opportunity to link with other professionals.
- Ideas to take back to share with teams and colleagues afterwards.
- A link to Childcare Choices which could be shared afterwards.

Whilst basic information was key to supporting staff to make a childcare offer to a family, it was also important to support thinking about how the offer is made, particularly to a least advantaged family.

Take-up of all entitlements in each participating LA can be monitored and as yet we cannot determine direct impact of the sessions. In terms of potential impact however, if each attendee is in contact with approximately 20 families over the next term, approximately 3,240 families could be reached positively with good information, positive and confident messaging (162 x 20). This is all within the context of all sorts of dynamics affecting all entitlements and the take-up of two-year-old places in particular.

Case Study: Joining up LA resources to reach families at home in South Gloucestershire

Childcare Works has developed a range of models to promote outreach to find, connect and motivate eligible families to access their two-year-old, 15 hours or 30 hours places. This has included the Changing Lives Through Childcare Programme and a range of resources circulated to LAs.

Canvassing households entitled to two-year-old funding is not part of a local authority elections officer’s core role. That said, South Gloucestershire identified a possible resource with the required skill-set that could be exploited for the purposes of reaching families. They contacted the elections team with the idea and they in turn contacted existing elections canvassers to test if they would be interested in reaching families by using the list of eligible families supplied by DfE and DWP. The answer was a resounding yes.

Using the skills of elections canvassers

So, a fast-track process was developed as the staff were already employed by the LA, and included a short application form, and a contract for each 'canvass'. The terms were based on a rate per household, and flat rate mileage allowance. There was also a fee for attending a compulsory training briefing session.

Having downloaded the DWP list, the early years team removed households already using a two-year-old code. Households with Travellers' site addresses were sent to the Ethnic Minority and Travellers' Education Service, who then visited to explain the entitlement and take a paper form to assist them with applications.

A 'Golden Ticket' offering instant and pre-validated access to the entitlement with a letter was sent to everyone else. This was followed up, one week later with a postcard which coincided with a visit from a canvasser with a case load of approximately 70 homes. The canvasser visited the household once on a weekday/evening or weekend, with a further visit at an alternative time if they were not in first time around. All visits were between 9.30am and 8.30pm.

If no-one answered, a postcard was left to say another attempt would be made. An application form and a prepaid envelope was also left so the household could return it even if they did not meet the canvasser.

When parents were in, they were encouraged to sign up online through the LA Citizen Portal or complete a paper application form there and then, or later with a pre-paid envelope if needed.

Information exchange

Clearly, information exchange in this dynamic period was key. Any families taking-up their place were removed on a day-to-day basis from the list as they were known to the early years team. Canvassers were notified by email with revised lists. Canvassers returned any completed forms to the office before the DWP list deadline. The Canvassers' Lists were annotated against each household with dates and times of visits, whether they completed an application form, or stated their intent to do so online, or if the family was no longer at that address.

Direct contact with a supportive person

In April 2019, 361 households were reached by the scheme, resulting in 167 successful applications in a three-week period. Feedback from parents, via the canvassers, was that awareness raising and actual action in the form of an application and take-up was much more likely as the result of a visit and direct contact with a supportive person. Families who had previously just received material through the post had not taken such action, until the support arrived on the doorstep. Parents really valued the assistance in completing the complex

application process and having the two-year-old entitlement explained to them, with clear answers to their questions and concerns.

“There is a cost and it is time consuming during the canvass period for the coordinator in the early years office. But we feel it is a good way to reach least advantaged families and makes a significant impact on take-up.

Combined with the Golden Ticket, and the letter and postcards, this approach maximises the use and effect of the DWP list. It is important canvassers are well-briefed and thoroughly understand the two-year-old entitlement. That is why training is mandatory.

This is a way to encourage eligible families for whom paper information and general advertising fails to impact. It gives parents time to complete applications and helps if they are less confident with IT – which is often the case. It enabled parents to ask questions to fully understand the process from idea to taking-up and benefitting from a place”.

We know...

Parent to parent communication really helps build motivation and confidence to take up entitlements

Parent-power is essential for reaching families. The sharing of information between parents at early years groups and at the school-gate is a long-held tradition, and we have all learned how useful this is. Parents trust each other to support navigating the world of parenting, childcare and work. The findings of many childcare sufficiency assessments undertaken by LAs reveal this remains the case, with word of mouth frequently cited as one of the most common ways parents find out about local services. Reaching parents with good quality information is part of a full marketing and communications strategy, with the desired outcome being parents talking about what you want them to talk about.

Parent communication strategies should include:

- Ways in which parents can find and access information autonomously at all times of the day and week.
- Clear and accessible information explaining the entitlements, local provision and processes to get involved.
- Simplified and streamlined customer-journeys so parents can swiftly and easily navigate through from learning about the entitlements to suing them.
- Parent case studies showcasing what has worked for other families.

- Parent good news stories sharing the difference early years and childcare has made to children's learning and development, and families' economic and other choices.
- Direct examples of parents' words, including short video clips.
- Opportunities for parents to take a more active role, such as becoming a parent champion.

Parent Champions are parent volunteers who give a few hours a week to talk to other parents about local services available to families. Coram Family and Childcare developed the Parent Champions programme in 2007 to help 'hard to reach' parents who miss out on vital information about how to access childcare and other early years services. The model is delivered by parents for parents, with the support of LAs, children's centres, schools, or local community organisations. This peer-to-peer approach has been effective at raising parents' awareness as a low-cost method, with additional benefits of supporting Parent Champions' volunteers' skills and employability.

To find out more about parent champions, visit the Coram Family Childcare website:

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parent-champions-national-network>

Case Study: Video interviews with parents and providers in Stockport

Childcare Works has worked alongside LAs to support the complex process of change resulting from the introduction of new Government funding arrangements. Of key importance was the need to fully understand the local childcare market and how need and demand was changing. This helped support LAs and providers to plan for changes to their delivery and financial models.

Stockport used a programme of consultation and discussion with early years providers and parents, to help them better understand their needs and to appreciate the real impact of 30 hours.

Interviews were held with providers at one of the local PVI forums; a relaxed environment with a wide range of setting types and practitioners. There were structured questions that all settings were asked on camera. For the parent interviews, a nursery was chosen and parents were asked to volunteer. The LA found it touching how appreciative parents were of 30 hours and how much they valued both the childcare and education elements.

As a result, Stockport found they had collected a range of views from early years providers on how 30 hours was impacting on their businesses at the time and potentially in the future. This process helped the LA to better understand settings' "state of mind" and enabled the early years team to directly address concerns and challenges as well as acknowledging to the sector that the LA was listening to them.

Families supported by 30 hours

The LA achieved a wealth of views and feedback from parents about how 30 hours supported families in different ways. Parents were found to be overwhelmingly favourable about 30 hours.

The LA was interested to understand that many parents were eligible – often in areas that challenged their stereotypes. This helped the team to realise which families were truly benefitting from 30 hours, and the difference it was making to their lives.

They found for some families it meant they were not so dependent upon family members and grandparents for informal childcare. For others, the opportunities to enhance the development of their children was the primary focus.

The videos are available on the LA website <https://www.stockport.gov.uk/funded-childcare-for-3-and-4-year-olds/30-hours-funded-childcare>. They were also circulated to schools not already offering 30 hours so they could consider the potential benefits to their school and the families in their communities.

“The whole exercise enabled us to properly hear the provider voice alongside the parental voice in new ways. We often don’t get this first-hand, so the video brought it to life for us as a team, for other providers – including schools, and for parents across the whole LA area – and beyond. It was an opportunity to reach areas of disadvantage where parents may not have taken up the offer and share the advantages as well. The mixture of feedback was remarkable with multifaceted benefits for families. It is a great way of consulting and coproducing marketing and information materials. We think if we did it again, we would look at how parents found out about the entitlements, so we could check if our marketing works. And now would be a good time to focus on Tax Free Childcare and promote the learning advantages, links to two-year-olds, and benefits for school readiness.”

We know...

The national support contract provided a mechanism for an effective conduit between key relationships.

We have found successful delivery depends upon inter-dependent and mutually beneficial relationships between the Department for Education (DfE), HMRC, Childcare Works, local authorities (LAs), and early years and childcare providers (providers). The building of trust relies upon an openness in dialogues and regular, easy access to named contacts, timely communications (including regular updates, breaking news, and prompt question and query resolution) across the relationship dynamics of:

- DfE to Childcare Works.
- Childcare Works to DfE.
- DfE to LAs, via Childcare Works.
- LA early years teams to their stakeholders (SMT, partners, and providers).

We have found, as key delivery partners, local authorities find high value in being strongly connected to the DfE through facilitated channels. Effective actions include:

- Programme Adviser updates circulated regularly.
- Questions and queries raised by LAs to Childcare Works and referred where necessary to the DfE.
- Progress Sharing Meetings (PS) allow for physical presence of DfE, three times per year in each region, with presented information updates. Importantly, these opportunities also allow for acknowledgement of the challenges and successes, feedback, two-way dialogue, policy influence, and the expression of gratitude.

Bringing LAs together regularly achieves several outcomes. We have found frequent and timetabled meetings are essential in achieving both universal and targeted outcomes. The programme brought LAs together in different ways using various methods:

- Progress Sharing (PS) Meetings – regionally and nationally (universal).
- In Depths (semi-universal and targeted).
- Buddying or peer-to-peer support.

Progress Sharing (PS) Meetings were the termly regional networking and progress sharing opportunity for 30 hours leads at local authorities (LAs) to come together and receive and provide direct-line updates on developments and implementation expectations. PS Meetings were a key opportunity for LAs to meet with their Childcare Works programme adviser (PA), DfE and HMRC officials, and partner organisations, for the purpose of information exchange, case studies and sharing experiences and lessons learned.

The meetings provided opportunities to reflect, review progress, plan future progress, connect with other officers working on the same issues, and to share and evaluate ideas and resources. In short, to make Programme Adviser time and cost efficiencies, and ensure effectiveness happened through collaboration between LAs, between LAs and Childcare Works, and between LAs, Childcare Works and DfE (and other government departments and agencies as necessary).

All LAs had access to the meetings as part of the universal offer. They were held across the country in 7-8 locations, usually: London, Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Taunton. Attendance, feedback, and analysis reports all evidence high levels of engagement, attendee satisfaction, and measurable outcomes and impacts.

There have been two National Progress Sharing Meetings (2017 and 2018), and these were highly effective in creating a sense of national movement and achievement. They have given ministers opportunities to lead, and to acknowledge the efforts of LAs, as well as express gratitude for the success of 30 hours. The **Childcare Works Awards** (held in 2018) enhanced this opportunity and

recognised particular achievements (e.g. team of the year, two-year-olds take-up, systems development, provider success). Recently, we have learned that whilst this was a popular element of the programme, LA human and financial resource is affecting a waning of ability and interest to participate at this scale.

In-Depth Meetings aimed to reflect the format of PS Meetings with a few major differences. They focused on single issues, with small informal groups (6 LAs attending and hosted at one LA) up to large seminar formats (50 people in a conference venue). They were useful in tackling common problems identified through fieldwork, PRFs and research such as: childcare sufficiency assessment, provider remodelling, and increasing take-up by disadvantaged families. Delivery was more targeted, training and activity focused, and workshop in style, in contrast to PS Meetings which were information and discussion-based.

Buddying and peer-to-peer Through the building of inter-LA relationships during the sustained programme of PS Meetings, LAs were able to foster autonomous, mutually beneficial relationships for support, resource sharing, and problem solving. Where resource was identified to make a difference, or new relationships and connections needed to be developed (local, regionally and nationally), a budget was allocated to commission inter-LA buddying or peer-to-peer support. We found there was a small core group of LAs who most commonly were able and interested to provide wider support across the country.

Outcomes included:

- The unblocking of local barriers by comparing and contrasting with the experiences, approaches and conditions of other local areas.
- The generation of sound arguments and effective levers to take back to support discussions and negotiations with senior colleagues, partners and other stakeholders.
- The development of 'soft competition' between LAs in a region, or beyond through the sharing of local, regional and national progress, take-up and successes. Driving energy and commitment from LA senior management and operational delivery teams.
- The sharing of problems and coproduction of ideas. The creation of efficiencies and cost-savings.
- The introduction of Childcare Works' advice and directive leadership, using activities to embed the thinking through soft training activities so actions are taken on board.
- Good relationships with DfE and HMRC through direct contact and dialogue. Especially important through busy information periods, and during the teething-problems of the Childcare Service.

- For some LAs, the PS meetings were their key Childcare Works contact (if they were not benefitting from targeted input). Such contact with the Programme Adviser team ensured relationships are maintained, soft intelligence gathered, and future problems or challenges are identified and mitigated against.

There is continued demand for more sharing of practice, trends and experiences (good and bad). Experience shows this needs to be organised, scheduled and facilitated for efficiency, equality of access and participation. DfE and HMRC presence and input is popular (at senior level and when presentations are given with Q&A) – but more than that it is about achieving an inter-personal dialogue. Childcare Works has successfully delivered DfE updates on occasions when DfE could not attend. In a period of high staff and role change, LA restructures, and reducing resources (move to place funding, 5% top slice and the conclusion of held two-year-old trajectory funding) we have found enormous benefit for LAs in facilitating this community of shared experiences and challenges has saved resource and increased efficiency.

We know...

A data informed approach is enhanced by fieldwork, Programme Adviser contact, and a mix of universal and targeted actions.

We found great value in collecting progress review data on a termly basis using our Progress Review Form (PRF). This enabled LAs to undertake a self-evaluation in collaboration with their colleagues, and to monitor their progress, and identify delivery challenges that lie ahead for a total of 10 times throughout the contract period. This process alone supported LAs to review, plan, and act. PRF returns were examined and moderated by Programme Advisers (PAs), who checked, monitored and challenged PRF content through contact with LAs prior to using findings to update the LA progress checker spreadsheet. PRF returns were also reported termly to DfE where trends and observations were usefully discussed in a workshop format. For the purposes of Childcare Works, such data and the fieldwork intelligence and held knowledge of LAs created a cohesive plan for universal and targeted work programmes for the next period. Cumulative results also informed a trend analysis of how the programme had grown and developed throughout its maturation.

4. The evolution and importance of early years and childcare

There was a time when early years and childcare was not something funded by central government at all. Instead, settings relied solely upon charitable activities or local council initiatives, or parents' fees paid to a growing number of settings in the private sector.

A century of Government funding for nursery education

As far back as 100 years ago, after the Education Act (1918), local authorities (LAs) could apply for grants to assist with nursery education. Such provision started to grow in the 1920s and grew further during World War II, when more women entered the employment market following a period of female employment in the war effort, and a new need for childcare emerged. As a result, the Education Act (1944) required LAs to have 'regard' to securing nursery schools or nursery classes in other schools, but fell short of making this a statutory requirement.

Maintained nursery schools

What developed was maintained nursery schools in schools or community buildings in some areas, and if there was a local scheme, funding from the local authority or other grants was also made available more widely. Provision was either free, relied on volunteer staff or parents, and/or parents would pay nominal fees to pay for refreshments, for example. Across the country, there were variations across regions. In the north, many places were created around industrial towns with high female employment, whereas in the south there was more independent/private provision reflecting the difference in demographics. We find these two characteristics remain in the market today, with lots of school-based provision in many northern LA areas, and a larger private sector market in the south.

The parent-led growth of the pre-school movement

But this was not enough to meet demand. In 1961, a London mother, Belle Tutaev, OBE (1929 – 2019), wrote to *The Guardian* to explain how she had set up a pre-school group of her own as a response to a lack of local provision. This tapped into a rich seam of parents experiencing the same pressures of supply and demand who, like Belle, had set up groups of their own. The pre-school playgroups movement was a parent-led network of 100s of groups, growing to many thousands in later years.

A growing national interest

Any ideas in the 1970s to grow the sector further on a national basis were somewhat stymied by economic recession, and early years remained a local power and regard, rather than a statutory national duty. The first signs of a renewed interest and appetite for a national strategy came in the form of the National Out of School Childcare Initiative (1993-1997). This offered start-up funding for the creation of before and after school childcare, notionally as a support to working parents. Then in 1996, the first phase of nursery vouchers for four-year-olds was introduced in four local authorities: Norfolk, Kensington and Chelsea, Wandsworth and Westminster. The second phase was planned to start throughout England from April 1997, then a change of government led to a rethink and the creation of the first National Childcare Strategy.

In 1997, the Nursery Education Grant replaced the voucher scheme and a free entitlement for all four-year-olds was introduced. The driver for free education was based on research evidence from the NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development) 1989 Study of Early Child Care (SECC).

Since then, successive governments have recognised the value early years and childcare provision offers to children and their families. They have sought to increase the amount of funding they contribute, and to create greater flexibility in offers – and changes have come thick and fast. This investment aims to meet multiple objectives, including:

- Universal and targeted provision.
- Supporting children’s learning and readiness for school and life after school.
- Helping earlier contact with children so their needs can be identified and supported sooner.
- Enabling parents to make choices around their own families, education, learning and/or employment.

1997	National Childcare Strategy.
1998	Free part-time nursery education places for four-year-olds 5 x 2.5 hour sessions per week, totalling 12.5 hours for 33 weeks in PVI providers and 38 weeks in maintained providers.
2004	Free part-time nursery education entitlements extended to three-year-olds.
2006	Entitlements increased to 38 weeks of the year in PVI sector. Pilots of free early years education for two-year-olds in 32 local authority areas.
2009	Funding extended to a further 31 local authority areas for least advantaged two-year-olds.
2010	Entitlements increased to 15 hours per week, over 3-5 days.
2012	Entitlements can be used over 2-5 days.
2013	Entitlements extended to 20% least advantaged two-year-olds (following small pilots started in 2009).
2014	Entitlements extended to 40% least advantaged two-year-olds.
2015	Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) introduced for three- and four-year-olds.
2017	Extended entitlement of an additional 15 hours for eligible working families (30 hours).

5. Further information and references

We set out to use lessons learned during national roll-out of 30 hours. We aimed to use the collective experience of DfE, local authorities, providers and partners to develop this learning and reflection document. What We Know is that such experiences are personal and viewed from

various different perspectives. And this process continues. We hope it has been useful to support everyone involved in future policy and strategy, and national and local delivery in the vital area of early learning and childcare. There is, of course, a lot more detail available should you wish to access it. This section highlights some of the main sources and locations of this further information.

Parents

Help, information and applications for parents on all early years and childcare entitlements and support with costs <<https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>>

Help for parents to work out the costs using an online calculator

<<https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>>

Supporting parents to find childcare, we like this one on the Coram Family Childcare website:

<<http://finder.familyandchildcaretrust.org/kb5/fct/childcarefinder/home.page>>

DfE video clips of parents' experiences of using their 30 hours childcare

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6gGtLyXoeq_sKn3DO_DRwdLTKti9Q2es

Local authorities

For a wide-ranging suite of briefing and signposting papers, tools, and resources for local authorities <<https://www.childcareworks.co.uk>> and the LA knowledge sharing portal (KHUB)

<<https://khub.net/web/guest/>> and join the Achieving Two Year Olds/Childcare Works group.

Research reports, evidence, tools and resources at The Early Intervention Foundation

<<https://www.eif.org.uk/reports>>.

Information about all the early years and childcare entitlements and related topics including SEND, Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and business health <<https://foundationyears.org.uk>> funded by DfE.

Providers

For a wide-ranging suite of briefing and signposting papers, tools, and resources for providers

<<https://www.childcareworks.co.uk>> and <<https://foundationyears.org.uk>>.

The NDNA Early Years Business Zone is a FREE online nursery and childcare business support toolkit - created by NDNA and the Department for Education - to help sustain healthy childcare businesses, developed by the sector, for the sector. The toolkit includes three tools; Business Appraisal, Financial Management and Staff Cost Calculator and a range of downloadable resources <https://www.ndna.org.uk/ndna/news/early_years_business_zone.aspx>

Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) - Business Smart for Childminders. Developed by childminders for childminders, Business Smart is a collection of ideas, inspiration and tools to help new and existing childminders develop a sustainable business. Again funded by DfE, providers can find top tips, videos, case studies, downloadable tools and other

essential ideas to help make the most of their business. <https://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/business-smart/about-business-smart/>

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