Early Education
The British Association for Early Childhood Education

Learning Together About Learning

Putting sound early years principles into practice

A DfE funded project to support the introduction of Early Years Pupil Premium

Project report

April 2016

Contents

Executive Summary

Early Education applied for a VCS grant from Department for Education (DfE) in order to trial ways of accelerating the sector's learning about how to make effective use of Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP). The Learning Together About Learning (LTAL) Project was funded for the financial year 2015-16. As this was the first year of the funding, there was a steep learning curve for both settings and local authorities and processes were evolving throughout the year.

The project aimed to support the effective introduction of EYPP funding in its first year of operation through local networks where practitioners could share their learning about what worked, and a national resource bank of case studies and materials.

Over the course of the year, the networks each developed their own plans for activity to support participating settings with developing their EYPP plans. Settings collected data both to support their own planning and to provide evidence for the project about how EYPP was impacting children's progress. Nationally, resources and case studies were developed for the benefit of all settings.

Settings inevitably found that there were teething problems with the administrative processes during these early stages, and there were therefore delays in accessing and using the funding and identifying the eligible children. Nevertheless, practitioners made progress in using monitoring data to guide their decision making about EYPP spending, trialled different approaches to using the funding, and developed their knowledge and confidence about making and evidencing effective practice. Data from the project was formative, but indications were that EYPP funding can make a difference to children's outcomes, and that practitioners who engaged in the networks benefited from shared learning to develop their professional practice.

The project was also able to share information among local authorities to showcase what was working well in supporting the implementation of the funding.

The project report makes a number of recommendations for practitioners, local authorities and government (see Recommendations section below).

Background to the project

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) funding was introduced in April 2015, following a small pilot in January 2015, in order to help close the achievement gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. This complements the Pupil Premium funding which has been in place in schools since 2011. Funding for the first year was paid to providers at a rate of 53p per hour for each eligible 3- and 4-year old (approximately £300 per year). As the project was taking place during the first year of the programme, there was an inevitable process of bedding in new systems for both settings and local authorities, and the project was able to contribute to learning related to those processes, as well as to helping develop good practice in using EYPP funding in itself.

Early Education is a national charity with a focus on ensuring all children, but especially the most disadvantaged, have access to high quality early education. We therefore fully supported the introduction of EYPP as a means of supporting a focus on the learning of the most disadvantaged children, and closing the gap in achievement between them and their more advantaged peers through high quality early childhood education. We wished to use our expertise to help share learning within the sector about making effective use of EYPP. We also wanted to help other parts of the sector access the well-established expertise of maintained nursery schools in supporting disadvantaged children and families.

We applied for a VCS grant from Department for Education (DfE) in order to trial ways of accelerating the sector's learning about how to make effective use of EYPP. The Learning Together About Learning (LTAL) Project was funded for the financial year 2015-16.

Aims and objectives

The aims of the project were to improve outcomes for children by:

- supporting less experienced practitioners and settings to develop and articulate coherent and sustainable plans for effective use of EYPP funding
- facilitating settings/schools in working together when appropriate to make best use of EYPP funding eg joint commissioning of staff training or arrangements for shared access to a qualified teacher
- creating self-sustaining networks of practitioners which would provide peer-to-peer support and share knowledge about effective approaches to closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged children and their peers, both during the period of project funding, and afterwards
- enabling settings to develop joint bids to EEF for more in-depth trialling and evaluation of a range of approaches to closing the achievement gap

Our objectives were to:
- build on existing infrastructure where possible to develop an initial phase of c.15 local peer-to-peer networks facilitated by nursery schools to encourage providers to share ideas, expertise and resources and identify areas for collaborative working
- map further need/demand for local networks

- hold 6 regional workshops for 600+ practitioners
- create a database of contacts interested in EYPP with email updates reaching at least 5000 settings
- make resources available online to exemplify successful approaches
- gather data via networks on impact of EYPP and improved outcomes for children

Project activities

Local networks

The project started with 15 networks across England. Initially each network was led by a maintained nursery school with an Ofsted rating of Outstanding. As the project progressed, three networks dropped out due to conflicting pressures on the lead institution. Two replacements were found, including one network made up solely of PVIs, which enabled us to trial a PVI-led model. The third network was not replaced as it dropped out too late for another network to become established, and the lead institution remained for the dissemination stage.

Maintained nursery schools were initially chosen in order to capitalise on their expertise in closing the gap for the most disadvantaged children, and due to the role they play in their locality as beacons of good practice and dissemination hubs. In particular, head teachers are experienced at collecting and analysing data, which allowed for sharing of expertise with PVI managers who were sometimes less experienced in this area.

Some of the networks used links that were already in place, others developed new collaborations and some developed new activities building on work done in previous projects. Each network initially had a minimum of 10 participants and some had as many as 30. Participating settings came from both the maintained and the PVI sectors. This meant that the project involved around 150 settings (numbers varied over the course of the project as settings came in and out of networks). Some networks were well supported by the local authority and the participants went on to be EYPP champions locally.

The local networks were intended to act as communities of practice to allow practitioners to share and enhance their learning about using EYPP, based around the principles of sound Early Years pedagogy. This was followed through by each network having autonomy to explore the aspect of pedagogy that was most relevant to its own members. Each network had a budget to support this. Networks met regularly for training and networking. The training took a range of formats including visits to other settings, input from a consultant, input from the lead or network participant and opportunities to share challenges and successes. Areas the networks focused on were meeting the needs of individual children as well as cohorts of children, supporting families, developing quality interactions and reflective practice, data collection and analysis, developing EYPP plans and developing collaborations with other settings in their locality. There was a focus on sustainability from the outset in order for these collaborations to continue after the project had finished.

National resources

The time of the project lead was split between supporting local network activity, collecting feedback, case studies and good practice from around the sector and producing support materials for use by practitioners. These included a series of webpages with useful information and links and regular newsletters to disseminate learning from the project and other useful resources and case studies. At the end of the project a short booklet was produced giving practical tips based on the learning from the project. All these materials can be found at www.early-education.org.uk/eypp

We had originally envisaged trying to develop a database of expertise to allow practitioners to find settings or consultants able to assist them with areas of work they wished to develop with EYPP. However, it became clear that settings felt they were still at a very early stage of the journey, and not yet ready to offer themselves as experts. Although the project identified useful case studies where groups of settings were working with consultants, most settings were clearly not yet at the stage of grouping together to commission in outside expertise. We therefore did not pursue this idea further at this stage.

Dissemination

The project culminated with six dissemination events in Newcastle, Stockport, Plymouth, Cambridge, Birmingham and London. The areas were chosen to ensure there was a geographical spread across the country, close to or in areas where high rates of EYPP funding were expected.   Each event had a similar format – a keynote, followed by networking opportunities and sharing of knowledge from the local network participants, and a drawing together of trends from across the project. The keynote focused on an element of practice that made a difference to sound pedagogy and improving outcomes for young children and their families. The keynotes were on quality interactions, attachment and resilience and further refining parental engagement. Practitioners who had been part of other projects were also invited to share their learning at these events, such as groups from Rotherham and Gateshead. The audience was made up of practitioners from both the maintained and PVI sectors and local authority personnel.

Methodology for evaluating the project

We used the following methods to evaluate the success of the project.

Practitioner knowledge and confidence

Practitioners were surveyed using a questionnaire at the start of the project (summer term), and measured again using a follow-up questionnaire at the end of the project. Both project participants and others from the sector were able to respond to questionnaires.

There were 512 responses to the initial online survey, from practitioners in 152 different local authority areas. The end of survey data was collected via an online survey was project (148 responses) and a paper survey which was included in the evaluation form at the dissemination events (59 responses from network participants,

245 from attendees not part of a network). The end of project surveys asked practitioners to comment retrospectively for when EYPP was introduced compared to at the time of the survey for a number of questions as neither the individual respondents nor the balance between project and non-project participants was constant between the two data points.

Qualitative data was also gathered from reports from the local network leads, and discussions with practitioners, local network leads, local authority contacts and others.

Outcomes for children

As a means of tracking children's progress, and identifying differences between those eligible for EYPP and those who were not, settings were asked to collect data at intervals and to measure the progress made between these points in relation to closing the gap. Network leads worked with settings to raise awareness of the need for eligible children to make accelerated progress, in order for the gap to close. As most settings use Development Matters as a benchmark for assessments, this was used as the basis for the data sheet which was developed in conjunction with the leads to create a shared format for data collection for the project.

There was a need for consistency across all the networks in order to be able to aggregate data. In addition to having the data sheet and guidance, moderation activities took place on both a local and national level. These activities involved professional dialogue, sharing of records/observations and discussing expectations in addition to other activities. These activities took place online as well as face to face. Because of the limited timescale and the size of the dataset, additional qualitative data were gathered to add to the evidence base.

The difference in outcomes for children was measured via collection of assessment data from participating settings at the mid-point of the autumn term, and the mid-point of the spring term. The quantitative data on the number of steps of progress made by children over the term was supplemented by qualitative feedback from settings.
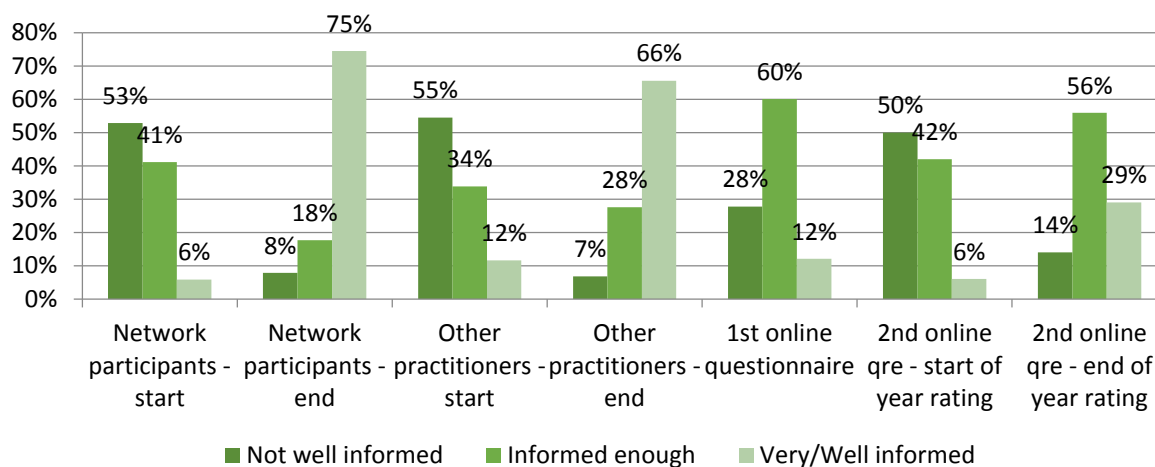
Findings

Practitioner confidence

The start and end of project surveys included questions to ascertain the confidence levels of practitioners. The follow-up surveys asked practitioners to rate their confidence levels retrospectively for when EYPP was introduced compared to at the time of the survey.

Practitioners sense of being well informed increased more for those involved in the project (ie in a local network) than among practitioners who were not part of a local network, with 75% feeling well or very well informed at the end of the project compared to 66% of other practitioners (29% compared to 19% feeling very well informed). Confidence among those who attended the dissemination events was also higher than those who responded to the online questionnaire.

Figure 1: How well informed did practitioners feel about EYPP, at start of year (April 2015) and end (March 2016)

During the course of the year most practitioners have developed their knowledge about EYPP, but the findings suggest that those who were involved with the local networks were able to develop their knowledge more than those who were not, and possibly also that those who were involved in dissemination events also benefited compared to those who did not.

Qualitative feedback has shown that levels of confidence among practitioners have grown due to being more familiar with expectations as settings have had three cycles of deciding how to use their EYPP funding. The fact that some of the network settings have been inspected by Ofsted has also helped build knowledge and confidence about Ofsted's expectations as the experiences were shared locally and at the dissemination events. The networking opportunities allowed the participants to rehearse the reasoning behind their decision-making. They got to hear how others were deciding to spend their funding and this helped them to refine their ideas.

Uses of funding

We found that EYPP funding was being spent in a wide range of ways, examples of which were regularly reported in the LTAL newsletters. Examples were collected from the local networks, from other contacts within the sector, from the participants Working alongside a consultant to develop practice in relation to engaging parents

Examples of how settings have used funding
- Release time for a member of staff to be an EYPP champion
- Working alongside a consultant to develop practice in relation to engaging parents
- Professional library to enable staff to refine their pedagogical thinking.
- Development of a loan library of home learning packs
- Speech and language sessions for parents
- Additional language based experiences in small groups, supported by a SENCO
- Enrichment activities such as a visit to a wildlife park

- Additional forest school provision
- Artist in residence
- Support materials covering topics such as toilet training, developing early language
- Video cameras so quality of practice can be monitored and developed, children can record their own stories etc.
- Transition focus to include extra visits, resources such as school uniforms, photographs of the new environment, postcards to the children in the holidays so they feel held in mind etc.

Case studies: using EYPP funding

One setting looked at the needs and interests of their EYPP children and decided that having more opportunities to take part in forest school experiences would benefit this group in relation to making relationships, language development and developing self-confidence and self-awareness. The children were given an extra forest school session. The funding paid for cover for the staff members needed to make this happen. The children benefitted as well as a less experienced staff member who was able to develop a deeper understanding of forest school pedagogy.

Another setting used funding to support having an EYPP champion. The champion was responsible for ensuring all the staff were tracking the progress of the EYPP children. They analysed the trends and shared these with other staff who were then encouraged to develop plans together so that they all had ownership. The champion also reviewed policies etc with this group of children as a focus. In addition they supported the key person to support the families of these children as necessary. Their role was to champion this group of children in meetings etc to ensure their progress was focussed upon. This was an opportunity for career progression as well as giving staff a further information point.

Settings within one network filmed and used this to highlight successful child adult interactions. They reported that children were having more beneficial interactions as staff gained a better understanding of how to scaffold learning rather than direct it.

The online survey conducted at the start of the project (between May and October 2015) found that 38% of respondents did not have plans in place for how to spend their funding. This had decreased to 18% by the online survey at the end of the project (February-March 2016). Evaluation forms completed by those attending the dissemination events showed even greater progress, with virtually all attendees having developed ideas about how they were going to spend the funding (Figure 2).

The initial survey had found that practitioners' plans when first aware of EYPP were to spend it directly on provision for children (the main choice for 40% of respondents). This may partly be explained by comments from practitioners that they felt comfortable discussing the benefits of spending funds on provision, but less confident in justifying the funding in relation to staff development.

Figure 2 shows that while settings have indeed primarily spent their funding on enhancing provision to meet the needs of their EYPP children by purchasing equipment or resources, respondents at the dissemination events were making choices that were spread across all three areas, with almost as many settings using funding for staff training and professional development as on provision for children. Those who chose to focus on training and development reported that it provided a legacy and enabled practitioners to look at their practice and develop it as a result. Comments at the dissemination events also suggested that settings were beginning to feel that opportunities to develop staff knowledge would be more beneficial than spending the funding on developing provision, unless there was a gap in provision that the setting felt needed closing.

Figure 2: planned and actual focus of EYPP spending
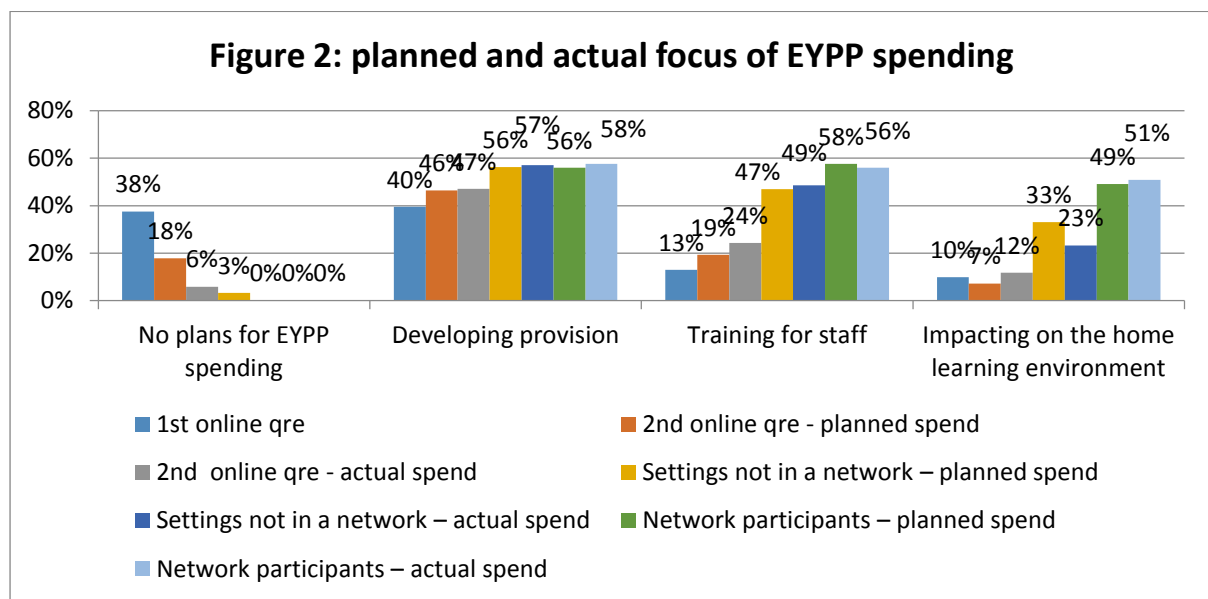
Case study: training

A setting organised for a speech and language therapist to train the staff team. Following this training practitioners reported that they felt more confident in supporting their children's language development and were giving children more time to process information and to engage in child led conversations.

Sessions with a consultant that focussed on refining parental engagement, led to staff reporting that they looked at procedures etc from the perspective of the families as well as the child.

Case study: provision

A setting identified that they needed a wider range of dual language texts and so a selection were purchased using some of the EYPP funding. The main focus was on the languages spoken by the children who were eligible for EYPP funding.

All the surveys asked about including families in the decision making processes in relation to EYPP, and in the survey responses many settings identified this as an area for development in future rather than a current focus. This could explain why

the figures for spending the funding on impacting on the home learning environment have been lower than the other possibilities at the start. Some networks focussed specifically on impacting on the home learning environment, for example, in the development of lending libraries and the work on making themselves less hard to reach for families, which may explain why this figure was higher among network participants than among practitioners not involved in a project. Maintained nursery schools are very experienced in working with families and were able to share this expertise with network participants.

Case study: working with parents

One network worked with a consultant. The focus for them was on finding ways of engaging with families who were finding it hard to engage with the staff at each setting across the network.

Staff recorded an example where the impact had been particularly notable. At the beginning of the project the mother avoided the staff at the nursery. The staff and especially the key person made lots of effort to be available to the mother. The mother subsequently started to send photographs of her child engaged in learning at home to the setting, she volunteered to go on trips and support in the sessions. The setting plan to ask her to apply if an opening occurs for an unqualified member of staff. This difference came about after a three week period of focused effort on the part of the setting and the key person. The mother was made to feel valued and accepted as part of the learning community as a result of this the child benefitted from an improved home learning environment and felt that they and their mother was more accepted. This in turn led to the child developing a closer bond with their key person as well as children in the setting.

The focus of the networks has been on training both on a network level and on a setting level. Network participants have been sharing opportunities for CPD with each other which has helped to consolidate professional relationships. Some settings have started to open up some of these training opportunities to families as well as staff.

Use of data within settings

The networks used the data tracking formats developed within the project (see www.early-education.org.uk/measuring-impact-eypp-funding) as a starting point to ensure the spending was targeted at the needs of eligible children. The formats supported practitioners to be able to identify the needs of the EYPP children. This enabled staff to target the funding to address either an area of need for a child or the setting as a whole.

Four settings had an Ofsted inspection during the life of the project and they reported that having the plans in place had been useful as evidence for Ofsted. It showed that careful thought had taken place before decisions were made and the fact that the plan was updated each term showed this was becoming embedded practice. Some local authorities who have not been part of the project have encouraged the settings in their locality to use the formats and have put their logo alongside the Early Education one.

Effectiveness of the local networks in supporting EYPP

Fourteen networks met regularly across the duration of the project. All the leads reported that the project resulted in much closer working relationships with a wider range of settings than they had before. Network members reported how much they valued the networking opportunities that were offered to them during the course of the project. They appreciated knowing that others were facing similar challenges. One participant talked about how isolated they felt before the project and how this is no longer the case.

Participants reported that being part of a network had enabled them to accelerate their understanding of their role in supporting children and families eligible for EYPP funding. They were frustrated that much of this year was spent waiting for local authorities to establish their processes which they had little influence over. The teething problems which led to delays in receiving funding and confirmation of which children were eligible restricted practitioners' opportunities to use the funding effectively and in turn, restricted the learning which could take place within the networks. Some Local Authority processes evolved over the course of the project. (See section on Administrative Processes below regarding the development of LA processes.)

Network participants typically reported that involvement with the project made them look at the attainment of children in their settings differently. Practitioners have been developing strategies to be able to highlight benefits of EYPP for individual children as well as groups of children. A common focus of debate within networks was about the balance between benefitting the individual child who attracts the funding and benefitting a larger group, an issue where greater clarity or guidance centrally might be helpful in relation to the impact being sought, for instance in the FAQs on the DfE's website, which currently focus more on eligibility. As practitioners are becoming more confident with EYPP and more sophisticated in their thinking, these broader questions arise.

In many networks, practitioners reflected on the issues that not all children who attract the EYPP funding were inexperienced[1], and there were also children who were inexperienced but not eligible for EYPP. Practitioners asked themselves what they should be focusing on in relation to closing the achievement gap and what could be put in place to address it, including to have high expectations and ensure that EYPP children became more experienced, not simply ensure they meet age related expectations. Respondents to the end of project survey also commented on the fact that they sometimes had children like this and wonder how to spend the funding to have an impact; this is an area for future work.

At least nine of the networks will be continuing to meet beyond the life of this project. Some have pledged to continue for the remaining academic year, whilst others can

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[1] We use the term "inexperienced" to avoid using a deficit model to describe children whose progress reflects that they may not have had the same life experiences as their more advantaged peers, and that this may impact on their learning and development. For the purposes of gathering data for the project, we refer to children being "less experienced than expected", "as experienced as expected" or "more experienced than expected" in relation to age-related expectations.

see further opportunities for continuing on into the following academic year. Three leads will either be retiring or moving onto another job for the next academic year, which has made continuation for those networks more problematic. Where one lead is retiring at the end of the year, the network have pledged to sustain themselves so that the work she and the practitioners have put in will leave a legacy. In another network two managers are going to support each other by being their "professional buddy". This will entail doing joint observations and discussing strategies for implementing developments as well as joint training if appropriate.

Networks require time to be spent on planning sessions, follow up, organisation of venues and subsequent liaison and communication between participants. Leads reported this had all taken up more time than anticipated. They also commented on how rewarding the project had been. A longer duration of the networks might have led to other participants being willing to take the lead and for practice to become more embedded.

Settings and local authorities are still feeling the need for further support in relation to EYPP as demonstrated from the evaluation forms from the dissemination events and email or phone contacts asking for support. There were many requests at the dissemination events to be able to join networks or to be enabled to set up new ones.

Practitioners reported that they are now starting to look at how impact can be measured and would value further support with this, now that EYPP is settling in and they can focus in more depth on outcomes rather than administrative processes.

Characteristics of effective local networks
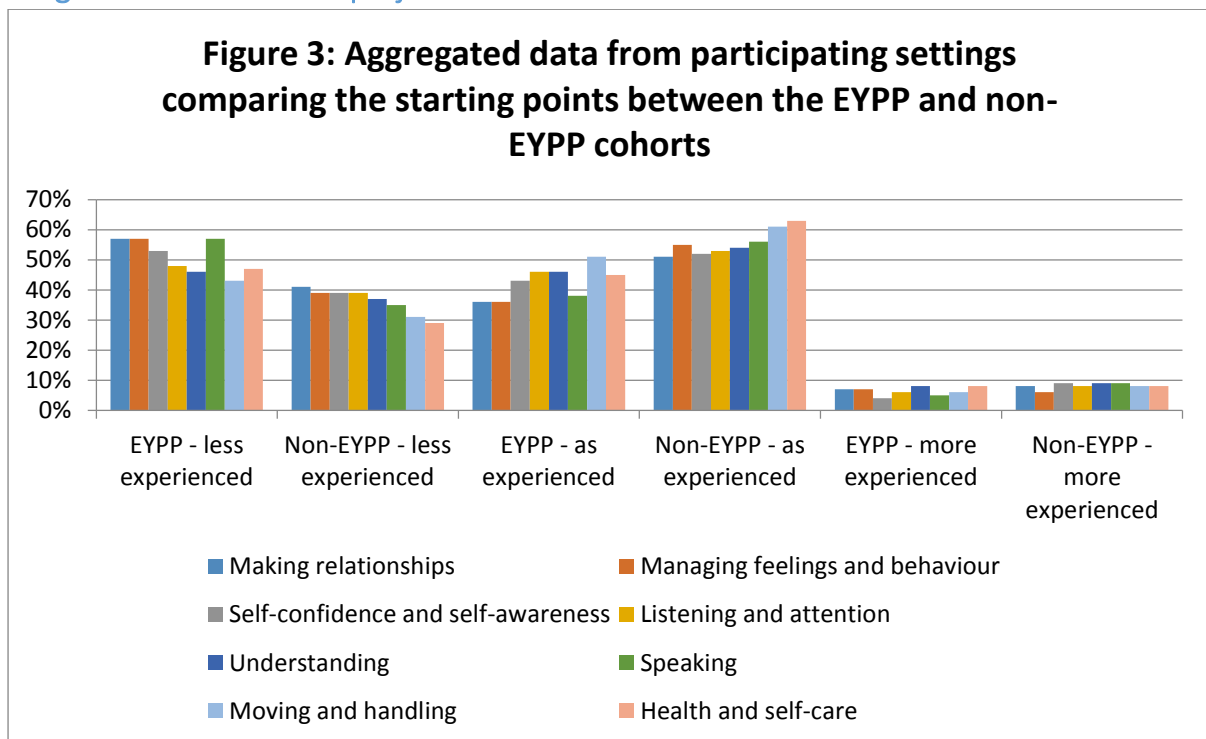
Factors which helped them to be effective included:

- **Building on existing links** Some leads used existing links with settings in their locality that they already had. These networks were able to begin their activities more quickly as the trust and expectations of collaborating were already well established.
- **Local authority support** The networks which were supported by the local authorities tended to have a larger cohort as there was more support available.

Challenges which were highlighted were as follows:

- **Time needed to establish networks** The networks took longer to set up than first thought, possibly due to workload pressures and reluctance on the part of some settings to collaborate together due to the "competitive" relationship some settings have with each other. Once they were up and running, however, the participants were keen to continue to network.
- **Workload involved in supporting the networks** Those responsible for running the networks had to recruit settings to join, organise meetings and support activities, and often were directly involved in delivering training and development activities to participants. Additionally for the project they had to manage the process of data collection and deliver reports to the project lead

on progress on a quarterly basis, attend two planning meetings and at least one dissemination event. The payment from project fund effectively only covered the time for project administration, not the network co-ordination, so this was effectively done on a voluntary basis rather than being funded by pooling of EYPP funds by participants. The three networks that pulled out did so due to workload pressures and personal circumstances of the lead individual. Networks withdrew at various points in the life of the project. Two networks considered withdrawing but managed to continue their involvement by delegating the lead's role to the deputy of the nursery school. Many of the nursery schools were already facing significant workload challenges eg as teaching schools, through involvement with other funded projects, and due to structural changes such as federation. Even though maintained nursery schools are generally larger than average PVI settings, there are limits to the numbers of additional pieces of work they can take on, particularly if unforeseen factors such as illness or staff vacancies occur. Leads all commented on the extra workload a project brings. Although they also felt there were benefits from their involvement, additional resource was really needed to ensure a robust and sustainable model, and it is likely this could only be achieved by some pooling of EYPP funding to buy in cover.

Progress data across the project

Figure 3: Aggregated data from participating settings comparing the starting points between the EYPP and non-EYPP cohorts

Participants were asked to collect data at two points in the project. In order to have a consistent approach it was decided the two points would be October and late February/early March. These points were decided upon because they were the points at which most practitioners already collected data, if they did so, and also because not all local networks were up and running in time to start data collection

from the summer term. It also allowed those settings with large numbers of children leaving in July to have beginning and end data for a consistent cohort.

It was difficult to show accelerated progress in such a short time frame. At the first data point a return was received for 242 EYPP children and 1295 non-EYPP children. The figures below show the percentages for each group for the sub-areas of the three prime areas of learning in the EYFS. As would be expected from national datasets, there is a gap between the EYPP and non-EYPP children.

By the time of the second data collection point (see Figure 4), we can see that fewer children are less experienced than expected and a greater number are more experienced, and the gap between EYPP and non-EYPP children appears to be closing: on average there were 17% fewer EYPP children who were less experienced compared to 12% fewer non-EYPP children, 6% more who were as experienced as expected (compared to 4% of non-EYPP children) and 12% more EYPP children were more experienced compared to 7% more non-EYPP children. This second return was for 230 EYPP children and 1212 non-EYPP children.

Figure 4: Aggregated data at the final datapoint, EYPP compared to non-EYPP cohort
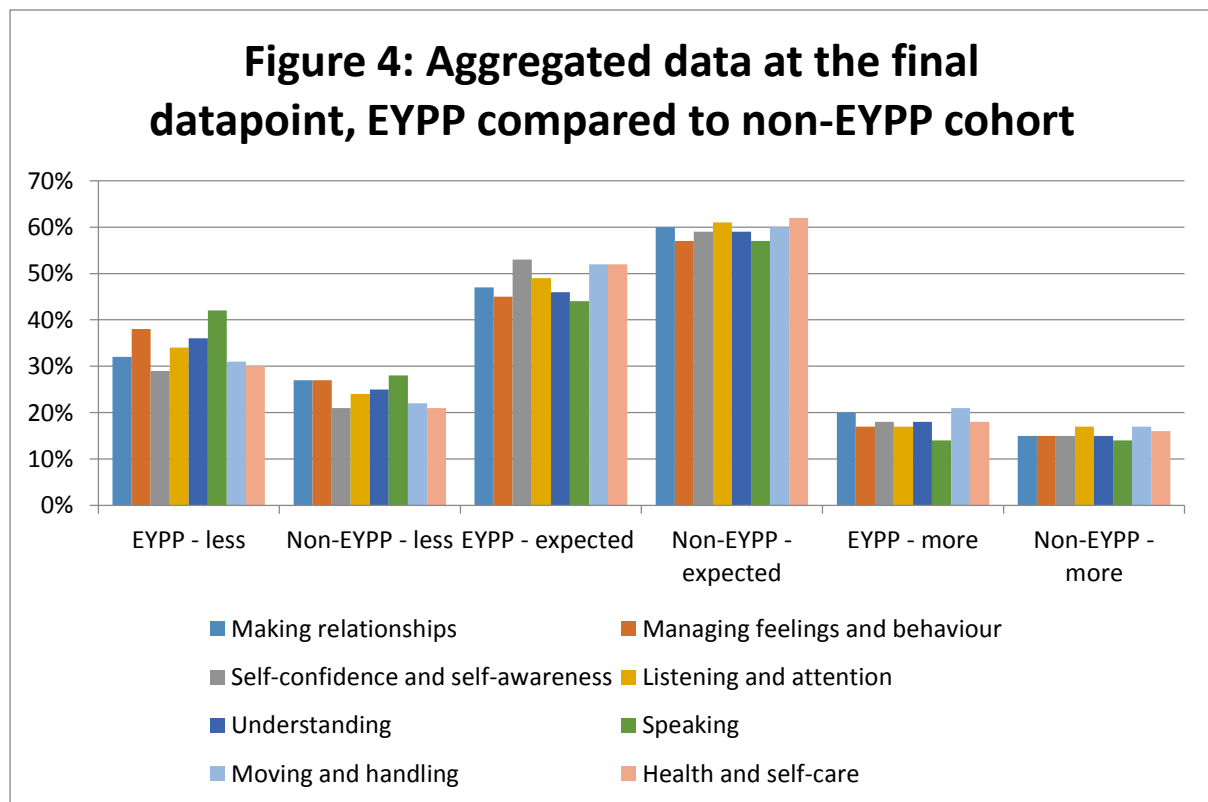
Due to the nature and intakes in Early Years settings and the compact nature of the project, it is difficult to know how many of the children have been included in both data sets, so these findings must be treated with caution.

It might be interesting to compare data returns between the maintained sector and the PVI to compare the rates of progress as a significant proportion of the data came from the maintained nursery schools, which are generally very experienced in closing the gap, and more experienced in using data tracking to support this than the

PVI sector. There wasn't enough time in this project to undertake this analysis, but it could be explored in a future project.

We collected data on the amount of progress children made in this period, however due to the short time frame and lack of contextual information about the settings and their children it was difficult to draw conclusions from it. Although settings had been asked to provide qualitative feedback as well as data, few did so. This may have been due to their inexperience, the format in which the lead sent them or other factors.

Progress was far from uniform across settings which did return data. There were indications that children receiving EYPP funding had made accelerated progress in 22 of the 45 settings which did. (For the purposes of this project we took expected progress to be one step per time period, understanding that children develop at different rates. Accelerated progress in this instance was two steps or more per time period). The data showed that there was a range in the number of steps of progress for different children for both EYPP funded and non-EYPP funded children.

An area for future research would be to explore what factors allowed some settings to make progress for some or all of their children, and why others had struggled to do so.

Challenges to data collection

Although data was received for a good number of children, there were issues with the amount and consistency of data which could perhaps have been improved had the project continued over a longer period of time. We would have liked to have seen more qualitative data and reflective analysis providing context to the individual setting data returns in order to be able to drill down and interrogate the data more effectively.

Despite the fact that data was returned in line with our target level of 1500 children (242 EYPP children and 1295 non-EYPP children at the first point and 230 EYPP children and 1212 non-EYPP children for the second), network leads reported that it was difficult to get settings to share their data. It was felt that reasons may have included instances where the children had made little or no progress, where settings were not confident at collecting data, the practitioners were unsure of the use of the data or there were no EYPP funded children at the setting. Two networks reported that the settings had no experience of collecting quantitative data before.

Even though a data collection document had been produced in collaboration with the leads, the returns were inconsistent. Some leads had chosen to only give sections out at a time or had altered the format. This made comparing difficult. The short time frame for this project meant discussions regarding the data document were rushed and it would seem buy-in from all the leads was not as good as it could have been. The variation was more apparent at the final collection point.

The qualitative data section was rarely used by the practitioners. This may have been because they didn't see it or they felt they had little to report as the time frame was so short. When it was used, it contained reflections such as the following "*Staff*

are more aware of their roles to help ensure that all children make progress. Staff are now not afraid to try out new ideas to aid learning. We are learning different approaches to suit different children. Staff are also learning when to step back when not needed, for example some of the children were struggling with relationships because adults were too involved."

The process of learning to gather and report on data was useful to participants, as well as contributing to the evaluation of the project. One network reported that the requirement to return some data had enabled conversations to be had between various types of setting and a clearer understanding of the need and usefulness of sharing data resulted. They envisage this being helpful at transition points and it will make up part of a transition project they are embarking upon. Participating settings have requested further support with gathering and analysing data.

Effective practice in using EYPP funding

Settings have developed a range of effective processes in relation to EYPP. The following list identifies examples of good practice identified via the project.

Settings are more effective at using their EYPP when they:

- closely match their strategies with the needs that have been identified for their EYPP funded children.
- hold discussions between colleagues that centre on this group of children and the progress they have been making. These discussions take place in a range of circumstances: supervision conversations, staff meetings, with outside agencies, parents or families, and in order to complete paperwork.
- have EYPP champions. These champions keep an overview of the needs of this cohort and ensure that developments to practice reflect this cohort's needs. They are also the person staff go to if they have queries relating to EYPP and they monitor the progress of children who are eligible for the funding.
- have developed an EYPP policy or updated policies to ensure children who are eligible for EYPP are included where necessary.
- hold regular discussions between the key person and the child's family each term with a focus on the progress the child has made from one point to the next and how the current term's funding could be spent with most effect. This has led to families feeling valued and more involved in their child's learning.
- have updated parents' literature so that parents are made aware of this funding stream when their child first arrives in a setting. Information about the EYPP funding and how it has been spent have been included in the settings website in some cases.
- compare the progress of EYPP children with non-EYPP children to ensure that accelerated progress is made by any child who has been identified as being inexperienced or not meeting age related expectations.
- have moderation activities. Participants have reported how useful these have been to ensure data is as accurate as possible. They understand more that this is an ongoing process and can see the benefit of moderating with

practitioners from a range of settings. They especially appreciate moderating with feeder settings so that data sent on will be valued more highly.

Barriers to successful use of EYPP

Settings often commented that the numbers of eligible children were low – often lower than expected. Due to the low numbers for which EYPP funding was successfully claimed, some settings felt the effort to claim was too great.

Initially there was some confusion as to whether EYPP funding would continue after 2015-16. This led to some practitioners wanting to wait and see before committing themselves to putting new systems and practices in place. Practitioners were also preoccupied with the potential impact of the 30 hours extended entitlement, which took some focus away from EYPP. There was concern as to whether there would be a reasonable period of notice if the EYPP funding were to be withdrawn as a result of the early years funding review.

The timing of EYPP payments has been a barrier for many settings as the majority of settings say they receive their funding too far into the term.   The following quotes are typical of those we received:

> "As a negative we have been given the eligible children names the last week of term so it has been hard to plan."

> "We get our funding at the end of term which makes life a bit difficult when planning budgets."

> "It takes more than half of a term to get paid the EYPP, we are therefore only spending it in the second halves of a term."

In addition to the timing of payment, some settings reported that it could be difficult to identify who the eligible children were as some local authorities had clearly identified the children; however, some had not, and where they had not the practitioners were left trying to work out which children had received funding and how much. As the EYPP funding was paid with the Nursery Education Grant funding as a lump sum rather than disaggregated, some settings were not clear about whether they had received their EYPP funding, how much or in relation to whom.

There was some confusion at the beginning as some settings were expecting all funded 2-year-olds to meet the criteria for EYPP when they reached 3, whereas not all of them were. Some local authorities were thinking about finding ways of flagging the 2-year-olds likely to be eligible for EYPP. However, families' circumstances can change and funded 2-year-olds who meet the EYPP criteria at age 2 may not do so by the time they are 3, and vice versa. It is important that settings are clear about the differences in criteria for the 2-year-old entitlement and EYPP.

Administrative processes

We noted above the frustrations from participants about delays in payment of funding and identification of eligible children. One of the unforeseen benefits of the project was the opportunity for us to gather examples of different LA processes, and to share these with LAs via their professional networks and the project resources.

Much feedback about this was verbal, so we were not able to track systematically how much this had improved by the end of the project, but the end of project questionnaire seemed to indicate that most settings had received payment by the end of the most recent term at the latest, although we had no start of project benchmark on this. At the end of the first year 20% had received funding at the beginning of term, 21% by half-term, 48% by the end of term and 11% who hadn't been paid, not including a small number who weren't sure or had not claimed for that term.

Local authorities have been developing their processes in relation to EYPP and how settings can claim it. We have seen three main ways:

1. a discrete EYPP form. Settings who have to use the separate form have reported that many parents are unwilling to fill in another form. Some have tried offering incentives to try to boost uptake. Others offered to fill in the forms alongside the parents. Settings also report that although they give the forms out universally, there is not enough time to chase for universal returning and so they are having to make a value judgement about who is "worth" chasing.

2. incorporating EYPP information in the Nursery Education Grant funding form which local authorities use to gather termly data on headcounts for calculating funding payments to providers (often referred to as the "headcount form"). Benefits to linking with headcount means that only one form needs to be completed and parents are already used to this process. A drawback for the headcount solution is that eligibility is then checked termly by LAs which makes it difficult for settings to forward plan as they feel they do not know which children are eligible from one funding period to the next. Some LAs may need to be reminded that eligibility should be for a whole year, and children should not lose their eligibility part-way through the year.

3. processes for liaising with departments responsible for benefits claims to identify eligible families. This final route means that no additional forms need to be filled in and the money is automatically paid to the settings. It seems to have been particularly effective to ensure maximum take up is achieved, but only appears to have been achieved in unitary authorities. (See case study below).

Practitioners have reported that they would like to have a more universal method for claiming the funding and their preference would be the option where no additional forms are necessary.

Local authorities pay the EYPP funding alongside the Nursery Education Grant (NEG), but this can be at different times in the term in different LAs, and processes also varied within LAs as processes for the maintained sector and PVIs were often separate. The timing of payment for EYPP raises similar issues to those for NEG in that for some settings cash flow is a real issue. However, this is further exacerbated for EYPP in that there is less certainty about whether children are eligible and which ones and at this stage settings were also uncertain of the implications if a child

moved part way through a term. They were therefore often cautious about the idea of spending money when they did not know for certain how much they would receive.

Practitioners reported three points at which the funding was paid: the beginning of term, just after half-term and the end of term once the funding period has finished. The most common payment point according to respondents to our surveys was the end of term. They felt that for this time they were having to wait to be able to put strategies in place to support the children which the EYPP was intended to enable. Later payment also caused some practitioners to be concerned that when they were inspected they might not know who their current cohort of EYPP children were. We suggest that if practitioners see the funding period as being from when they receive the funding to the next funding point expectations may be clearer.

Much feedback about this was verbal, so we were not able to track systematically how much this had improved by the end of the project, but the end of project questionnaire seemed to indicate that most settings had received payment by the end of the most recent term at the latest, although we had no start of project benchmark on this. At the end of the first year 20% had received funding at the beginning of term, 21% by half-term, 48% by the end of term and 11% who hadn't been paid, not including a small number who weren't sure or had not claimed for that term. Feedback from practitioners has clearly indicated that practitioners would like a more standardised time to be paid, early in the term, along with a quicker method to identify eligible children.

Some settings reported receiving no funding. It was unclear why this was the case and could be due to a system error or having no eligible children currently.

Case study: eligibility checking integrated with benefits – Bolton Council

In Bolton we operate an automated and manual eligibility checking process. As part of the registration process for benefits in Bolton, parents are asked whether they would like to sign up for educational benefits, which includes EYPP.

At the start of each term, the Revenue & Benefits Team provide us with a list of parents who have signed up for educational benefits and meet the criteria. This list is imported into our children's services database and the children are marked as eligible for EYPP. Looked after children in the right age band at that time are also marked as being eligible.

Our Finance Team then use a report matching the headcount form and the EYPP eligibility field to allocate payments to providers. Providers are informed of eligible children by secure email. The list of names can only be issued to providers once headcount forms have been submitted and verified to ensure we accurately match children to their childcare provider. This process can take up to six weeks to complete but it removes:
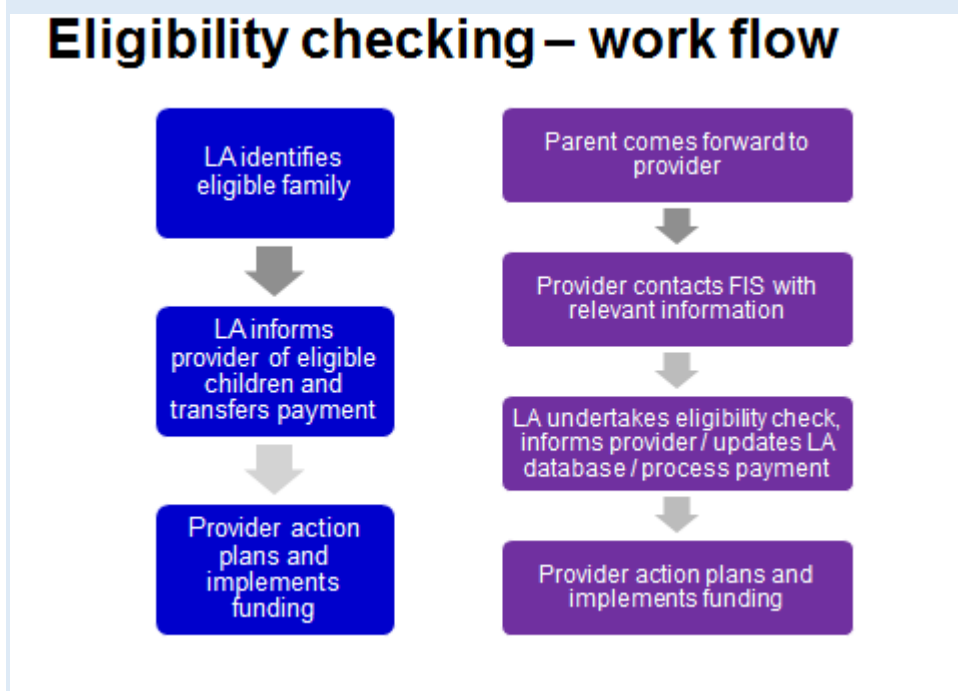- the need for childcare providers to have potentially awkward conversations with parents
- the barrier for some parents to let their childcare provider know about their personal circumstances

- the need for providers to gather information on parent's circumstances and have contact with the local authority for an eligibility check – no paperwork and no data protection issues!

Providers are aware that if a child is eligible at any point from September through to the end of August, they remain eligible for the rest of that academic year so whilst there is up to a 6 week wait at the start of term, after the autumn term they already know a large number of the children that will be receiving funding. It is the provider's responsibility to confirm with parents that EYPP funding is in place for their child.

When we established this process, we were aware that there may also be families that would be eligible for EYPP who wouldn't be picked up through the automated route (eg if they lived out of borough, or didn't access any benefits for example), so we have been clear with providers that we will undertake checks using the national eligibility checker as needed. Providers are asked to gather the information from parents and ring through for an eligibility check. The provider is advised of the outcome over the phone. Where a child is eligible, Finance are informed to trigger the additional payment, and the child's record in the children's services database is updated to indicate eligibility in future terms.

Our processes are summarised in the diagram below:

Eligibility checking – work flow

LA identifies eligible family
↓
LA informs provider of eligible children and transfers payment
↓
Provider action plans and implements funding

Parent comes forward to provider
↓
Provider contacts FIS with relevant information
↓
LA undertakes eligibility check, informs provider / updates LA database / process payment
↓
Provider action plans and implements funding

In August each year we will add an additional field to the children's services database for the next academic year of EYPP and the process starts again. We recognise that childcare providers are really keen to get 'their list of children', particularly at the start of the autumn term. Whilst we endeavour to get this out quickly, it is usually six weeks in before this information can be shared – simply because of the headcount return date. In our experience of parental eligibility checks for other initiatives, we are reasonably confident that the six weeks is still a lot more efficient than gathering individual information from potentially large groups of

parents. On the whole we receive very few EYPP manual claims, we've had less than 50 since the introduction of the funding stream, and this term have over 1800 children being funded through the EYPP stream.

**Case study: early notification – London Borough of Bromley**
London Borough of Bromley has developed a system of early identification and payment of the funding. Settings there receive a list in the last week of term identifying those children who are eligible and the LA aim to get funding to settings by the second or third week of term. Their new automated system means that providers will be able to confirm if a child is eligible for EYPP straightaway (if they have the necessary details – NI number etc.) without having to wait for the LA to do the checks

Reach and value of the project resources

Over the course of the project we gradually built up the resource bank on the project website (www.early-education.org.uk/eypp), including ten sections covering a range of aspects of practice, the newsletters and information from the dissemination events. A practical guide was developed using the expertise that was developed over the course of the project. This can be downloaded at www.early-education.org.uk/eypp under the section titled project resources.

The website materials had 8,000 unique page views over the course of the project. Six newsletters were sent out to those who subscribed. Circulation for these reached approximately 4,500 direct contacts, and information was also passed on by local authority contacts.

The results from the end of project survey suggest the materials that were produced have either been useful or very useful to those who accessed them. A typical comment was: "I found the newsletters and links to additional information very helpful - thank you."

Figure 5: Feedback on project and other resources from end of project online survey (n=114)
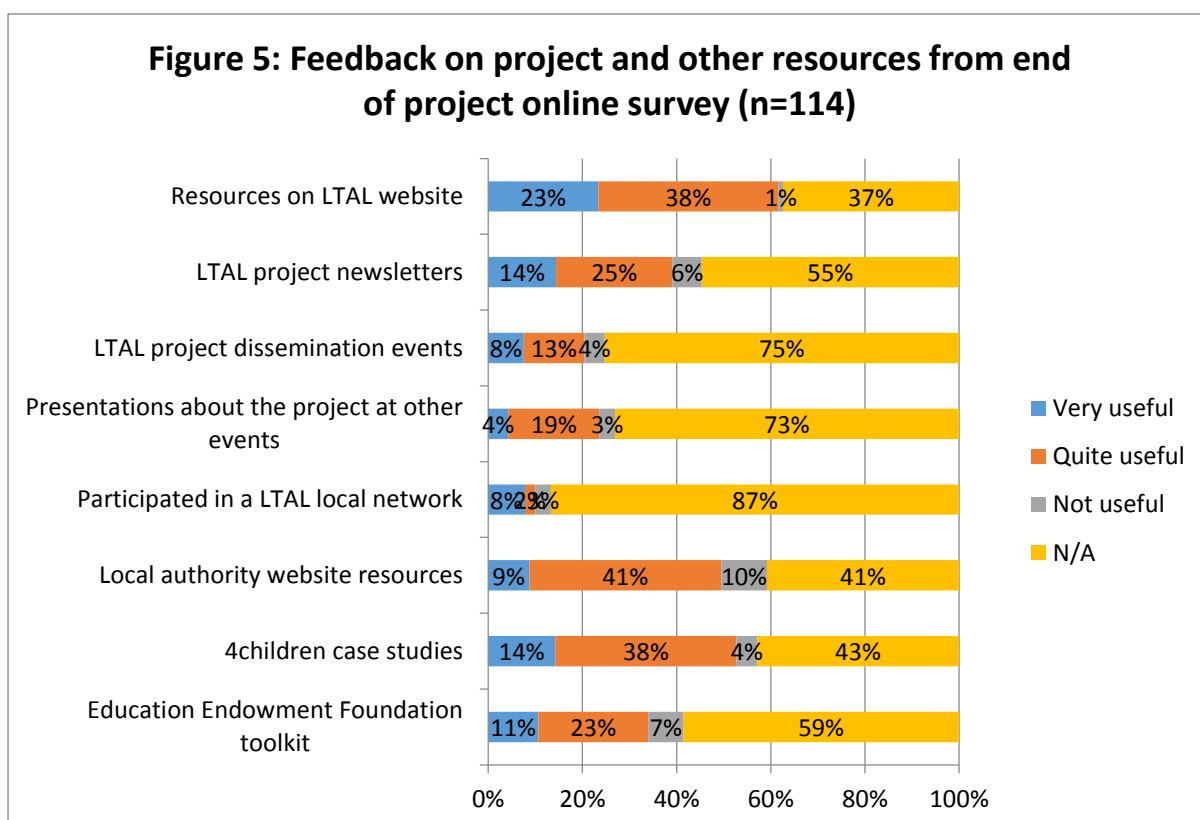
Conclusions

The project has demonstrated that networks were successful in building practitioner knowledge and confidence and there are indications that this helped improved outcomes for children at the settings. Settings reported seeing a difference in outcomes for children as a result of being able to access EYPP funding, even after this short period. This was supported by some of the data returns, although the data was not conclusive.

Focussed training opportunities provided by the networks led to deeper levels of understanding for staff, and resulted in practitioners wanting to further develop their understanding. There were cases where outcomes for families and children were very much improved. These collaborative opportunities enabled practitioners to support and develop their practice by learning from what others were doing. This has been experienced across all of the networks, from sharing how practice is monitored and modified through filming, to sharing the development of home learning packs in another. Lasting relationships have built up over the course of this project within networks, many of which will continue after the end of the project.

For the settings who took part in this project, they only had three opportunities to refine their processes in a supportive network. A longer period of time to embed this way of collaborating might have allowed settings to make further progress, and would have allowed us to collect more extensive and robust data.

It is early days for the Early Years Pupil Premium, but the signs are promising that given a good infrastructure to support practitioners in developing their pedagogical knowledge and skills, this funding has the potential to make a difference to some of our most disadvantaged children, and we would encourage government to continue to support and embed the learning of practitioners so that it can be used consistently to best effect.

Recommendations

During the course of the project, feedback was gathered on barriers and on factors which supported effective use of EYPP. The following recommendations are a synthesis of the feedback received.

Recommendations for practitioners

Recommendations for how settings and practitioners can make most effective use of EYPP can be found on page 17.

Recommendations for local authorities:

It would assist settings in making better use of EYPP if local authorities were to:

- inform settings more quickly and transparently about which children are eligible for EYPP
- pay the money earlier in the term so that practitioners can make full use of the funding whilst the child attends that setting
- support settings to work collaboratively together
- co-ordinate and share information about effective ways settings are spending the funding and how they are measuring the impact of their EYPP spending
- check children's eligibility annually, not termly, so that practitioners can forward plan. This is particularly relevant for authorities who combine the head count and EYPP claiming systems.
- Ensure settings are aware that only around half of funded 2-year-olds will be eligible for EYPP at age 3.

Recommendations for Government

Issues for DfE to consider in order to improve the administration of EYPP funding include the following:

- Develop a simpler, universal method for parents to have eligibility for EYPP funding checked and that eligibility confirmed to settings, eg as a single process combined with checks for other early years entitlements such as the 30 hours and tax free childcare. This would ensure maximum take up by reducing the stigma involved, and eliminating the need for parents to complete additional forms and disclose personal data multiple times. It would also reduce administrative workload for staff in settings.
- Create greater certainty as to children's eligibility by allowing children to remain eligible once they have met the EYPP criteria at any point, as with the "Ever 6" criteria for schools' pupil premium. Allow for new children's eligibility to be checked at least termly.
- Ensure that the future of EYPP funding and any disadvantage supplement in future funding formulae takes account of the benefits of EYPP (focusing attention on eligible children, freedom for practitioners to target according to children's individual needs), while taking note of the disadvantages (cumbersome claiming and payment processes, lengthy period for processes to bed in effectively) . It is especially important to note that practice and

processes take time to become embedded and refined, so the effectiveness with which EYPP is used is likely to increase over the coming years.

- Continue to give settings discretion over how to use the EYPP funding, trusting them to know what will make the difference to their children, families and settings in relation to closing the gap
- Continue to provide mechanisms to disseminate strategies that make a difference and that help refine practice so that outcomes continue to improve. One such mechanism might be the introduction of EYPP reviews, the outcomes of which should be synthesised to provide national guidance on best practice, and/or the appointment of an EYPP Champion at national level, perhaps linked in with early years Teaching Schools. Levels of practitioner knowledge and confidence are extremely variable across the sector, and it will be helpful for the early years' workforce strategy to take into account the need for practitioners to continue to develop their pedagogical knowledge to support effective use of EYPP.

Recommendations for future work

There remains much scope to develop further ways to develop and embed support for practitioners in how to use the EYPP, and also to evaluate its impact on children's outcomes. Possible areas for future work include:

- Further analysis of the data from the project to identify further aspects which supported successful use of EYPP
- Gathering data over a longer period of time to allow for more rigorous development of data collection and moderation, and comparison of outcomes over time
- Further exploration of ways to create and support the development of communities of practice to enable practitioners to learn from one another about effective use of EYPP

Acknowledgements