

Joint Evaluation of the Commissioning Support Programme (CSP) and Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO)

PriceWaterhouseCoopers

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Introduction

In autumn 2009, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Department for Education to complete a two year independent evaluation of two major improvement programmes, the Commissioning Support Programme (CSP) and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO). An interim report was delivered in July 2010, with Year 1 fieldwork being conducted between February and May 2010. This is the report of the Year 2 findings, and is based on fieldwork carried out between December 2010 and January 2011.

Since the evaluation delivered its interim report, the coalition government has transformed the landscape for improvement support within children's services. To reflect this, the Department re-scoped the second year of the evaluation.

The revised aim of the evaluation is to inform the development of a sector-led model of improvement support through the identification of those aspects of both the CSP and the C4EO most valued by the sector and which have had the most impact.

This summary provides a brief context for the evaluation, an overview of our methodology and a summary of the key findings in Year 2. It is not the purpose of the evaluation to compare the programmes to each other and the findings for each are set out separately.

Context

Prior to May 2010, the improvement landscape for children's services consisted mainly of a range of central initiatives, from intervention in failing services to the provision of field force capacity on specific policy priorities. The CSP and C4EO programmes represent a different approach, based on the idea of sector-led improvement support.

Rationale for C4EO and CSP

C4EO is charged with creating a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice in delivering children's services from local, regional and national evidence. This picture is built up through the delivery of knowledge sharing events, the synthesis of existing research and the provision of sector support. The C4EO model also embodies the 'for the sector from the sector' approach through sharing expert practitioner capacity, via 'sector specialists', between local areas.

CSP focuses on enhancing commissioning practice across local areas. It provides a universal offer of generic commissioning support which includes an online resource bank, a suite of regional and national events, and training and development. This is backed up by bespoke support, available to all Children's Trusts on an opt-in basis. The bespoke support is determined by an initial Self Analysis and Planning (SAP) exercise and is delivered by 'CSP local leads' who are independent from the Children's Trust but tackle commissioning priorities identified by the Trust.

The changing policy environment

Since May 2010, the coalition government has transformed the system for improvement support within children's services, and a sector-led model for improvement is now in line with the dominant strand of government thinking. Whilst central intervention is still applicable for the most serious cases, traditional field forces such as Children and Learner's Strategic Advisors have been disbanded. Other significant changes include the removal of Government Offices and Primary Care Trusts, and an enhanced role for schools and General Practitioner (GP) consortia in commissioning local services.

These policy changes make the experience and learnings from the C4EO and CSP programmes even more crucial to the further development of a sector-led improvement model.

Methodology

Our approach to the fieldwork in Year 2¹ of the evaluation was based on gathering both qualitative and quantitative data from Directors of Children’s Services (DCSs), Commissioning Champions (CCs) and other users of CSP and C4EO services and products, and is also underpinned by desk-based analysis of programme information. The Figure below outlines our methodology, which comprised three key phases. The fieldwork window for Year 2 was 17th December 2010 to 31st January 2011.

Figure 1 - Overview of methodology



- Sampling
- Redesign of research
- Analysis of programme data
- DCS interviews
- CC interviews (CSP only)
- Survey of commissioning officers (CSP only)
- E-survey of 2nd to 4th tier officers (C4EO only)
- Qualitative and quantitative analysis
- Interim report
- Final report

The final report is based on the views of 733 respondents, predominantly from local authorities, but also from other local area organisations and the voluntary and community sector. Figure 2 outlines our proposed and achieved sample for Year 2.

Figure 2 - Overview of fieldwork and sample for Year 2

<i>Interview group</i>	<i>Programme evaluated</i>	<i>Proposed sample</i>	<i>Achieved sample per tranche</i>
Interview programme			
Directors of Children’s Services	C4EO and CSP	50	50
Commissioning Champions	CSP	50	53
E-surveys			
2nd – 4th Tier Officers in the local area, Voluntary and Community sector	C4EO	300	354
Local Authority commissioners	CSP	300	276

Our evaluation framework comprised assessment of progress against a ‘change journey’ which comprised a number of stages as follows:

- Stage 1 - Awareness
- Stage 2 - Engagement
- Stage 3 - Impact of Services
- Stage 4 - Impact on outcomes

¹ DfE re-scoped the evaluation’s overarching research questions in November 2010 (see Appendices) to reflect the Department’s new priorities and preference to develop a sector-led model.

Findings

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO)

Awareness of and engagement with of key programme elements

Awareness of the key components of the C4EO offer is very high and has increased since year 1 of the evaluation. There continues to be very good awareness of the **products and services**, and good (and increasing) engagement with the programme. There is evidence that the C4EO priority areas and activities resonate with the sector and add value. Most Directors of Children's Services perceive that the programme is closely linked, and responsive, to their challenges as local area leaders, and that the C4EO is well positioned to support them.

There is also very strong awareness of the 'for the sector, from the sector' approach which includes the use of frontline practitioners to deliver tailored support, and the collaboration between the sector and C4EO in developing the range of products and services available.

It is clear from the evaluation data that Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents continue to find C4EO **research evidence** the most useful and relevant element of the programme offer. It is strongly supported, used and valued by the sector. Research evidence material is seen as being accessible, of high quality, acting as an authoritative guide to effective practice in children's services, and tailored for a variety of audiences. This makes it valuable for supporting local area improvement and development.

Respondents are also clear that C4EO **events and networking** opportunities provide a valuable means of improving individual skills and knowledge. Directors of Children's Services are concerned about being able to release staff to attend events in the new financial climate, although staff remain keen to attend them in the future.

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There has been an increased uptake of **tailored support** between Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation, and a positive response from those Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents who have experienced it. E-survey respondents from small local authorities were more likely to feel that tailored support from sector specialists had enhanced skills and knowledge in their local areas compared with those from larger authorities, and more likely to state that it had provided valuable insight into the issues facing other local areas. However, a small number of Directors of Children's Services would still prefer to purchase external support directly from the market rather than brokering a sector specialist through C4EO.

C4EO is seen as acting as a '**critical friend**' for local authorities and their partners. This enables local areas to gain an independent perspective on key issues, to use C4EO to provide challenge to senior teams and their staff, and to accelerate thinking and action at both strategic and operational levels.

Benefits and issues of sector specialists

Respondents reported that the particular benefit of sector specialists was their **proximity to the sector**. As current practitioners, sector specialists were particularly credible in respect of their knowledge of the day to day challenges facing local areas. Some Directors of Children's Services also valued the independent challenge and insights provided by the sector specialists, while others valued the additional capacity that this time-limited support provided. Three quarters of e-survey respondents believed that support from the sector specialists enhanced the skills and knowledge of staff in their local areas.

Providing sector specialists to work with other local authorities was also seen as beneficial, as they were seen as **bringing additional insights and experience back to their local areas**. More than three quarters of e-survey respondents that had accessed tailored support said they would welcome the opportunity to provide support to another local area as a sector specialist.

The issue most consistently raised in relation to the use of sector specialists was concern about the **sustainability of the model** given the difficulties local authorities face in releasing staff to act as sector specialists.

Tailored support delivered by C4EO was **regarded as being more valuable than traditional field forces** by the majority of Directors of Children's Services that have a view. This is in part due to the clarity of the brief (genuine improvement support without inspection responsibilities) and in part due to the model of using current practitioners. A small number of Directors of Children's Services pointed out that the quality of tailored support is reliant on the individual providing it rather than whether it is delivered through C4EO or a field force.

Impact of the programme

The C4EO programme has made a positive contribution to **developing the skills and knowledge** of the sector. The majority of e-survey respondents reported that their skills and knowledge had increased as a result of accessing C4EO products and services and almost half reported that this support had been significant in terms of building capacity. About half of Directors of Children's Services agreed that the C4EO had helped staff to enhance their skills and knowledge on specific issues.

There are indications of a positive **impact on service delivery**. Over three quarters of Directors of Children's Services reported that the C4EO has helped the local area to identify different and improved ways of working, with about half reporting that the C4EO had helped to implement these. Directors of Children's Services provided examples of a positive impact on service delivery models, service design and front-line practice.

Respondents found it more difficult to attribute **impact on outcomes** to the C4EO products and services but were broadly positive. Over a third of e-survey respondents confirmed that individual products and services had had a significant impact, whilst about half of Directors of Children's Services felt that the C4EO had had a positive impact on outcomes in their local area.

There is endorsement of C4EO's range of **cost effectiveness products** as a useful and valuable means of addressing new challenges to provide value for money services. However, both e-survey respondents and Directors of Children's Services were reluctant to fully attribute local area financial savings directly to C4EO products and services.

Sustainability of programme benefits

In terms of sustainability, e-survey respondents and **Directors of Children's Services view many of the materials as having a legacy** if they continue to be available electronically and can be re-visited as new challenges emerge.

Where a positive impact has been noted on services or outcomes as a result of C4EO support, many respondents felt that it might be hard to ensure sustainability due to changing and challenging conditions within the local area. However, over half of the Directors of Children's Services felt that improvements achieved as a result of C4EO support will be sustained. Directors of Children's Services who reported feeling confident that impacts could be sustained were those most likely to have embedded the support from C4EO in local area plans and practice.

Conditions that enhance C4EO impact

It is clear that local conditions have an impact on the degree to which the C4EO's products and services are effective in supporting improvement in a local area. Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents reported that the most important factor was that the local authority needed to be outwards facing, ready to access support and open to change. Two additional factors that were also identified as being important were senior management sponsoring the use of the C4EO and the local authority of having a culture of embedding learning into core planning, delivery and evaluation activities.

Commissioning Support Programme (CSP)

Awareness of and engagement with of key programme elements

There is clear evidence that the Directors of Children's Services, Commissioning Champions and commissioners who participated in the evaluation, value the overall CSP offer and see it as relevant to their commissioning activities. There continues to be very good awareness and high levels of usage across all of the CSP's core services.

Whilst commissioners have made most use of the CSP's **universal elements** (online resources, networking events and training and development), Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services have reported that the **bespoke support** is the element of the CSP that they have found most useful.

Commissioners value the opportunities the CSP has provided via **its networking events**, in bringing people together to learn from each other. Over half of commissioners surveyed believed that the networking events had helped them to commission services more effectively. **Enhanced support**, being the more recent part of the CSP's offer, was the least accessed service, but those who have accessed it spoke positively, with some commissioners feeling it will play a greater role in 12 months time.

Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions also identified the value of the CSP in bringing people together to share good practice and benchmark, as well as being a critical friend that is providing bespoke and responsive support. The majority of Commissioning Champions interviewed agreed that the network of contacts made through the CSP has helped them to 'commission services more effectively in a significantly changing (networked) environment'. These communities of practice provided commissioners with case studies against which to benchmark their local practice.

Benefits and issues of local and regional leads and the commissioning champion role

The **CSP local lead role is viewed positively**, with respondents more readily sighted on the local lead, compared with the CSP regional lead. The CSP local leads are seen as being an effective delivery model for driving, co-coordinating and delivering packages of support.

Commissioning Champions are the primary link with CSP local leads and over half of Commissioning Champions interviewed who held a view, perceived CSP local leads to provide more value than a traditional field force. A key benefit over a traditional field force is their independence and ability to start from the local authority's agenda.

The Commissioning Champion role was generally viewed positively, particularly as a point of contact with the programme which enabled real engagement between the local area and the programme. An additional benefit was cited as helping to raise the profile of commissioning within the local area. There was uncertainty whether the role would continue in the future as commissioning became more mainstreamed within teams, and given the new financial climate.

Impact of the programme

In Year 2, the CSP support was reported to have improved the **skills and knowledge of staff**. Around three quarters of commissioners believed that the CSP's bespoke support and training and development services had improved their skills and knowledge. The Resources Bank on the CSP website is also seen as providing a valuable body of sector knowledge that is relevant to commissioners. Over half of commissioners stated that it had helped them to commission more effectively

The CSP was reported to have had an **impact on service delivery**. Half of the commissioners and Commissioning Champions we spoke to felt that the CSP has had an impact on service delivery to date. The main drivers of this were training and development and bespoke support. The majority of commissioners felt that bespoke support had strengthened commissioning processes in the local area, a key foundation to improving service delivery. When it came to strengthening partnerships in their local area, more (50%) of commissioners felt this to be true in Year 2, compared with in Year 1 (40%).

Roughly a third of commissioners perceive that the CSP has had an **impact on outcomes**, which is an increase from Year 1, where less than a quarter of commissioners perceived this to be true. Training and development is felt to have played the greatest part in this to date. Respondents felt that bespoke support was more likely to have an impact on improving outcomes over the next 12 months time.

The CSP's reported impact on creating efficiencies to date is varied, but Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions had a more positive view about the CSP's likely future impact on efficiencies and the majority of commissioners believed that that bespoke support and training will help generate efficiencies in 12 months time.

Sustainability of programme benefits

The sector was positive about the sustainability of the benefits from the CSP programme in terms of its contribution to **increasing the appreciation of effective commissioning as a driver of better outcomes**, and the skills to deliver it. There were however concerns about the continuation of the benefits given the new financial climate.

A number of themes were identified as defining the point at which effective commissioning becomes self sustaining. These were: stable local leadership; clear governance arrangements around commissioning; a shared understanding or 'culture' of commissioning amongst partners; an enhancement of staff commissioning skills and knowledge base; a secure financial base; and a set of in house plans to ensure commissioning capabilities are being prioritised.

Conditions that enhance the CSP impact

It is clear that local conditions have had an impact on the degree to which the CSP's products and services are effective in supporting improvement in a local area. Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions identified a number of points in a local area's development which have enhanced the impact of the CSP. Local area strategic partnerships found the CSP to be of particular benefit if they were at the point of developing their vision and approach to commissioning. Other points include when the local area is developing operational commissioning arrangements and when there is stability within the local area. Local areas can benefit from the CSP most when organisations are outwards facing and open to learning.

Conditions which enable a sector-led model to develop

Factors influencing readiness for improvement

We asked Director's of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions which factors needed to be in place to trigger or enhance an area's readiness for improvement. Those raised most consistently were: the importance of strong leadership; effective partnership working; clarity and direction regarding the national policy agenda; having sufficient resources; clarity about performance and strengths; having access to research and evidence; and external challenge and support.

We also explored with local authorities the local conditions that enhanced the impact of what was achieved from the support they received. The local conditions which were common to both programmes were: an outward facing approach; capacity within the local authority to draw down the support; and sufficient stability in the local area to make use of support.

Priorities for future support

We asked Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions to identify their top four priorities for the future areas where they would welcome support. Directors of Children’s Services identified, in order of priority: raising standards in schools; improving safeguarding; improving services for looked after children; and delivering savings without harming frontline services.

Commissioning Champions identified a slightly wider range of priorities for the coming year. They identified, in order of priority: partnership and joint working; schools and education; the emotional well being of children; and creating efficiencies and savings.

Introduction

Introduction

Introduction

In autumn 2009, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to carry out an independent joint evaluation of two major improvement programmes, the Commissioning Support Programme (CSP) and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO).

The two-year evaluation set out to examine the effectiveness of CSP and C4EO across a number of areas including the impact on local service provision and outcomes for children, young people and families. An interim report based on fieldwork in spring 2010 was delivered in July 2010. This report is the second and final report and is based on fieldwork carried out in December 2010 and January 2011.

The rationale for a joint evaluation of these programmes is provided by their complementary nature, together with the fact that it is more cost-effective for the Department, and less burdensome for the sector, to have one overarching evaluation rather than two separate but similar evaluations. It is important to note, however, that this is not intended to be a comparative evaluation across the two programmes.

Since the evaluation delivered its interim report in July 2010, the coalition government has transformed the landscape for improvement support within children's services. To reflect this, the Department re-scoped the second year of the evaluation to include additional considerations of the conditions most likely to contribute to a sustained improvement in performance.

Purpose of the evaluation

The evaluation assesses the impact of the two programmes on local authorities and their local area partners (formerly referred to as Children's Trusts) up until the end of January 2011. The second year of the evaluation also aims to inform the development of a sector-led model of improvement support for Children's Services, drawing on comparisons with previous field force based approaches.

Where appropriate, we have made comparisons between the two years of the evaluation. The report also focuses on the *perceived* impact that CSP and C4EO have had to date. This is measured against an evaluation 'change journey' framework comprising of four stages of development: awareness; engagement; impact on services; and impact on outcomes. These stages reflect how interventions in complex systems can lead to change, first at an individual level and then, as the change becomes more widespread, at an organisational level. The findings of this report must continue to be read with an understanding of the ongoing changes in the environment within which both programmes now operate. In addition to the financial climate, the change of administration has led to a reshaped children's services improvement environment.

Changes in the children's services commissioning and improvement landscape

Prior to May 2010, the improvement setting for children's services consisted of a range of central initiatives, from intervention in failing services to the provision of field-force capacity on specific policy priorities. In this respect, the CSP and C4EO represent a different approach, based on the idea of sector-led improvement support. Both programmes are entirely separate from performance management regimes and are of an opt in and voluntary nature. Both programmes also operated within a sector which was impacted by marketing freezes and restrictions on promotion of, or attendance at conferences.

Since May 2010, the coalition government has transformed the system for improvement support within children's services, and a sector-led model for improvement is now in line with the dominant strand of government thinking. Whilst central intervention is still applicable for the most serious cases, traditional field forces such as Children and Learner's Strategic Advisors have been disbanded. Other significant changes include the removal of Government Offices and Primary Care Trusts; and an enhanced role for schools and General Practitioner (GP) Consortia, in relation to the commissioning of local services.

The experience and learnings from C4EO and CSP are therefore all the more crucial to feed into the further development of a sector-led model.

The revised research scope

In November 2010, the Department revised the scope of this evaluation to take into greater consideration the changes to the children's services improvement system since the Year 1 fieldwork was carried out.

The revised aims of the evaluation are:

- To inform the development of a sector-led model of improvement support through the identification of those aspects of both the Commissioning Support Programme and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes most valued by the sector and which have had the most impact; and
- To provide the evidence necessary to assess the performance of the Commissioning Support Programme against its Year 3 10% KPIs.

A set of revised research questions (See appendices) were also formulated to address the shift of the evaluation's focus (as per the revised aims) to create a sharper focus on impact and value, rather than process.

The programmes

The two programmes which are the subject of the evaluation are described in more detail below.

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO)

Rationale for programme

Policies belonging to the former and current government have recognised the importance of a robust evidence-base to support the effectiveness of local area interventions on improving outcomes for children and young people. C4EO² is designed to establish an evidence base of 'what works', covering a number of agreed strategic priority themes for improving outcomes. This evidence base underpins the practical support provided by sector specialists to promote it becoming actual practice.

Overview of model

C4EO aims to assist in the improvement of outcomes by identifying and coordinating local, regional and national evidence to create a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice. This evidence is designed to support local areas in improving services.

For the purpose of this evaluation, C4EO's products and services are broadly grouped into the following areas:

1. **Research evidence**, including research reviews, rapid evidence reviews, scoping reviews, knowledge reviews, on-line data tools (formerly known as progress maps), and research material presented on the C4EO website
2. **Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice**, including timely release of best and emerging practice in local area across the C4EO themes
3. **Networking opportunities, event and workshops**, including regional and national events, regional knowledge workshops, regional progression events, and on-line communities of practice.
4. **Tailored support delivered by Sector Specialists**, with the types of assistance Sector Specialists offer depending on local contexts and needs.
5. **Cost effectiveness products and services**, including tools, calculators, best practice examples and cost models.

² www.c4eo.org.uk

Research evidence

C4EO produces a range of research evidence of ‘what works’ which is available online and in print. The research evidence offer is comprised of the following key elements:

1. There are a number of research products which facilitate knowledge sharing in a particular area. Research Reviews provide a comprehensive overview of known quantitative and qualitative data within a particular area. Directors’ Summaries provide a succinct overview of the whole theme, with suggested questions to facilitate improvement. Research Summaries prioritise thematic areas for those wanting greater depth than the Directors’ Summary but are shorter than the Research Review, and seen as a good mechanism for sharing key findings with staff.
2. C4EO provides online data tools (previously known as “progress maps”) which help local authorities to benchmark themselves against statistical and national and/or regional neighbours by drawing together the latest available data.

Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice

C4EO works to highlight examples of excellent local practice and promising practice which have led to significantly improved outcomes for children, young people and families. C4EO works with local areas to identify examples of effective local practice, which are then assessed and validated by a panel of sector experts who consider them against agreed criteria.

Networking events and workshops

Evidence of ‘what works’ is disseminated through a programme of regional events, including examples of promising local practice. The knowledge events are followed up, several months later, by Excellence and Evidence events (formerly known as progression events). These events update local areas and are intended to encourage ongoing sharing and progress from local improvement activity.

Tailored support delivered by sector specialists

Sector specialists are identified, accredited, trained and deployed to provide tailored support to local areas. These specialists are drawn from the sector and are identified by individual areas as experts to support improvement and provide tailored support to other local areas. Support is provided to areas in response to their requests drawing on the bank of sector specialists. This is intended to be a broadly reciprocal arrangement in that all local areas are eligible to request support from sector specialists and all are encouraged to release their own experts to act as specialists on priorities where they demonstrate effective practice.

Cost effectiveness products and services

A comprehensive list of cost effective children's services products including tools, calculators, best practice examples and cost models are available on the C4EO website and as part of tailored support packages delivered by sector specialists.

C4EO presents its products and services across eight key themes, and two cross cutting themes of Early Intervention and Cost Effectiveness. The work of C4EO builds on The Narrowing the Gap programme, which was a two year programme hosted by the Local Government Association (LGA), supported by Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) and funded by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). Its aim was to narrow the gap in outcomes between vulnerable and excluded children and others, against a context of improving outcomes for all. From April 2008 the programme was overseen by C4EO.

The C4EO themes can be summarised as follows:

1. **Early Years** including narrowing the gap in outcomes, family-based support for early learning and effective practice in integrated early years services.
2. **Disabilities** including improving the wellbeing of disabled children, improving access to positive activities, differentiation and diversity and research studies into the effectiveness of intervention for sleep problems and different modes of delivering behaviour management.
3. **Vulnerable (looked after children)** including improving educational outcomes, improving emotional and behavioural health and increasing care leavers in safe accommodation.

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4. **Safeguarding** with the priority of protecting children living in families where they are at high risk of abuse, harm or neglect.
 5. **Child Poverty** including looking at evidence of effective area-wide child poverty strategies and child poverty needs assessments.
 6. **Schools and Communities** including three aspects: educational achievement and improving emotional resilience, sustaining progress between key stages and family well-being and community cohesion.
 7. **Youth** including a focus on increasing the engagement of young people in positive activities, spreading the impact of targeted youth support and reducing alcohol consumption.
 8. **Families, Parents, and Carers**, including a focus on improving safety through improving the physical and mental health of mothers, fathers and carers, reducing conflicts within families experiencing domestic violence and effective interventions with parents and carers of 7-19 year olds.

The cross-cutting themes are:

1. **Early Intervention:** looking to produce a report analysing the growing number of examples of effective local practice.
2. **Cost effectiveness:** C4EO has developed a model to apply to local practice, to help leaders and managers assess the cost of effective interventions at a time of reducing resources. A comprehensive list of cost effective children's services products including tools, calculators, best practice examples and cost models are available on the C4EO website and as part of tailored support packages delivered by sector specialists.

Each theme is being considered against the best evidence available, and builds on the collaborative sector-led approach. This approach means C4EO engages closely with stakeholders, including a Programme Board chaired by the President of ADCS, and Theme Advisory Groups that shape and guide each theme.

The schedule for completing each theme is phased over the life of the programme. This means that some themes, such as Early Years, have been completed whereas others, such as Youth, are due to be completed towards the end of the programme. The programme has sought to respond to changing needs, for example including the Child Poverty, Early Intervention and Safeguarding themes at the request of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

C4EO was launched in July 2008 with a remit to run until March 2011.

Commissioning Support Programme (CSP)

Rationale for the programme

The CSP³ has a remit to support more effective commissioning of services by local authorities and their local area partners and, through this, drive improvements in outcomes. Its scope covers all services that are commissioned on behalf of children, young people and families, including education, health, social care and 14-19 provision. There are various definitions of commissioning in use, but the Department, in common with other Government departments, describes it as the overall process by which services are planned and delivered with a view to best meeting the needs of service users and driving continuous improvements in outcomes.

Overview of model

The CSP was originally designed to work at a local, regional and national level to deliver its programme. Since May 2010, the majority of activity has taken place at a local level. There are six key elements to the offer assessed in the second year of the evaluation as set out below.

³ <http://www.commissioningsupport.org.uk>

1. A Self Analysis and Planning exercise (SAP)

A Self Analysis and Planning (SAP) exercise is offered as part of the engagement with Local areas. This aids Trusts in understanding their current commissioning arrangements and their priorities for improving commissioning in the future. The result of the SAP is a Change Plan and Support Agreement which underpins the focus of the bespoke support provided to the Trust.

2. Bespoke Support for Local area

CSP offers tailored support to Trusts to help address their individual commissioning priorities. The nature of this support is determined in discussion with the local Trust. It can include offers of strategic cross-cutting support to the Trust Board as well as more specific support on operational priorities. It has included a range of priorities such as governance structures, improving commissioning for children with disabilities and commissioning early years services.

3. Networking Opportunities

CSP is working with commissioners to establish a Community of Practice. This includes events, conferences and shared learning. These events are supported by content from the resource bank and the Community Area on the CSP website to encourage a wide audience who will benefit from the learning and sharing. The community of commissioning practitioners also includes the development of 'Commissioning Champions', a senior official in each Children's Trust providing a key point of contact with the CSP.

CSP encourages the development of special interest groups by working with Commissioning Champions from the sector. The groups focus on commissioning priorities and the information produced is shared across the Community of Practice.

4. Online Resources (Resource Bank and Community Area)

This website provides a resource for commissioners and Local areas on commissioning. It contains opportunities for learning more about commissioning, news and details of forthcoming events, a resource bank of materials, and a community area to exchange information and discuss shared challenges.

5. Training and Development

The CSP has developed a training portfolio to meet the different needs of relevant stakeholders across the Children's Trust. There are four main training offers:

- The Commissioning Development training which is open to commissioners, providers, senior managers, practitioners and voluntary sector providers and aims to improve understanding of commissioning. Materials are free to download from the CSP website;
- The Transforming Commissioning Development Programme which is aimed at Commissioning Champions and other senior commissioners;
- Commissioning Skills Training which comprises 'train the trainer' events targeted at commissioners. It is intended that they will use the knowledge from this event to train their local commissioning workforce;
- Lead member workshops which are designed to improve the commissioning knowledge of elected lead members and are co-delivered with the IDEa; and

The overall CSP offer is delivered through a network of Regional and Local leads who are the conduit for information and services within each region and with each Trust.

6. Enhanced Support

This is a relatively new CSP service and was rolled out in phases during 2010 and offered to Local Authorities that wished to receive further support in the following three key areas: Outcomes and Efficiencies; Schools' Commissioning; and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) commissioning. The support is delivered by CSP via a small group of specialists and is often targeted at Chief Executives.

The enhanced offer on schools support was in two phases, the second phase started in September 2010 and was influenced by the changes in school policy following the election. The outcomes and efficiencies enhanced

support communications and delivery continued after the general election. The VCS enhanced support was launched in September 2010.

The Commissioning Support Programme was launched in November 2008, with a remit to run until March 2011.

Purpose and structure of the final report

The final report assesses the perceived value each programme has brought to the sector to date, as well as the perceived impact of each programme to date, in addition to predicted impact in 12 months time. There are formative and summative aspects to this evaluation in relation to the development and refinement of a sector-led model for improvement in children's services.

The aims of the final report are to:

1. Gain an understanding of the continued usage of CSP and C4EO in local authorities to date, to enable the assessment of the perceived impact on skills and knowledge, service delivery and outcomes for children, young people and families; and
2. Inform the development of a sector-led model of improvement support through the identification of those aspects of both the Commissioning Support Programme and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes most valued by the sector and which have had the most impact.

The final report is structured as follows:

- **Methodology** - a summary of the evaluation methodology
- **C4EO findings** - key findings in relation to C4EO in Year 2, against the evaluation's change journey framework.
- **CSP findings** - key findings in relation to CSP in Year 2, against the evaluation's change journey framework.
- **Conditions which enable a sector-led model to develop** – thematic findings in relation to readiness for improvement, priorities for improvement and general learning from both programmes
- **Appendices** –key evaluation documents including: the re-scoped evaluation questions; further details of our research instruments; and further e-survey and qualitative data

Methodology

Methodology

Introduction

The CSP and C4EO evaluation is a two year evaluation with the main tranches of fieldwork undertaken in spring 2010 and early 2011. This section of the report presents our methodology for Year 2 of the evaluation of the CSP and C4EO programmes.

The original aims and methodology for the joint evaluation were reviewed by DfE in July 2010 following the change of administration. The evaluation was recommenced in November 2010, with re-scoped objectives which reflect the Department's new priorities and preference to develop a sector-led model.

This section of the report also outlines how some of the methodological issues highlighted at the end of Year 1 of the evaluation were taken into consideration for the second year of the fieldwork.

For both programmes there has been a phased implementation of products and services which means that some themes and activities have been more developed than others during the evaluation period. We have taken account of the stage of implementation of the programmes and new product or service offerings when gathering evidence, interpreting research findings and forming conclusions on impact. Both programmes are now in the final stages of roll out and many of the themes and activities are now substantially complete. We have flagged those products and services that are in an earlier stage of roll out where appropriate.

Summary of programme lifecycle

We have developed a programme lifecycle to provide a framework for analysing the findings from the evaluation. This breaks down the programmes into four key stages: awareness; engagement; impact on services; and impact on outcomes. These stages reflect how interventions in complex systems can lead to change, first at an individual level and then, as this change becomes more widespread, at an organisational level. These generic stages are shown in the figure below and described in the accompanying text.

The report findings are structured around each of the four phases.

Figure 3.1: Summary of programme lifecycle (or 'Change Journey')



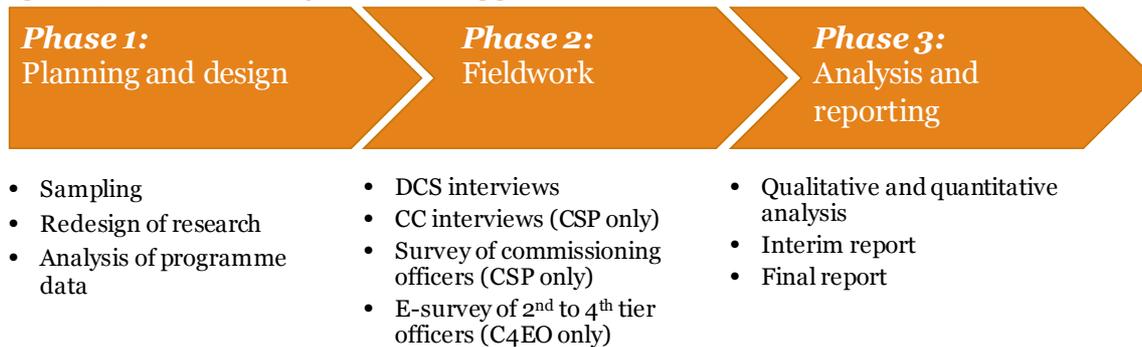
- **Stage 1** - Awareness of the programme – this is the early stages of a programme. Awareness can be passive at first but programme users must actively engage with the programme for processes to develop.
- **Stage 2** - Engagement with programme – when users start to actively engage with the programme, individual programme users may start to feel the benefit of enhanced knowledge and confidence gained from participation.
- **Stage 3** - Impact on services – once a number of users have started to feel the benefit of a programme at an individual level, there may be an impact on service delivery. At a collective or organisational level, processes and systems now begin to show some impact from the enhanced level of knowledge and skills of individual users.
- **Stage 4** - Impact on outcomes – this is final stage of the programme lifecycle. It is the most difficult stage to assess as the time lag from impact on services to outcomes will vary across services. It is often also difficult to isolate the impact of the programme from wider initiatives.

The findings from our previous interim report focused mainly on the first two stages of the programme lifecycle (awareness of and engagement with programme). In this report, whilst stages 1 and 2 are revisited, the focus has moved on to a greater extent to the final two stages of the programme lifecycle for CSP and C4EO.

Summary of work streams for the evaluation

Our approach to the fieldwork in Year 2 of the evaluation is based on gathering both qualitative and quantitative data from Directors of Children’s Services (DCSs), Commissioning Champions (CCs) and other users of CSP and C4EO services and products. It is underpinned by desk-based analysis of programme information.

Figure 3.2: Overview of methodology



The paragraphs which follow discuss in more detail the ways in which we have developed our approach in conjunction with the Department as the evaluation has progressed. It is structured as follows:

1. **Phase 1:** planning and design;
2. **Phase 2:** fieldwork; and
3. **Phase 3:** analysis and reporting.

Phase 1: planning and design

The purpose of Phase 1 was to refine our approach in light of: external changes in the local government environment; on-going development of the products and services offered by both programmes; and lessons learnt from the first year of the fieldwork. Prior to redesigning the research instruments, and in line with the revised evaluation scope, members of the study team held a number of meetings with both C4EO and CSP to discuss developments in the scope and reach of their products and services and of the data held by each programme which could inform this evaluation. Both programmes also provided the study team with contact details of their services users to facilitate the fieldwork phases of the evaluation.

In this phase, two key activities were undertaken:

- **Sampling:** identifying research sample parameters; selecting and recruiting Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions; and sourcing the sample for the quantitative phase of the evaluation.
- **Design of research instruments:** preparing questionnaires⁴ and interview guides; piloting and testing research instruments.

In designing the e-surveys we have used a 5 point Likert scale the most widely used scale in survey research. This includes a ‘neither/nor’ option which is standard practice in market research. Offering the ‘neither/nor’ option from the scale prevents respondents from making a forced choice on either the positive or negative end of the scale which may not accurately reflect their opinion, particularly in future case scenarios. ‘neither/nor’ is a valid response in many cases and avoids the bias to a questionnaire which may occur if a midpoint on the scale is not offered.

These two activities are discussed in more detail below.

Sampling

Table 3.1 below sets out our sampling approach for undertaking the programme of interviews and surveys in Year 2 of the evaluation.

Table 3.1: Overview of the sampling approach for Year 2

Interview group	Programme evaluated	Proposed sample per tranche	Achieved sample
Interview programme			
Directors of Children’s Services	C4EO and CSP	50	50
Commissioning Champions	CSP	50	53
E-surveys			
2nd – 4th Tier Officers in the local area, Voluntary and Community sector	C4EO	300	354
Local Authority commissioners	CSP	300	276

A number of different approaches to sampling were adopted, depending on the target audience for each strand of the fieldwork.

Evaluation of CSP and C4EO

Directors of Children’s Services: contact details for each Directors of Children’s Services were sourced from the Association of Directors’ Services (ADCS). Each Local Authority area was then mapped against a number of variables: region; type (county, London, metropolitan, unitary); location (urban, rural); and size (small, medium and large). Directors of Children’s Services contacts were then selected to reflect the distribution of local authority types across England.

Evaluation of CSP

Commissioning Champions: contact details for Commissioning Champions (CCs) were supplied by the Springboard Consortium (who deliver the CSP). The information from Springboard also outlined whether or not the Commissioning Champion’s local areas had undertaken a Self Analysis and Planning exercise (SAP). The contacts were segmented against the same variables used for Directors of Children’s Services interviews and on the level of engagement the Commissioning Champions have had with the CSP and prioritised on that basis.

Commissioning Officers in local areas: potential contacts for the CSP e-survey were also supplied by Springboard following validation by the CSP Regional Leads.

Evaluation of C4EO

2nd- 4th tier officers in Local areas: potential contacts for the C4EO survey were provided by the C4EO from a number of data sources. It should be noted that e-survey respondents have a variety of roles and responsibilities, and their reasons for accessing C4EO will be correspondingly varied. The breadth and depth of the C4EO programme means that usage will not be limited to a single area (for example, commissioning or frontline service delivery etc).

The e-survey findings in relation to ‘awareness’ of each programme should be considered in light of the fact that all potential respondents will already have had some degree of contact with one or both programmes. However, it is also important to note that the overarching aim of the evaluation is “*to provide the Department with robust evidence as to the impact of each programme*” and that it is therefore essential that respondents to these surveys have an informed view of the services and products available to them.

Methodological issues in relation to sampling

Several methodological issues emerged in relation to the sampling for the quantitative phase of the evaluation in Year 1. We have worked closely with DfE and the programmes to overcome these issues for Year 2:

- Preliminary analysis of the contacts database from each programme in Year 1 revealed, to varying degrees, differences in the level and quality of the information held. The original intention was to conduct a telephone survey of each grouping, but the initial sift revealed that the majority of contacts had email addresses only. It was therefore decided to adopt an e-survey methodology (i.e. self-completion) in Year 1 supplemented by telephone interviews. Reaching local authority officers by telephone proved to be problematic in Year 1 however as the numbers available were often switchboard numbers rather than direct lines. It was decided therefore, in conjunction with the Department that an e-survey methodology only would be employed in Year 2.
- Sample data provided by C4EO in Year 1 contained a high number of contacts from the voluntary and community sector which were excluded from the sample in Year 1. However, given the nature of the products and services offered by C4EO, it was agreed with the Department that this sector should be included in the target sample for Year 2. Year 2 findings from this wider sample are presented in the main body of this report. Where comparisons with the C4EO Year 1 findings are provided, the figures relate to 2nd-4th tier officer responses only.

Design of research instruments

Following the initial scoping exercise and the stakeholder interviews, four research instruments were developed: a topic guide for the interviews with Directors of Children’s Services; a topic guide for the interviews with Commissioning Champions (CSP only); a questionnaire for the survey of Commissioning Officers in local areas (CSP); and a questionnaire for the survey of 2nd to 4th tier officers in local areas and voluntary/community sector organisations (C4EO). The research instruments were informed by the evaluation objectives and the early stakeholder engagement, in particular with CSP, C4EO and the ADCS. For Year 2 of the evaluation, the original research instruments were reviewed in light of the revised research objectives and also to reflect changes in the external environment (e.g. changes in the political landscape and in the products and services offered by the programmes). The research instruments were revised accordingly. In some cases, therefore, the extent to which year-on-year comparisons can be drawn is necessarily limited.

The DfE have a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for CSP. These KPIs are closed statements against a four-point scale, with an additional option of ‘not enough evidence to answer’. In Year 2, we collected KPI data for CSP within each research instrument as appropriate. All research instruments are provided in the appendices.

Phase 2: Fieldwork

This section of the report considers each of the four main data gathering strands in more detail and presents the breakdown of the sample for each target population in terms of the variables identified above. Each phase of the research is presented in relation to the specific aspect of the evaluation under investigation i.e. both programmes; the CSP only; or the C4EO only.

Evaluation of CSP and C4EO

Interviews with Directors of Children’s Services

The aim of this phase of the fieldwork was to conduct 50 telephone interviews with Directors of Children’s Services by 31st January 2011. This was a challenging target given the many competing demands on their time and we were delighted with the response to our invitations to participate. The response rate (50) was aided significantly by the contribution of the ADCS in publicising the importance of the evaluation to its members.

Overall, 83 Directors of Children’s Services were contacted within the time to achieve the target of 50 interviews. The achieved interviews were also broadly representative by type of authority, size and location (i.e. urban or rural). The interview data was also mapped to the 2010 APA performance variable which showed that the majority of interviews were conducted with Directors of Children’s Services in categories 2 and 3 (‘performs adequately’ and ‘performs well’ respectively). Table 3.2 in the appendices, illustrates the spread of participating Directors of Children’s Services by region, type, location and size.

Evaluation of CSP

As previously mentioned, two elements of the fieldwork phase addressed issues relating to the CSP only - interviews with Commissioning Champions and a survey of Commissioning Officers in local ar

Interviews with Commissioning Champions

For the Commissioning Champions interview sampling, we conducted a similar process to that undertaken for the Directors of Children’s Services sampling. Again, the interview data was also mapped to the 2010 APA performance variable which showed that the majority of interviews were conducted with Commissioning Champions in categories 2 and 3 (‘performs adequately’ and ‘performs well’ respectively)⁵.

Survey of Commissioning Officers

As noted above, it was agreed that the data collection methodology for the survey of Commissioning Officers would be an e-survey. Following sign-off of the questionnaire, the e-survey was tested extensively internally and with the DfE. The e-survey element of the survey of Commissioning Officers was undertaken from the 17th December 2010 to 28th January 2011 . Overall, 276 completed responses were achieved during the timescale which could be used for analysis purposes. A further 66 respondents were excluded from the survey because they were in the voluntary or community sector, “not at all aware” of the CSP, or because they had not accessed any of the CSP services and products. The overall response rate was 21%.

Table 3.4 in the appendices summarises the achieved sample for the survey of Commissioning Officers. The survey data was also mapped to the 2010 APA performance variable which showed that almost three-quarters of respondents were from local authority areas in categories 2 and 3 (performs adequately and performs well respectively).

Evaluation of C4EO

Survey of 2nd to 4th tier officers

Following sign-off of the C4EO questionnaire, the e-survey was tested extensively internally and with the DfE. The e-survey element of the survey of 2nd-4th tier officers was undertaken from 17th December 2010 to 21st January 2011, including voluntary and community sector respondents as previously noted. Overall, 354 completed responses were achieved during the timescale and used for analysis purposes. A further 140 respondents were excluded from the e-survey analysis either because they were providers or they described themselves as being “not at all aware” of C4EO or had not used or accessed any C4EO services. The overall response rate was therefore 15%.

Table 3.5 in the appendices summarises the achieved sample for the survey of 2nd - 4th tier officers in local areas.⁶ The survey data was also mapped to the 2010 APA performance variable which showed that three-quarters of respondents fell within categories 2 and 3 (performs adequately and performs well respectively).

⁵ Table 3.3 in the appendices illustrates the distribution of the achieved sample by region, type, location and size

⁶ Please note that, there is no definitive or central list of 2nd to 4th tier officers across Local areas. By the very nature of its product and service offering, the C4EO database contains contacts from a wide range of organisation types and individuals. The sample for this survey was therefore selected on the basis of those job titles within the C4EO database which were most likely to correspond to these roles. Providers were automatically closed out of the surveys.

Response rates for e surveys

Each e survey has its own set of variables affecting its response rate. These include length of time taken for completion, relevance of the survey to respondents, and quality of the sample contact details. While the response rates between the 2010 and 2011 surveys cannot be directly compared given the differences in the nature of the sample and of the surveys themselves, it should be noted that the response rates for both surveys are of similar magnitude. The response rate for the survey of commissioning officers (CSP) was 24% in 2010 and 21% in 2011. For C4EO, the response rate was 17% in 2010 and 15% in 2011, however, the overall population size was larger in 2011 as voluntary and community organisations were included this year.

The margin of error is a measurement of the accuracy of the results of a survey. The higher the response rate, the lower the margin of error. There was some anecdotal evidence from several participants in the qualitative research phases of this evaluation that rapid changes in the local government landscape and the financial constraints under which local authorities are now working would be likely to have a negative impact on response rates in the final year of the evaluation. In 2011, with a total number of survey returns of 276 for the CSP survey, the margin of error is 5.2%. For the C4EO survey, the margin of error is 4.8%. A sampling margin of error of around 5% is normally acceptable for survey based studies, so the results of these surveys can be viewed as robust and used with confidence.

Phase 3: analysis and reporting

The following paragraphs outline the analysis techniques employed in respect to the qualitative and quantitative data collected on both programmes and present the reporting timetable for the remainder of the evaluation.

Qualitative data from the Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champion interviews

The telephone interviews with Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions were analysed by recording data for specific question items under the key themes relating to the research objectives. The number and frequency of response to specific question items were then quantified, enabling us to build a clearer picture of key issues and the main impacts of the programmes across the participating Trusts.

Quantitative data analysis

Top line frequencies were produced for each of the survey datasets. The datasets were also matched to characteristics in terms of Local Authority type, size and location. In order to explore any variations between respondents in terms of awareness and usage, cross-tabulations were produced on these variables and also variables such as:

- Self-assessed maturity in terms of commissioning/partnership working;
- Main responsibility in terms of children's services
- Employing organisation (i.e. local authority, PCT or other); and
- Performance data (APA 2010 ratings).

Reporting

An interim presentation of the emerging findings was presented to the Department on 1st February 2011. The final report and a Research Summary will be submitted to the DfE by 31st March 2011.

*Centre for Excellence and
Outcomes (C4EO)*

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes

Key findings

- There is a very good awareness of C4EO products and services, and good (and increasing) engagement with the programme. There are early signs of positive impact on service delivery, and signs of potential impact on outcomes for children and young people.
- There is good brand awareness around what C4EO offers and support for the sector led approach it embodies at a time of significant challenge within the sector.
- C4EO's model and approach can be considered as unique within the sector as it arises from its collaboration with the sector in both developing and delivering the model.
- There is evidence that C4EO prioritises areas and activities that resonate with the sector and add value. Most Directors of Children's Services perceive that the programme is closely linked to their challenges as local area leaders, and that C4EO is well positioned to support them.
- C4EO research evidence is very strongly supported, used and valued by the sector. There is a strong sense that research evidence material is tailored for a variety of audiences, which makes it more valuable to the sector.
- The majority of Directors of Children's Services that have accessed tailored support have been happy with it, but some would prefer to buy in support outside of the programme from suppliers of their choice.
- E survey respondents from small local authorities were most likely to feel that support from the sector specialist had enhanced the skills and knowledge of staff compared with those from medium sized or large authorities. They were also more likely to state that tailored support has provided valuable insight into the issues facing other local areas.
- The website forms a major avenue for access. General professional interest is the main reason for accessing it, and information on early intervention and early years is the most popular material accessed.
- The programme has made a positive contribution to developing the skills and knowledge of the sector. The majority of e survey respondents reported that their skills and knowledge had increased as a result of accessing the C4EO products and services and almost half reported that this support had been significant in terms of building capacity.
- There are early indications of positive impact on service delivery, and signs of potential impact on outcomes for children and young people. Over three quarters of Directors of Children's Services reported that the C4EO has helped the local area to identify different and improved ways of working considered, with about half reporting that the C4EO had helped to implement these.
- Over half the Directors of Children's Services felt that improvements achieved as a result of C4EO support will be sustained. Many respondents felt that it was hard to ensure sustainability due to changing and challenging conditions within the local area (for example, workforce issues). Directors of Children's Services who reported feeling confident that impacts could be sustained were most likely to have embedded the support in local area plans and practice.

Introduction

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) is charged with creating a single and comprehensive picture of effective practice in delivering children's services from local, regional and national evidence, and using this information to work with local authorities and their partners to improve outcomes. The C4EO seeks to support Children's Services to raise their practice to the highest level through sector specialists providing tailored support to local areas.

The aim of the research was to explore awareness of the C4EO, and how users access and value its products and services. It also looks at the impact of the C4EO on building skills, experience and capabilities in local areas, and whether this leads to improvements in service delivery and outcomes for children and young people.

A full description of the themes, products and services that comprise the C4EO programme is summarised in the introduction section of this report. For reference, as part of this evaluation we have broadly grouped the products and services into the following categories for the majority of the research questions:

- Research evidence, including research reviews and summaries, website materials and tools;
- Local validated practice and promising practice;
- Networking opportunities and events;
- Tailored support delivered by sector specialists; and
- Cost effectiveness tools.

Between Year 1 and Year 2 of the evaluation, the C4EO has continued to offer the same range of products and services as identified in Year 1. The Parents, Families and Carers theme was launched in Year 2, as was Youth, and Schools and Communities.

In addition, the C4EO has released two major publications between the evaluation years. *Grasping the Nettle: early intervention for children, families and communities*, which summarises local practice validated as excellent or deemed promising. *Can I afford to can I afford not to* was also released, which looks at what the evidence says about best practice and where the best returns for investment are obtained.

These products and services are distributed across eleven themes (these themes are described in more detail in the Introduction section of this report). They have been launched as part of a rolling programme, characterised with the collation and dissemination of research as the first activity for the theme, and the recruitment and release of theme sector specialists later in the theme's lifecycle.

There were 118 trained, accredited sector specialists as of December 2010. 60 local authorities have released staff to act as sector specialists, of which 17 have loaned multiple specialists. 107 local authorities have received sector specialists, of which 54 have requested more than 1 assignment

The themes and launch dates are summarised in the table below. It should be noted that some themes have only recently launched, and so the sector is unlikely to be as familiar with the products and services within these themes as it is with more established priority areas. Similarly, some themes launched earlier in the C4EO programme but did not recruit or released sector specialists until later in the programme.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Launch date for theme</i>	<i>Launch date for tailored support</i>
Early Years	February 2009	May 2009
Cost effectiveness	February 2009	August 2010
Disability	June 2009	October 2009
Child Poverty	September 2009	November 2009
Vulnerable Children	October 2009	January 2010
Schools and Communities	April 2010	June 2010
Safeguarding	July 2010	April 2011
Youth	September 2010	April 2011
Families Parents Carers	October 2010	May 2010
Early Intervention & Prevention Cross Theme	October 2010	October 2010

Profile of respondents:

An initial e-survey was conducted in April 2010 as part of the Year 1 evaluation with a second e-survey conducted in Dec 2010/Jan 2011 as part of the Year 2 evaluation. The results in this report refer to the second survey, but where relevant, make comparisons with the Year 1 e-survey. It is important to note that in the second phase of the evaluation, voluntary and community providers were included in the sample following agreement with DfE. Care should therefore be taken in making direct comparisons between these findings and the results of the first wave of the evaluation.

Profile of 2nd to 4th tier officers who completed the e survey:

- The e survey was completed in full by 354 respondents. Over two thirds of e survey respondents are employed by the Local Authority (70%). 11% are employed by a voluntary and community sector provider, and 7% are employed by the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- The e survey sample represents a good spread of responses across all regions, size (small, medium and large) and performance ratings for local authorities in England.
- E survey respondents had responsibilities across a broad range of children's services, with education, social care and early years accounted for over half of all responses (16%, 25% and 18% respectively).
- The majority of respondents felt their local area was mature in terms of partnership work (71%), and were more likely to state this than in Year 1 (54%). Smaller local authorities are more likely to report that they are 'quite' or 'very' mature, and larger local authorities are more likely than small authorities to say they are 'not very' or 'not at all' mature.

Six of the 50 Directors of Children's Services had been in post six months or less, 15 had been in post between six months and two years, 21 had been in post more than two years, and eight declined to answer. 13 Directors of Children's Services had a background in education, 13 had a background in social care, eight had a background in both education and social care, and 14 declined to answer.

Of the 50 Directors of Children's Services interviews completed, three respondents were only able to answer five research questions or fewer in relation to C4EO, this was due to limited programme awareness and/or usage on their part. Consequently these Directors of Children's Services were considered to be 'non-users or low users' in terms of the Directors of Children's Services findings. Where these Directors of Children's Services did provide full answers to any question, their comments were included in the research summation. There were eight 'non or low users' in Year 1, which suggests a greater level of awareness among the Directors of Children's Services cohort in Year 2.

We have also cross-referenced the data with the size of local authorities (small, medium, large), self-reported levels of maturity in partnership working in the local area by e-survey respondents, and the performance of local authorities (using Annual Performance Assessment grades of outstanding, good, adequate and inadequate as at December 2010). For e-survey respondents, 15% came from poorly performing local authorities, 20% came from adequately performing authorities, 55% came from those that were performing well, and 10% from local authorities that perform excellently. Of the 50 local authorities that Directors of Children's Services came from, five were poorly performing, eight were adequate, 28 were performing well, and eight were excellent.

There was no identified link between e-survey responses or Directors of Children's Services responses and local authority performance. Where there has been a link between a response and local authority size or maturity this has been noted in the report.

What we learnt in Year 1 of the evaluation

In Year 1, it was clear that the sector had a good level of awareness of C4EO as a programme, however, there was not a correspondingly high level of usage of all aspects of the programme. Many respondents valued the idea of a sector-led programme but evidence collected at that stage of the evaluation indicated that engagement levels with each element of the programme were still varied.

The aspects of the C4EO programme that e-survey respondents had made greatest use of related to the research evidence and the networking events and workshops. Although, many respondents were positive about the value C4EO provided, Directors of Children's Services were less confident than e-survey respondents that there was

yet a link between the programme and improvements in service delivery and outcomes for children and young people. Leadership of C4EO, organisation and quality of provision were regarded well by interviewees, and it appeared that some of the success by C4EO in reaching the sector was related to personal professional networks.

The remainder of this section is divided into sub-sections that analyse the link between the C4EO programme and the local area's progression along points in the evaluation framework change journey. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made to findings in Year 1, although it is important to be mindful that the scope of the evaluation has been revised and that whilst the qualitative fieldwork has captured some common people in Year 1 and Year 2, the e-survey respondents to the second e-survey are anonymous and not necessarily the same respondents to the first e-survey. The section also explores the features, strengths and weaknesses of the programme and its perceived value, including a comparison with traditional field forces.



Awareness of programme

This sub-section covers the awareness of C4EO across its themes, products and services by both the e-survey respondents and Directors of Children's Services. The value, relevance and impact of C4EO are explored in subsequent sections.

In Year 1 of the evaluation, C4EO was still at the early stages of its programme development, with some elements of its programme recently launched or yet to launch. Consequently, Year 1 probed more heavily on awareness and usage of products and services, and Year 2 has focused more on impact on local areas. In Year 2 of the evaluation, we would expect to see greater awareness of C4EO – both as a programme and of its range of products and services – if the programme was developing well and valued by the sector.

Levels of awareness have increased since Year 1, particularly in respect of those who stated they are very aware of the programme

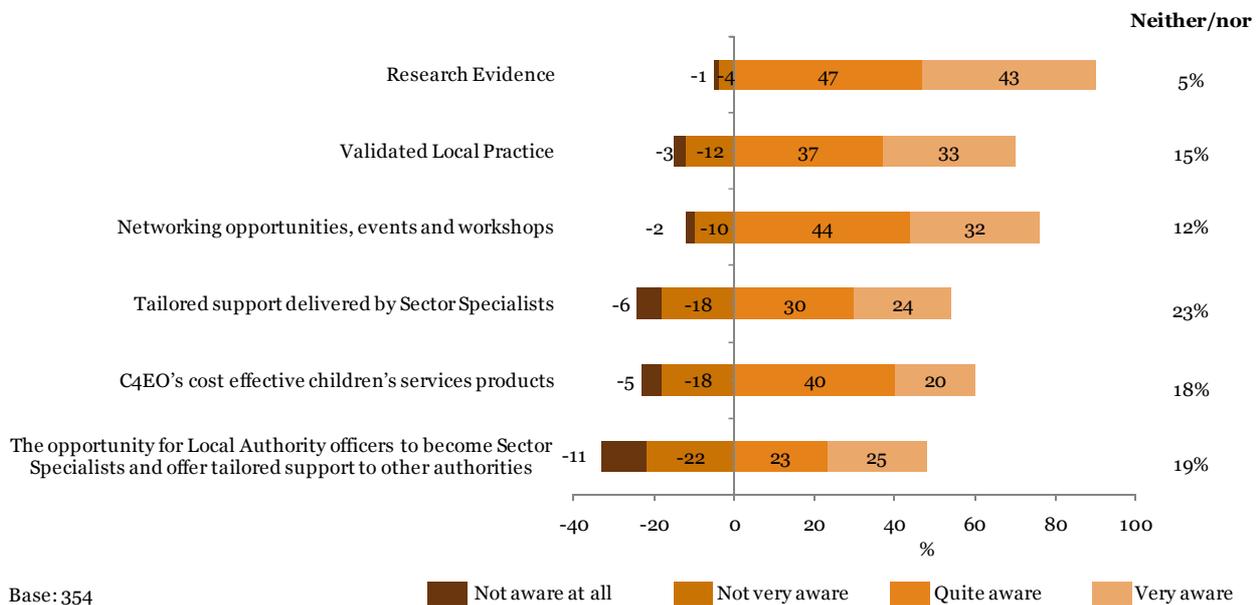
The vast majority of e-survey respondents stated that they were quite or very aware of the C4EO programme (89%). Levels of awareness have increased since Year 1, particularly in respect of those who stated they are 'very aware' of the programme. In terms of product and services awareness, levels of awareness for research evidence, networking opportunities and tailored support have increased, again particularly for those stating they are very aware (see Figure 1).

A third of e-survey participants reported not being aware of opportunities to become Sector Specialists, this may be a reflection of how strongly local authorities promoted these opportunities to their teams. Many Directors of Children's Services reported that the current climate poses challenges to releasing staff to attend learning and development events.

Almost a quarter of e-survey respondents were not aware of cost effectiveness products, these products have been released more recently than other products and services. Consequently, it is not surprising that e-survey respondents are more familiar with established products.

Figure 1: Levels of awareness of C4EO products and services

How aware are you of the specific activities undertaken by C4EO?



The C4EO website was the main source of initial information about C4EO (36%), followed by word of mouth from colleagues (26%) and C4EO printed material (23%). Those reporting that their main source of initial information was from the C4EO website or personal contact from C4EO have reduced from Year 1, and respondents were least likely to hear about C4EO from a professional publication or the local area partnership (8%) or a professional body (11%).

Staff from a large local authority were more likely to hear about C4EO from the website (42%), and staff from small local authorities were most likely to hear from a colleague (34%). This suggests that smaller authorities may have closer word of mouth and personal networks for professional development than larger authorities.

Directors of Children's Services reported high levels of awareness of the C4EO programme, and were most aware of the research products and services

More than half the Directors of Children's Services felt they had a 'good' or 'very good' awareness of the C4EO (n=26), with a further 20 Directors of Children's Services stating they were 'reasonably' aware. Only 4 Directors of Children's Services stated they 'were not very aware' of the programme, compared with 16 Directors of Children's Services who were 'not very' or 'not at all' aware at the time of the survey in Year 1. This represents a significant rise in awareness of C4EO among Directors of Children's Services and, as described later in this section, has had a positive impact on the degree of engagement with the C4EO programme in the local area.

There was a high level of awareness amongst Directors of Children's Services for the C4EO's products and services, especially the research evidence. Some 22 Directors of Children's Services cited specific products they were aware of: the most common of which were research materials (n=11) and networking opportunities and events (n=8). This is broadly consistent with the findings in Year 1.

Four Directors of Children's Services explicitly referred to the marketing efforts of the C4EO as having been an effective means of raising awareness of the programme. In addition, three Directors of Children's Services referred to being present at the launch of the C4EO, with a further three reporting that the C4EO had visited their local authorities – both factors were regarded as improving awareness in their local area.

"As an organisation, C4EO has done well in informing local authorities of what they could do for them."
 (Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

There is no correlation between local authority performance and awareness of C4EO by Directors of Children's Services.

Engagement with C4EO



Engagement with the C4EO programme is evidenced by a translation of awareness of products and services into active uptake of products and services across the themes. This sub-section reports on the extent to which both the e-survey respondents and Directors of Children's Services perceived the products and services as being relevant and made use of them. It also includes findings illustrating the impact on skills and knowledge of respondents (which is explored in further depth in the sub-section on impact on service delivery) and findings regarding tailored support delivered by sector specialists.

It is important to note that the C4EO delivers its programme in a number of stages. For each theme research findings and tools are collated and disseminated to the sector. The next stage is for sector specialists to be recruited and released to deliver tailored support to local areas. This is phased both in terms of the order of delivery within a theme, and across the themes within the programme. Consequently, we might expect to see greater engagement with services and products from more established themes that were developed at an earlier point in the programme (e.g. early years) than more recently launched themes (e.g. parents, families and carers).

The main reason provided by e-survey respondents for accessing support from the C4EO is general professional interest, followed by a desire to build skills and knowledge.

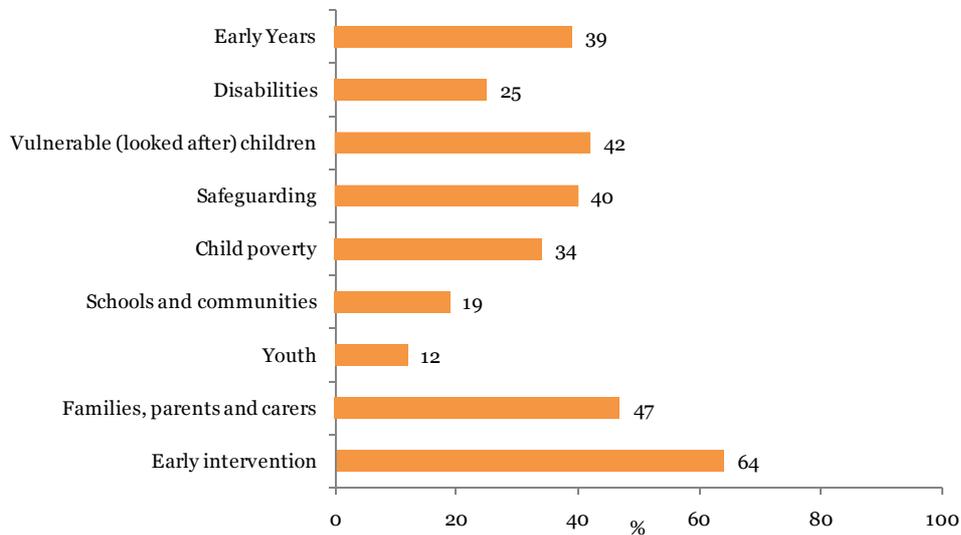
The most commonly cited reason for accessing support from the C4EO is a 'general professional interest' (72%). There was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents accessing the C4EO with 'a desire to build skills and knowledge' (63% in Year 2 compared to 17% in year 1). Those seeking a response to a specific issue also rose: 38% in Year 2, compared to 22% in year 1.

Beyond this initial reason for accessing the C4EO, e-survey respondents were most likely to look for information on early intervention, and Figure 2 summarises the other areas that were further accessed by respondents. The two most accessed themes, Early intervention and Family, and Parents and Carers, were launched more recently (October 2010) and these findings suggest that the sector has readily welcomed the material presented in each. The Early Intervention theme was identified by the sector as an area of need and as a consequence the original C4EO programme was further extended.

More than a third of Directors of Children's Services also reported using early intervention products and services, and only early years was more frequently cited as a theme (n=17).

Figure 2: Further information sought by e-survey respondents by area theme

Which specific issue(s) did you seek further C4EO information on?



Base: 216

Although Directors of Children’s Services used a range of products and services, they were mostly likely to cite research evidence

In terms of products and services, research evidence was the more frequently cited product used in local areas by Directors of Children’s Services. The most frequently areas within research evidence were early intervention (n=10), child protection/safeguarding (n=3) and disabilities (n=3).

One Directors of Children’s Services said that the local authority senior management team had a “scanning the horizon” agenda item on their monthly meeting agenda, and outputs from the C4EO were identified and then cascaded to the relevant teams or areas for review.

“I know staff use C4EO material because they quote from them!”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

“We take a ‘pick and mix’ approach: we use what’s available at the time.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

E-Survey respondents found early intervention and safeguarding the most useful themes

Looking at the C4EO themes, e-survey respondents considered that Early Intervention and Safeguarding were the most useful areas of research evidence (66% and 60% respectively). Families, Parents and Carers and Vulnerable Children were also regarded as useful themes (59% and 53%). E-survey respondents were most likely to give a “neither/nor” response to the usefulness of the ‘youth’ and ‘schools and communities’ themes (60% and 53%). This reflects the fact that these themes had more recent launch dates (September 2010 and April 2010 respectively) but may also suggest that these themes have not yet penetrated the sector, or that staff completing the e-survey do not have responsibility for these areas. It is noted that only 6% of respondents are employed in the area of young people, and 5% of respondents were employed by a school or university.

Some 8% of e-survey respondents reported difficulties in accessing the C4EO programme (n=27). Of these, the main difficulties experienced related to timing and resourcing issues (37% and 30% respectively). Other reasons provided included poor or a lack of communication within the local area about accessing support resources, and internal factors such as local area restructuring.

Three quarters of e-survey respondents had accessed research evidence and almost half had participated in a networking opportunity.

The proportions of respondents accessing research evidence, networking opportunities and tailored support have increased since Year 1. All e-survey respondents report using at least one type of support from C4EO, a positive change from the position in Year 1 when a quarter of respondents reported not accessing anything. The universally accessible material is reported as being more commonly accessed, with smaller numbers of respondents having accessed tailored support or the opportunity to become a sector specialist.

The types of products and services accessed by e-survey respondents are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: E-survey respondents and their usage of C4EO

Which of the following C4EO products and services have you (as an individual) accessed or participated in?



In Year 2, 41% of e-survey respondents had used validated local practice or promising practice, and 31% of respondents had used cost effective children's services products. Due to sector demand, more recent validated local practice or promising practice examples have included costings, reflecting the belief that effective practice needs to include value for money to be relevant to the sector.

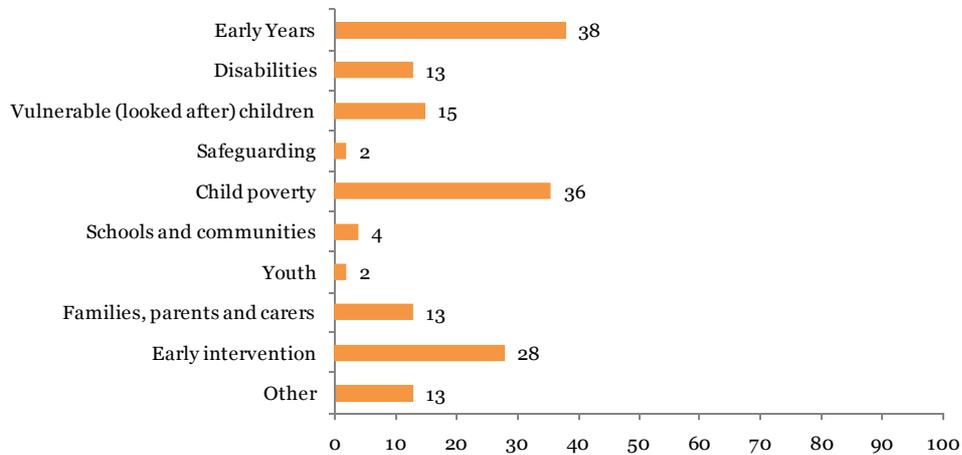
Validated local practice or promising practice and cost effective children's services products (including tools and calculators) were wrapped up in 'research evidence' in Year 1 due to the timing of their launches being close to that of the first survey. There is therefore no specific data in relation to these services from Year 1 to form a point of comparison.

The proportion of e-survey respondents who used tailored support from sector specialists rose from 9% in Year 1 to 13% in Year 2. Ten percent of e-survey respondents in Year 2 had also accessed or participated in the opportunity for local authority officers to become Sector Specialists and offer tailored support to other local authorities. Of those e-survey respondents who stated that they had received tailored support from Sector Specialists (n=47), the majority described themselves as 'quite' or 'very' involved in the support (71%). There has been a positive shift towards those who stated they are 'very' involved (from 37% in Year 1 to 43% in Year 2).

Early years, child poverty and early intervention were the most commonly cited areas of thematic support that were received from Sector Specialists (n=47). As Youth and Families, Parents and Carers themes were launched recently it is to be expected that fewer respondents will have accessed tailored support in these areas. Full details of the areas of support that had been received from sector specialists is summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Areas of tailored support provided by Sector Specialists

Which thematic area of tailored support have you accessed?



Base: 47*

*Please note the small base. Use caution when analysing the results.

Across all elements of C4EO there are some common themes regarding what the sector values from C4EO, many of which echo the findings in Year 1. These include:

- C4EO acts as a conduit for collating and sharing evidence based good practice, through research evidence, events and tailored support;
- C4EO acts as ‘critical friend’ for local authorities and their partners. This enables local areas to gain an independent perspective on key issues, to use C4EO to provide challenge to senior teams and their staff, and to accelerate thinking and action at both strategic and operational levels within the local area;
- There is strong support for and valuing of the tag-line: ‘for the sector from the sector’, in particular that the tailored support is delivered by people “doing the day job”; and
- Directors of Children’s Services report valuing the connection between C4EO’s programme and the challenges senior leaders in local authorities are facing

This sub-section will now look in more detail at the value e-survey respondents and Directors of Children’s Services attribute to key elements of the C4EO programme: research evidence including website; validated local practice and promising practice; tailored support; and networking opportunities and events.

E-survey respondents and Directors of Children’s Service regard C4EO research evidence as the most valuable element of the programme

Research evidence is considered to have the highest relevance to e-survey respondents, with 92% of e-survey respondents reporting that research evidence is ‘quite’ or ‘very relevant’ to their day job, which is consistent with Year 1 findings (93%). More respondents feel that it is ‘very relevant’ now (61% in Year 2 compared with 53% in Year 1). A summary of the extent to which e-survey respondents reported C4EO products and services as being relevant to their professional role is summarised in Figure 5.

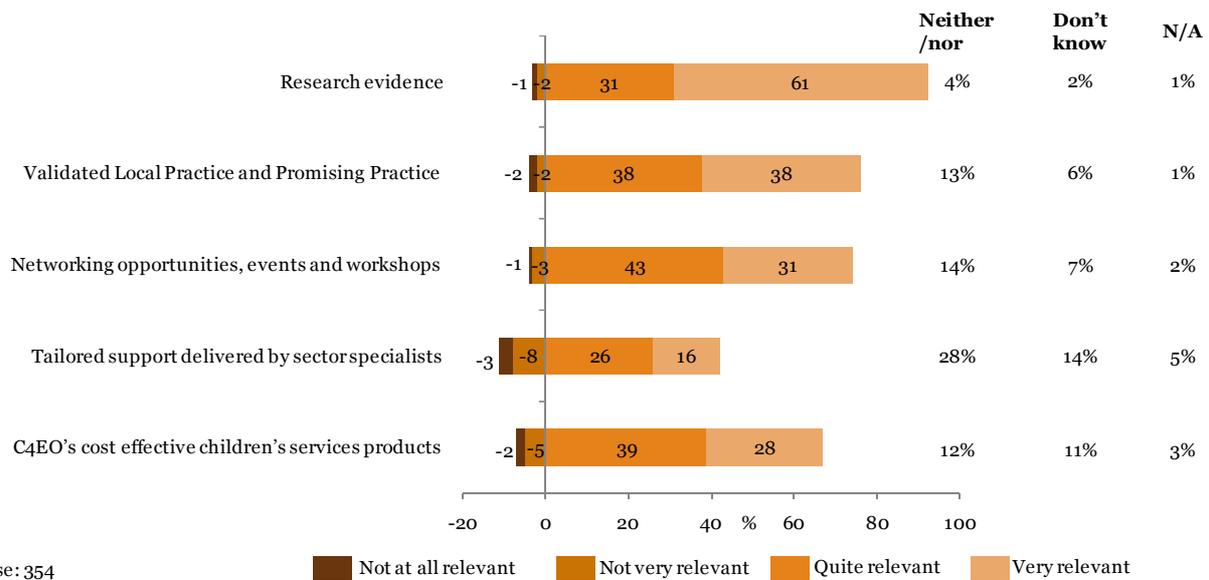
Three quarters of e-survey respondents were ‘quite’ or ‘very’ satisfied with research evidence, which was the C4EO product that received the highest level of satisfaction amongst respondents. The vast majority of e-survey respondents agree that the research evidence:

- provides a valuable source of high quality information on the key issues for children’s services;
- is an authoritative guide to effective practice in children’s services, and
- is relevant to their work.

It should be noted that the question of relevance was asked to all e-survey respondents (n=354), and only a minority of those responding are likely to have accessed tailored support, as it is a brokered service as opposed to the universally available products and services (see Figure 4). Of the e-survey respondents who gave a view about the relevance of tailored support, the vast majority were positive (78%).

Figure 5: Relevance of C4EO products and services to role

How relevant are the following products and services provided by the C4EO to your main work responsibilities?



The majority of e-survey respondents state that the C4EO website is user-friendly and easy to navigate (82%). Use of the C4EO website is relatively infrequent with over three quarters visiting once a month or less (80%). Several Directors of Children’s Services found the website to be a valuable resource as it enabled them and their staff to continue to re-visit materials, or search for new/related material. There was an anxiety that the loss of this resource would impact on the local area’s ability to sustain and build further improvements.

“C4EO is our kind of Google for early intervention work.”
 (Directors of Children’s Services, London/Urban)

“Their material is concise, and insightful.”
 (Director of Children’s Service, Unitary/Rural)

Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice is increasingly valued as a means of accessing best practice examples and developing local ideas

78% of e-survey respondents stated that Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice is ‘quite’ or ‘very’ relevant to their role. The majority of e-survey respondents that had accessed Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice (n=145) felt that it gave a useful insight into what had worked elsewhere (94%). This is a significant increase since Year 1, in which 62% of e-survey respondents agreed that it provided a useful insight, and may reflect the effort C4EO has made in this area of their programme since the time of the first survey. Almost half of respondents were ‘quite’ or ‘very’ satisfied with the Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice (49%) with a further 28% stating “neither/nor”.

E-respondents from small local authorities were more likely to be ‘quite’ or ‘very’ satisfied with Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice (55%) than those from medium authorities (49%) or large authorities (44%). Interview evidence suggests that this may reflect the value smaller authorities place on examples from outside the local area.

When asked whether Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice had given them ideas for new initiatives in the local area, 61% of e-survey respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree', with over a quarter giving a 'neither/nor' response (28%). Again, the numbers agreeing that Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice examples have led to new ideas has increased since the first survey (44%).

"People know about and understand the importance of validated practice. Previously there was too much focus on programmes that were well publicised and talked about, irrespective of their value".

(E survey respondent)

"Validated practice is important to support staff morale and future projects."

(E survey respondent)

Directors of Children's Services were less likely to use the phrase 'validated local practice' or 'promising practice', but several referred to the use and value of best practice examples (n=6). This may suggest that the terms have not penetrated this cohort as points of recognition; however, it is nevertheless clear that the products are being accessed and valued by this cohort.

"C4EO brought gravitas with their evidence base."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Urban)

Unlike Year 1, there was no reference by Directors of Children's Services regarding the resource challenge of contributing Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice examples, which suggests this is no longer a felt issue for local areas.

*Although only a minority of e-survey respondents and Directors of Children's Services had accessed **Tailored Support**, it was generally well received*

As at December 2010, 107 tailored support programmes had been delivered to local areas, with 118 sector specialists accredited by C4EO to provide support to the sector. According to C4EO data, 27 Directors of Children's Services that were interviewed came from areas that had received tailored support from sector specialists by December 2010, although not all Directors of Children's Services referenced the tailored support they had received in the interview.

Eight Directors of Children's Services stated their authority had released staff to act as sector specialists, six in the area of 'early years', and one in 'youth' (one did not state an area). In contrast, 13 Directors of Children's Services reported having received tailored support in their local area, with a broad spread of theme areas, including child protection, early intervention, early years, child poverty and workforce issues. Several Directors of Children's Services spoke of the value that being a sector specialist had on staff, both in the staff member's own professional development, and in increasing capacity in their area once they had returned from providing support to another local area.

Nine out of 50 Directors of Children's Services referred to tailored support as the most useful element of the C4EO programme. A further five Directors of Children's Services cited tailored support as the greatest strength of the programme.

"The bespoke offer was very good and they offered help through detailed conversations."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

"The challenge for the sector specialist model is that because it's very sector oriented, and pretty much sector led, capacity will be stretched in the current climate. Releasing staff to C4EO is challenging. It will never be more important to be able to release staff than it is now, and yet it won't ever have been more difficult to free them up." (Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

Overall, e-survey respondents who had accessed or received tailored support (n=47) were positive about the support. Three quarters of e-survey respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that their sector specialist

understood the issues in their local area, and more than half ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that the support from the sector specialist has enhanced the skills and knowledge of staff in their local area (61%).

E-survey respondents from small local authorities were most likely to feel that support from the sector specialist has enhanced the skills and knowledge of staff (80%, N=37) compared with those from medium sized authorities (62% or n=29) or large authorities (47%, N=22). E-respondents from small local authorities were also more likely to state that tailored support has provided valuable insight into the issues facing other local areas (79%, n=37) than medium sized local authorities (43%, n=20) or large authorities (54%, n=25).

These findings may reflect a lower capacity for smaller authorities to access different ways of working and practice examples than larger authorities, or less of a culture for looking outside the local area for practice examples; both were themes that were echoed to some degree by comments made by Directors of Children’s Services. Additionally, this may reflect that smaller local authorities have less access to a range of experience and skills within their staff group, and so value the external support of C4EO differently to larger local authorities.

More than three quarters of e-survey respondents that had accessed tailored support (n=37) would welcome the opportunity to provide support to another local area through C4EO (83%). Of this cohort, 75% of respondents from large authorities ‘strongly agree’ that they would welcome the opportunities, compared with 55% of those from medium authorities and 44% from smaller authorities.

In your view, what were the benefits of support from a Sector Specialist?

- *“Ability to provide a critical friend approach, peer mentor role, advisor and specialist who can share examples of good practice”.*
- *“For the sector, from the sector. Peer support is very valuable. Flexible and responsive approach.”*
- *“Opportunity for targeted support and time to reflect”.*
- *“Peer support makes it much easier to be open about difficulties. Also bringing in like minded professionals allows for sharing of ideas”.*

E survey respondents

Sector specialists offer more value than traditional field forces

28 Directors of Children’s Services felt the tailored support delivered by sector specialists offered more value than traditional field forces such as National Strategies and Teenage Pregnancy Advisors. Eight Directors of Children’s Services felt that C4EO sector specialists offered the same level of value as traditional field forces: the majority of these because they saw the value of the support as being dependent on the individual providing it, rather than the delivery programme vehicle (n=5). Three Directors of Children’s Services felt it was not possible to compare C4EO to field forces as they were different models with different briefs. None of the fifty Directors of Children’s Services felt that C4EO offered less value than traditional field force. A small number of Directors of Children’s Services would still prefer to purchase external support directly from the market rather than brokering a sector specialist through C4EO.

The mostly commonly cited explanation for why sector specialists offers more value than traditional field forces was that the C4EO model drew upon existing practitioners, rather than advisors that were no longer in the field (n=13).

“Sector specialists are people doing the job right now, facing the same struggles, and they can hit the ground running compared with some consultancy support. However, there is an issue about taking resources away from the local authority but giving to the sector more broadly.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Unitary/Urban)

Seven Directors of Children’s Services felt that sector specialists were less judgemental and/or less inspection focused than traditional field forces, and offered more genuine support and independence. C4EO was viewed as credible and quality assured, with valuable insight provided by sector specialists as part of the overall value of a

sector-led approach. Finally, it was felt that the model allowed for reflective practice which meant that C4EO offered more value than field forces.

“Definitely more [value] essentially because it's steeped in practice, has intuitive understanding of the day to day challenges and offers a fresh external view that is not concerned with evaluation.”

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

“C4EO looks at contemporary issues in a specific way, looking at the positive and negative elements, and goes more with the grain, is more organic, than the National Strategies ever could be.”

(Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

*An increasing number of e-survey respondents reported that networking **opportunities and the C4EO events** were relevant to their role and provided useful information*

Three-quarters of e-survey respondents found networking opportunities, events and workshops relevant to their role (74%), an increase since Year 1 (68% in Year 1). Likewise, significantly more e-survey respondents indicated that they had attended training events in Year 2 than Year 1 (n=169 in Year 2, n=70 in Year 1).

E-survey respondents were generally positive about networking opportunities, events and workshops. The vast majority of respondents felt that networking events and workshops have provided them with useful information (89%). Just over half of respondents state they have expanded their network of contacts through the events. Three quarters of respondents would like to attend more C4EO events over the next year. And 44% of e-survey respondents were 'quite' or 'very' satisfied with networking opportunities, events and workshops, although over a third of respondents gave a "neither/nor" (35%).

Eight Directors of Children's Services felt that networking opportunities and events were the most useful element of C4EO's offer, although most Directors of Children's Services made reference to staff attending events rather than themselves.

More broadly, several Directors of Children's Services talked about the challenges of releasing staff to attend events and one Directors of Children's Services expressed an interest in new technologies being explored by the sector as a whole to enable staff to access learning and development opportunities without the need to attend in person.

“Why haven't we made more of the C4EO programme? We can't release people, we are desperate to hold onto every ounce of expertise in these challenging times.”

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban, Medium)

*Although many e-survey respondents and Directors of Children's Services access and value **C4EO cost effectiveness products**, they are less likely to attribute local financial savings to support received from the programme*

Two-thirds of e-survey respondents felt that the C4EO's cost effective children's products were 'relevant to their role' (67%), with less than one in 10 (7%) reporting a lack of relevance. However, only a third of respondents felt that these products and services helped identify local savings, and almost half gave a "neither/nor" response to this question (45%). 27% of e-survey respondents stated that they accessed the C4EO to find out about cost effectiveness of different types of interventions.

A third of respondents were quite or very satisfied with the cost effectiveness products (32%), while over a third stated "neither/nor" (38%) to the question and a quarter of respondents gave an 'n/a' response. This may reflect the fact that not all respondents to the question (n=354) were likely to have accessed these products. Of the e-survey respondents that did give a view about levels of satisfaction, 97% were 'quite' or 'very' satisfied with the cost effectiveness products.

Three Directors of Children’s Services cited cost effectiveness products and services as the most useful element of C4EO’s offer, however, these products were not a frequently mentioned element of the C4EO offer cited by interviewees.

Only 17% of e-survey respondents felt that C4EO has helped the local area achieve efficiencies in the delivery of children’s services. 35% gave a “neither/nor” response, with a further 39% stating they did not have enough evidence to answer. This may again be a result of respondents being reluctant to attribute achieved local savings to the C4EO support specifically, or lack of awareness of the details of any savings achieved in the local area.

Directors of Children’s Services were more polarised than e-survey respondents in their views as to whether C4EO had helped identify and implement efficiencies. A third of Directors of Children’s Services state that C4EO has helped identify and implement efficiencies in service delivery in the local area (n=19), another third disagree (n=16). The final third felt that they did not have enough knowledge on the subject to answer (n=15).

E-survey respondents and Directors of Children’s Services were generally positive about C4EO’s capability to enhance staff skills and knowledge, and identify and implement different and improved ways of working

Nearly three quarters of e-survey respondents state that engagement with C4EO has helped enhance their own skills and knowledge (73%). Almost half e-survey respondents feel that engagement with C4EO has helped enhance their colleagues’ skills and knowledge (47%), although 22% feel that they either do not have enough evidence to answer and 25% gave a “neither/nor” response’.

Almost half of e-survey respondents felt that C4EO support is significant in terms of building capacity (45%). E-survey respondents do not appear to translate their self-reported increase in skills and knowledge with building capacity in the local area. It may be that these staff feel that their own skills have been improved but the local area’s capacity has not because they are one person and the impact of their up-skilling is diluted when averaged across the area as it includes all the people who have not been up-skilled.

How has C4EO built skills and knowledge in your local area?

- “C4EO is a high quality One Stop Shop when it comes to skills and knowledge in the children’s services area of service delivery. It is open to everyone and very easily accessible.”
- “I have used C4EO to improve my own knowledge and used this to build capability in foster carers looking after vulnerable children.”
- “It is the only organisation I know of which produces very detailed and specific information based on best practice both nationally and internationally in a very accessible format”
- “The blockers are not C4EO but the ability of senior officers to allow the possibility that other opinions can be more valid than their own.”

E survey respondents

At the more strategic level, 25 out of 50 Directors of Children’s Services state that C4EO has helped staff to enhance their skills and knowledge on specific issues, while a further 14 Directors of Children’s Services ‘disagree’. 11 out of 50 Directors of Children’s Services felt that they did not have enough knowledge on the subject to respond.

Over three quarters of Directors of Children’s Services report that C4EO has helped the local area identify different and improved ways of working (n=38). Only four Directors of Children’s Services ‘disagree’ with the statement. Half the Directors of Children’s Services state that the C4EO has helped the local area implement different and improved ways of working, with about a quarter disagreeing with this.

Impact on services



This sub-section considers the impact of C4EO products and services on service delivery in local areas, both to date and in terms of its potential impact in 12 months time. It also includes an analysis of respondents’ views of the sustainability of any impact.

It should be noted that e-survey respondents were more likely to state “neither/nor” to questions regarding the

impact of C4EO on services or outcomes. This may be explained by a number of factors, including an individual's reluctance to attribute impact to a single source of support.

A significant proportion of E-Survey respondents have a positive view about the impact of C4EO on service delivery

Just over a third of e-survey respondents state that engagement with C4EO in their service area had had a specific positive impact on improvement in service delivery (37%). 25% gave a "neither/nor" response, with a further 32% stating they did not have enough evidence to answer. Here, it is not clear whether respondents were uncertain about having the evidence to measure impact locally, or reluctant to accredit C4EO alone with the positive improvement.

Which particular aspects of your service delivery have benefited from C4EO support?

- *"Child poverty scope of who to involve, deprivation monitoring and alignment with the child poverty agenda."*
- *"Development of a commissioning strategy and Family Group Conferencing Pilot."*
- *"Early intervention and prevention strategy aligning locality teams for more integrated/coordinated working with partners to improve outcomes...the importance of a team around a family."*
- *"Helped us to refocus on those services which improve outcomes for children and led to a reorganisation of children's services."*
- *"Making sure that my team is fully up to date to ensure that children, young people, their families and the wider community have access to good quality extended services."*
- *"Strategic planning in relation to early years services, narrowing the gap. Targeting specific areas to support closing the gap. Access to data analysis in relation to local and national context."*

E survey respondents

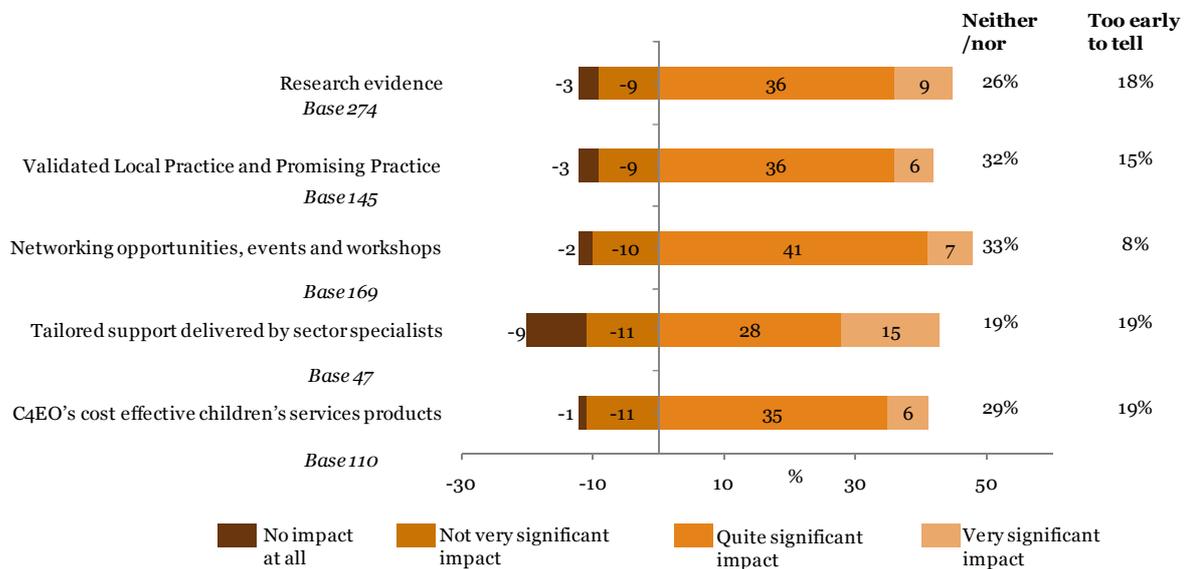
For those e-survey respondents that had accessed tailored support, almost half feel that the support from the sector specialist has improved service delivery for children and young people in their local area (42%), although a third gave a 'neither/nor' response to this question (34%). Similarly, almost a third of e-survey respondents report that the support from the sector specialist has strengthened partnership arrangements in their local area, although again a third gave a 'neither/nor' response (36%).

Looking at the impact on service delivery by each grouping of C4EO products and services (Figure 6), networking opportunities and events were narrowly regarded as contributing the greatest amount of impact, although broadly, the majority of C4EO's products and services were seen to have an equal impact on service delivery. Across C4EO's products and services, tailored support delivered by sector specialists was the least accessed (n=47). Of those e-survey respondents who expressed a view regarding the impact of sector specialists, two thirds thought sector specialists had had a positive impact on service delivery.

Respondents were more likely to state that the products and service have had a very significant impact in Year 2 than in Year 1.

Figure 6: Level of impact on service areas to date by C4EO products and services

How would you describe the impact of each of the following C4EO products and services on service delivery in your local area to date? (Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed)



E-survey respondents linked maximising the benefits achieved by C4EO support with a number of factors, including internal senior leadership, staff capacity to engage with the programme, and a strong awareness of the products and services that are offered. These views were consistent with those expressed by Directors of Children's Services. The table below offers a sample of views offered by e-survey respondents regarding the further impact C4EO could have had in the local area if the support had been offered differently or if local barriers were removed.

What would have increased the impact the C4EO could have made in your local area?

- "A different allocation and distribution of specialist time with an opportunity to have more influence over the focus area."
- "A higher profile and support for it from the director and senior management team."
- "Availability of staff time to engage with C4EO resources."
- "Because the message they bring is not the message some senior leaders want to hear which limits the opportunities for impact on improved outcomes."
- "Higher profile as to how they are involved in the organisation and what skill and knowledge they are bringing to improve or assist good practice."
- "I think our Director should be encouraging colleagues via workforce development or service planning to make use of C4EO information and resources."
- "Strategic commitment to direction of travel and how to get there. Better dissemination of what C4 EO has to offer and better targeted towards staff who can make best use of the support."
- "I have realised through doing this survey that I could use their services for so many more things! Thanks."

E survey respondents

The majority of Directors of Children's Services were positive about the impact of C4EO on aspects of service delivery

Directors of Children's Services reported using C4EO to address a variety of issues, and the majority were clear that the support had a positive impact to their local area. Some 13 Directors of Children's Services cited a positive impact as a result of C4EO in local area service delivery models and service design, and 12 Directors of Children's Services cited a positive impact on front-line practice and service delivery.

Within this, 17 Directors of Children's Services cited specific areas of impact in which things would be done differently in the local area as a result of C4EO products and services. These ranged across the responsibilities within a Children's Services department, and included early intervention, child protection/safeguarding, Looked After Children, early years and child poverty.

"It is difficult to draw a line between impact and improvement, although C4EO has sharpened our thinking."
(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

"C4EO has been quite influential in turning ideas and aspirations into actual models and outcomes in our Early Prevention area."
(Directors of Children's Services, London/Urban)

18 Directors of Children's Services cited that there had been a general impact as a result of C4EO but did not provide details about the different ways of working. Ten Directors of Children's Services did not identify any particular impact, and three felt it was difficult to attribute an impact to C4EO support solely.

Over half the Directors of Children's Services felt that these improvements will be sustained. The most common reason cited was that the changes arising from C4EO support had been integrated into local policy, plans or practice (n=10). A further four Directors of Children's Services felt that C4EO support to provide an evidence base meant that it was embedding or embedded in the local area.

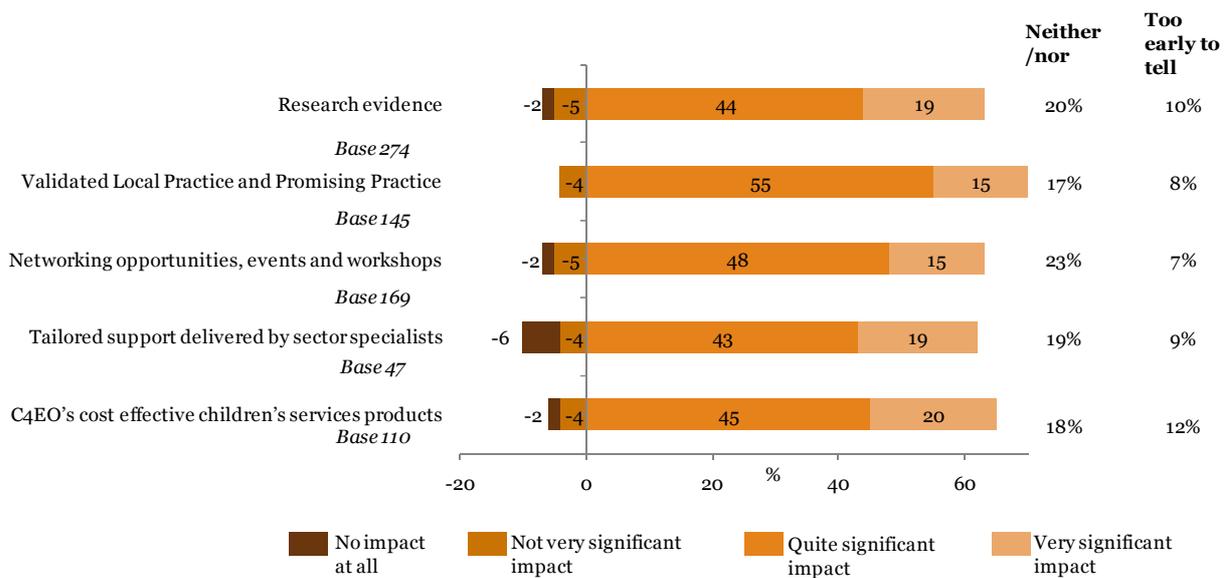
"Attitudes are changing in the departments that have received support from the C4EO. There is a culture of following up an evidence base to understand issues, and to help staff bring in practice that is likely to work locally."
(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

Almost two thirds of e-survey respondents thought that there would be a positive impact on service delivery in the local area in 12 months time

E-survey respondents were more likely to feel that there would be a greater positive impact in 12 months than could be reported to date (see Figure 7). Respondents felt the greatest potential impact was likely to be as a result of Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice (70%), although again respondents did not identify a set of products or services that contributed a significantly greater impact than any others.

Figure 7: Potential impact of products and services on services

How would you describe the potential impact of C4EO’s products and services on service delivery for children, young people and families in your local area in 12 months time? (Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed)



When comparing the potential impact of C4EO products and services on service delivery in Year 1 to Year 2, 63% of both sets of respondents thought research evidence would have an impact in 12 months, although Year 2 respondents were more likely to think there would be a ‘very significant’ impact than Year 1 respondents. E-survey respondents to the Year 1 survey were slightly more confident of a positive impact from networking events, and tailored support than respondents to the Year 2 survey.

Impact on outcomes



The aim of the change journey framework is that involvement in the C4EO programme ultimately results in improved outcomes for children and young people. This is the most difficult aspect of the change framework to assess because the time lag from impact on services to impact on outcomes will vary across services. It is also the case that it can be difficult to isolate the impact of the programme from wider initiatives, and Directors of Children’s Services were reluctant to overlook the value of their own internal improvement work on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Another challenge observed within the sector is that many local authorities struggle to measure impact consistently or confidently articulate the impact new ways of working can have on improving outcomes.

Just over a quarter of e-survey respondents and a half of Directors of Children’s Services feel that C4EO has had a positive impact in improving outcomes in the local area to date

Just over a quarter of e-survey respondents report that C4EO as a programme in its entirety has had an impact on improving outcomes for children, young people and families in their local area to date (27%). 26% gave a “neither/nor” response, with a further 39% stating they did not have enough evidence to answer.

In contrast, almost half the Directors of Children’s Services feel that C4EO has helped to improve the outcomes of children, young people and families in the local area. Nearly half of the Directors of Children’s Services felt that they did not have enough knowledge on the subject to respond.

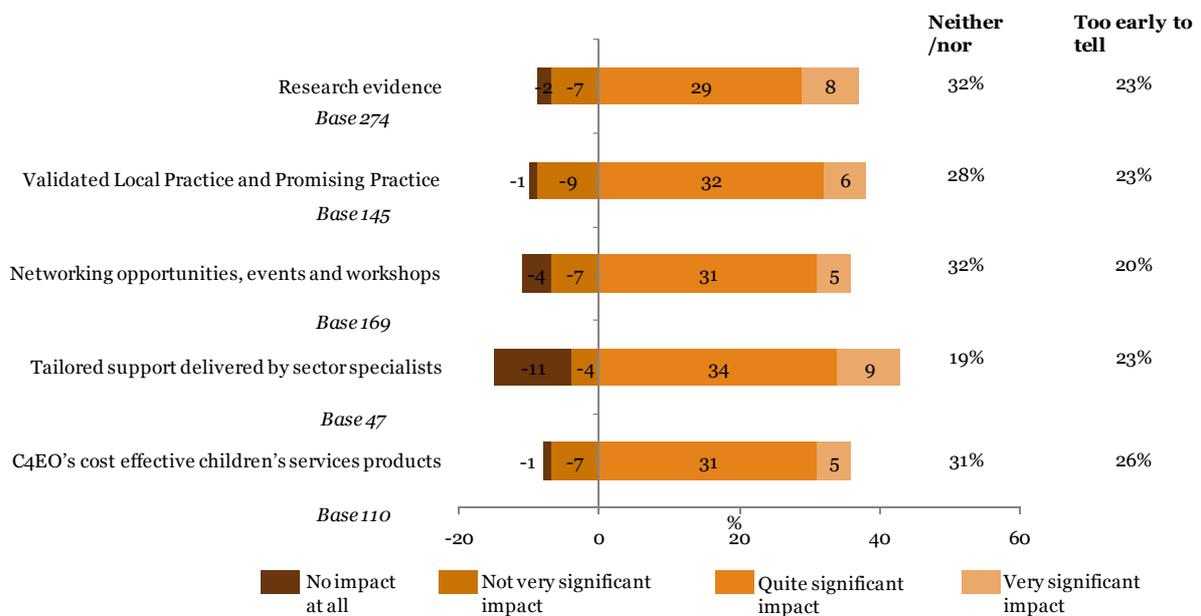
Looking at the impact of individual C4EO products and services on outcomes to date, overall, more than one third of e-survey respondents stated that C4EO products and services have had a significant impact on outcomes in their local area. Respondents only commented on products and services they had accessed so far, and a significant number of respondents felt it was too early to tell if there had been an impact to date, or stated “neither/nor”.

The greatest variance in perceived impact related to tailored support delivered by sector specialists, for which views ranged widely from ‘no impact at all’ to ‘very significant impact’.

The perceived impact on outcomes across C4EO products and services is summarised in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Impact of C4EO’s products and services on outcomes in the local area to date

How would you describe the impact of C4EO’s products and services on outcomes for children, young people and families in your local area to date?
(Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed)



E-survey respondents gave views about the impact they perceived the C4EO has had on their local area to date. Consistent with the views expressed by Directors of Children’s Services, there is an appetite for the support the C4EO offers in collating and disseminating best practice examples, and in the area of cost effectiveness when planning and delivering services. Some of these views are demonstrated in the table below.

Why do you think the C4EO has had an impact to date?

- “As we are influenced by the economic climate it is very important that there is more "joint" working and pooling of resources to make sure that the outcomes for children remain high and are not compromised. We still need C4EO to take the lead to ensure these things happen in our area.”
- “Our service has been further developed because of research, validated practice, networking and toolkits provided by C4EO. The skills and knowledge exchange has been invaluable in keeping up to date in my own field and having access to credible and trustworthy information in other fields.”
- “The more competent services become at implementing best practice, the better they will be able to support children achieving their outcomes.”
- “This is a time of significant change for local authorities, and decisions that are being made around budgets and services. There is a greater focus on sector led policy development and the work C4EO do is likely to influence this.”

E survey respondents

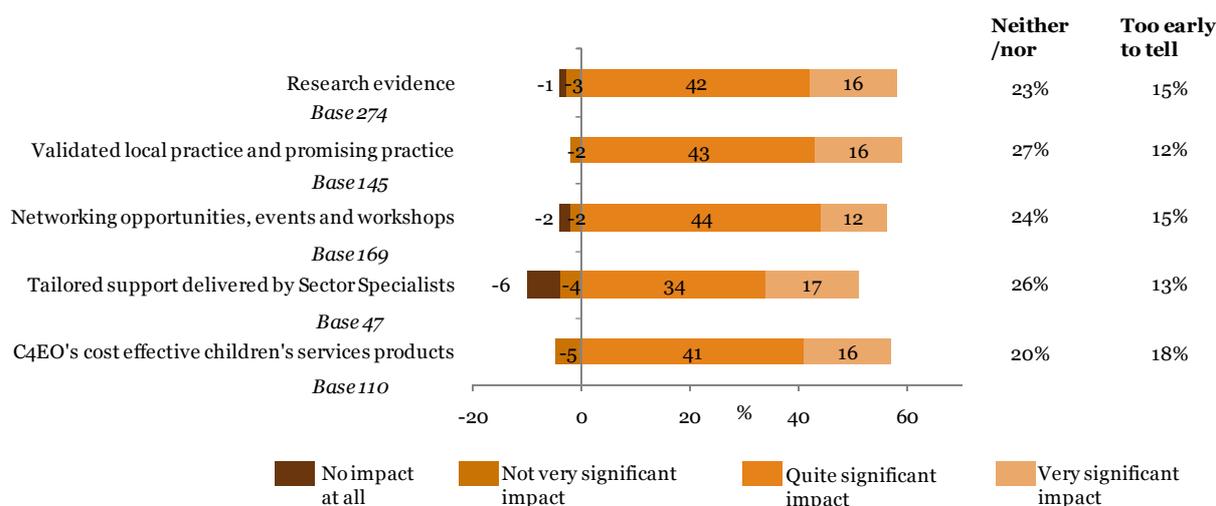
Over a half of E-survey respondents are positive about C4EO products and services contributing to a positive impact on outcomes in 12 months time

Just over half of e-survey respondents state that C4EO as a programme is likely to have an impact on improving outcomes for children, young people and families in their local area in the future (52%). A similar amount felt that C4EO products and services would have a significant impact on outcomes for children, young people and families in their area in 12 months time. Again, respondents only rated the potential impact of services they have accessed to date.

Consistent with the anticipated impact on service delivery, e-survey respondents felt that C4EO products would have a potentially greater impact on outcomes in 12 months than had been reported to date. There has been a positive shift towards those who believe there will be a very significant impact in 12 months time compared with the Year 1 survey. Potential impact on outcomes is summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Potential impact on outcomes by C4EO products and services

And how would you describe the potential impact of C4EO’s products and services on outcomes for children, young people and families in your local area in 12 months time? Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed



What do you think has been the greatest impact of the C4EO's products and services?

- *“All local authorities will have to work differently as there will be far less staff around to deliver the services the public deserve. Therefore using best practice, this saves time reinventing the wheel and allows more focus to be put on service delivery, which in turn should be aimed at improving outcomes for children. This is just as important for ALL children in education rather than just the current focus on vulnerable children agenda, whereby education professionals are being forgotten about.”*
- *“At a time when the government white paper is asking health organisations to budget, the tools and guidance are valuable resources to put this into practice and ensure that the service is still fit for purpose.”*
- *“Bringing together so much information, credible research and validated good practice in one place this has enabled greater ability to plan strategically to prevent overlap/gaps in service area provision.”*

E survey respondents

Directors of Children's Services were able to identify conditions that made a local area more likely to benefit from support by C4EO, and points in local area development that maximised the benefits of this support

In considering conditions that made it most likely that a local area could benefit from support offered by the C4EO, Directors of Children's Services offered a range of views, including:

- Where the local authority is outwards facing, ready to access support and open to change (n=12);
- Where the C4EO is valued and championed by senior management (n=7); and
- Where the local authority has a culture of embedding an evidence base as part of its planning, delivery and evaluation activities (n=4).

Conversely, conditions that made it less likely that support from the C4EO would have an impact included:

- A lack of staff capacity to access the programme, both to attend events and to access universal material available on the website;
- A perceived lack of local need to engage with the programme; and
- Having other priorities in the local area, particularly if it was perceived that C4EO support would not meet these needs (e.g. as a result of internal restructuring decisions).

There were two dominant themes regarding how the C4EO was regarded as being effective in supporting a local area's development. The first, as referenced by seven Directors of Children's Services, was that readiness within the local authorities to access and interpret the evidence base offered by the C4EO meant that the local area could accelerate its thinking about options and the best fit for local need. It also enabled them to provide evidence for partners, including elected members, about proposed ideas for service delivery.

The second theme, cited by five Directors of Children's Services, was about the planning process for change and the C4EO's role in supporting improvement. These Directors of Children's Services felt that the local impact achieved from the C4EO could be maximised by using the products and services once there was a sound local understanding of needs or issues to be resolved. Once these needs and priorities had been identified locally, respondents then sought specific advice from C4EO – either from the universal materials available to all, or brokered through tailored support delivered by sector specialists – in order to understand the options available. This included accessing Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice examples to reduce duplication of effort and reduce likelihood of failure with local adoption.

“C4EO has helped us to understand the evidence base and best practice when planning.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Unitary/Urban)

“It helps that the culture of our local authority and the ethos of C4EO are aligned.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

“All local authorities will have to work differently as there will be far less staff around to deliver the services the public deserve. Therefore using best practice, this saves time reinventing the wheel and allows more focus to be put on service delivery, which in turn should be aimed at improving outcomes for children.”

E survey respondent

A key strength of the C4EO programme was its ‘for the sector from the sector’ approach

Directors of Children’s Services were asked about their views on the strengths of the C4EO programme overall. The five areas of greatest strength were:

- The ‘for the sector from the sector’ approach (n=19) – this included the use of frontline practitioners to deliver the tailored support, and the collaboration between the sector and C4EO in developing the range of products and services available.
- The quality and value of the research summaries and publications (n=10) – this included the sense that materials were tailored for different audiences to reflect what these documents needed to achieve, and enabled them to be more accessible; and that research evidence was robust and credible, with sufficient attention given to its collation to make it useful to the sector.
- C4EO’s closeness to the local authority agenda (n=9) – in particular the view that C4EO has designed a programme that closely reflected the current challenges being faced by senior leadership teams in local authorities and staff in their local areas.
- C4EO’s ability to challenge as well as support local areas (n=4) – there is a strong view that C4EO tailored support includes constructive challenge to local areas, drawn from insights about what has (and has not) worked in other areas, in addition to collaborative support to build capacity and capability

Although e-survey respondents and Directors of Children’s Services can identify a range of improvements achieved as a result of engaging with C4EO, there are mixed views regarding the sustainability of these improvements

As has been evidenced, the sector uses C4EO to support and address a range of local issues, from individual staff development (including feeding professional interest) to very specific pieces of brokered tailored support. Over half the Directors of Children’s Services felt that improvements achieved as a result of C4EO support will be sustained. From our findings, it would appear there are some common themes that support a local area moving towards a self-sustaining model of improvement. These include:

Strong leadership and vision regarding the improvement agenda

In order to both increase the benefit achieved from support provided by C4EO, and ensure that these benefits are sustained, clear leadership is recognised by both Directors of Children’s Services and e-survey respondents as a critical factor. Looking at national churn at Directors of Children’s Services level, just over a quarter of local authorities have new Directors of Children’s Services (28%) since Year 1 of the evaluation.

“Our new approach puts sustainability at the heart of all service delivery.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Unitary/Urban)

Embedding improvements into corporate plans and daily practice

The most common reason cited by Directors of Children's Services as to why improvements achieved by C4EO would be sustained in the local area was that these improvements had been integrated into local policy, plans or practice (n=10). In the view of Directors of Children's Services, this enabled the support to move beyond external help into part of the daily practice within the local authority. This is part of the concept of improvements not being an 'add on' to the day job but a fundamental part of the way services are provided.

"The improvements C4EO has helped bring about have been integrated into our improvement plan, which is held to account by our reporting system."

(Director of Children's Service, County/Rural)

"The best tools that we have brought in are those that that you forget you are using after time they become part of the way we do things around here."

(Director of Children's Service, Unitary/Urban)

Creating a culture of being outward focused as a local authority, and consistently applying an evidence base to planning

Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents identify a key strength of C4EO support is the evidence base they bring to the improvement landscape. The recognised challenge is embedding this approach in local area development, as part of the drive for sustainable improvements. Directors of Children's Services who were most confident that their local area were closer to achieving a self-sustaining model of improvement felt that a culture of consistently using evidence was embedding or embedded in their local area.

"Attitudes are changing in the departments that have received support from C4EO. There is a culture of following up an evidence base to understand issues, and to help staff bring in practice that is likely to work locally."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

Stable workforce, with a focus on partnership working in the local area and access to training and development opportunities

Consistent with having stable leadership is the notion of having a stable workforce to deliver services to ensure a local area can continue to improve without external support. In addition to workforce stability, it is also important to make sure the resources within the local area are fully and appropriately utilised according to need and priorities. A focus on partnership working was also identified as an important factor, and this included having a common language for understanding the challenges, risks and approach to delivering services within the local area.

"Our ability to make best use of the resources we have, including our staff, helps make it sustainable."

(Director of Children's Service, Country/Rural)

Conclusion

Awareness of the key components of the C4EO offer is very high and has increased since year 1 of the evaluation. There continues to be very good awareness of the **products and services**, and good (and increasing) engagement with the programme. Most Directors of Children's Services perceive that the programme is closely linked, and responsive, to their challenges as local area leaders, and that the C4EO is well positioned to support them.

Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents continue to find C4EO **research evidence** the most useful and relevant element of the programme offer. Research evidence material is seen as being accessible and tailored for a variety of audiences which makes it valuable for supporting local area improvement and development. Respondents are also clear that C4EO **events and networking** opportunities provide a valuable means of improving individual skills and knowledge. Directors of Children's Services are concerned about being able to release staff to attend events in the new financial climate, although staff remain keen to attend them in the future.

Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice examples have been welcomed by the sector as a quality assured and endorsed means of sharing and accessing best practice, including costed examples. Unlike in Year 1, there was no reference by Directors of Children's Services to the resource challenge of contributing Validated Local Practice and Promising Practice examples, which suggests this may no longer be an issue.

There has been an increased uptake of **tailored support** between Years 1 and 2 of the evaluation, and a positive response from those Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents who have experienced it. E-survey respondents from small local authorities were more likely to feel that tailored support from sector specialists had enhanced skills and knowledge in their local areas compared with those from larger authorities, and more likely to state that it had provided valuable insight into the issues facing other local areas. However, a small number of Directors of Children's Services would still prefer to purchase external support directly from the market rather than brokering a sector specialist through C4EO.

Respondents reported that the particular benefit of sector specialists was their proximity to the sector. As current practitioners, sector specialists were particularly credible in respect of their knowledge of the day to day challenges facing local areas. Some Directors of Children's Services also valued the independent challenge and insights provided by the sector specialists, while others valued the additional capacity that this time-limited support provided.

The issue most consistently raised in relation to the use of sector specialists was concern about the sustainability of the model given the difficulties local authorities face in releasing staff to act as sector specialists.

Tailored support delivered by C4EO was regarded as being more valuable than traditional field forces by the majority of Directors of Children's Services that have a view. This is in part due to the clarity of the brief (genuine improvement support without inspection responsibilities) and in part due to the model of using current practitioners. Some Directors of Children's Services pointed out that the quality of tailored support is reliant on the individual providing it rather than whether it is delivered through C4EO or a field force.

The C4EO programme has made a positive contribution to **developing the skills and knowledge** of the sector. The majority of e-survey respondents reported that their skills and knowledge had increased as a result of accessing C4EO products and services and almost half reported that this support had been significant in terms of building capacity. About half of Directors of Children's Services agreed that the C4EO had helped staff to enhance their skills and knowledge on specific issues.

There are indications of a positive **impact on service delivery**. Over three quarters of Directors of Children's Services reported that the C4EO has helped the local area to identify different and improved ways of working, with about half reporting that the C4EO had helped to implement these. Directors of Children's Services provided examples of a positive impact on service delivery models, service design and front-line practice.

Respondents found it more difficult to attribute **impact on outcomes** to the C4EO products and services but were broadly positive. Over a third of e-survey respondents confirmed that individual products and services had

had a significant impact, whilst about half of Directors of Children's Services felt that the C4EO had had a positive impact on outcomes in their local area.

Where a positive impact has been noted on services or outcomes as a result of C4EO support, many respondents felt that it might be hard to ensure sustainability due to changing and challenging conditions within local area. Directors of Children's Services who reported feeling confident that impacts could be sustained, were those most likely to have embedded the support from C4EO in local area plans and practice.

It is clear that local conditions have an impact on the degree to which the C4EO's products and services are effective in supporting improvement in a local area. Directors of Children's Services and e-survey respondents reported that the most important factor was that a local authority needed to be outwards facing, ready to access support and open to change. Two additional factors that were also identified as being important were senior management sponsoring the use of the C4EO and having a culture of embedding learning into core planning, delivery and evaluation activities.

Commissioning Support Programme

Commissioning Support Programme

Key findings

- There has been significant churn of the Commissioning Champion and commissioners' population since Year 1.
- The sector continues to have high awareness of CSP, four out of five commissioners surveyed are aware of core CSP services and the majority felt that CSP was accessible to them. CSP is seen to be relevant to commissioners' main jobs.
- There is high usage across all of CSP's core services and the universal elements continue to have the highest levels of usage amongst commissioners surveyed.
- Bespoke support had the fourth highest levels of usage amongst commissioners, yet was the most valued element of CSP amongst Commissioning Champions.
- Bespoke support and training are the two CSP elements contributing most to enhancing the skills and knowledge of commissioners.
- Half of Commissioning Champions and commissioners believe that CSP has had an impact on service delivery to date, this is mainly due to bespoke support and training and delivery. Commissioners are positive that enhanced support may contribute more in the future.
- Around a third of commissioners perceive that CSP has had an impact on outcomes for children and young people to date, compared to less than a quarter of commissioners in Year 1. Bespoke support is expected to have the greatest role in improving outcomes in 12 months time.
- CSP's reported impact on creating efficiencies is varied to date, but Commissioning Champions feel that bespoke support and training will contribute to this most in 12 months time. Commissioners are positive that bespoke support will help generate efficiencies in the future.
- Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions identified a number of conditions which would make a local area more likely to benefit from the CSP support, the main one is when a local area strategic partnership is developing its vision and approach to commissioning.
- The sector was positive about the sustainability of the benefits of the CSP programme in terms of its contribution to increasing the appreciation of effective commissioning as a driver of better outcomes, and the skills to deliver it.
- The CSP local leads are an effective delivery model for driving, co coordinating and delivering packages of support but there are mixed views of their value compared to traditional field forces. Commissioning Champions, the primary link with CSP local leads, were positive that local leads were of more value, compared with traditional field force.
- Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions believe the Commissioning Champion role has enabled meaningful engagement with CSP but there is uncertainty over whether it will remain in the future.

Introduction

The Commissioning Support Programme (CSP) is working with local authorities and partners across England to support a transformational change in their commissioning arrangements. The programme was launched in November 2008 and will continue until March 2011. Fieldwork for the second year of this evaluation was conducted between 1st December 2010 and 31st January 2011.

The CSP has been impacted by two key external factors since the fieldwork in Year 1 was carried out in spring 2010. Firstly, local government continues to respond to the financial climate by making significant reductions in budgets, which have resulted in streamlining of local priorities, service and council-wide restructuring, and changes to the local workforce. Secondly, in May 2010, there was a change in government administration,

which heralded a number of further significant policy and legislative changes for local government, and more specifically, for the children's services improvement landscape.

Prior to commencing the fieldwork in Year 2, the CSP reported that there had been a significant churn to commissioners and Commissioning Champions and that commissioners in post were preoccupied with local issues, resulting in some disruption to the delivery of the programme over summer 2010. It is important to bear this context in mind when reading this chapter, particularly in relation to the sustainability of benefits drawn from the CSP.

Profile of respondents

This chapter draws on the views of: 53 Commissioning Champions; 50 Directors of Children's Services (DCSs) and 276 commissioners from local areas (formerly referred to as Children's Trusts), via an electronic survey (e-survey).

The programme's main contact within the local authority continues to be the Commissioning Champion, a senior officer usually at Assistant Director level within the local authority. This role was introduced in November 2008, when the Secretary of State of the former Department for Children Schools and Families wrote to all Directors of Children's Services asking them to nominate a lead officer to drive forward commissioning work within their Children's Trust. Prior to this official request, many authorities already had a Commissioning Champion *function* although not always by this name, particularly those that were relatively mature in terms of commissioning activities.

The majority of the 53 Commissioning Champions we spoke to were Assistant Directors. Some 38 Commissioning Champions (representing 25% of the Commissioning Champion population) were new in post since we conducted the Year 1 fieldwork. In Year 2, we spoke to 10 Commissioning Champions who were new in post.

In Year 2 of the evaluation, almost all the Commissioning Champions we spoke to have a Support Agreement⁷ in place and were underway with, or had nearly completed, their bespoke support packages. Only two local authorities did not have a support agreement in place and were therefore only able to provide a limited view on CSP, based on their local area's experience.

Profile of commissioners from the e survey:

- The majority (76%) of e survey respondents who completed the e survey were employed by the local authority (LA), with Primary Care Trusts (PCT) being the second main employer (11%). Only 6% of respondents came from joint LA/PCT funded posts.
- Commissioners from PCTs (n=29) reported similar levels of awareness, usage or perceived impact of CSP, to local authority commissioners.
- Over half (53%) described the maturity of their local area, in terms of commissioning, as quite mature to very mature. Around a quarter (24%) described the maturity as neither mature nor immature, and one fifth (22%) as not very mature.
- There was a relatively even balance of respondents from different local authority sizes. Thirty per cent of respondents were from small local authorities; 39% were from medium sized authorities and 31% belonged to large local authorities.
- Around a third (n 83) of commissioners e surveyed had been in post a year or less.
- Almost three quarters (75%) of commissioners surveyed were from authorities performing adequately or performing well.

⁷ A Support Agreement outlines the package of support provided to the local authority. The Support Agreement is determined by the Self Assessment Process (SAP) exercise which local authorities carried out as part of their early engagement with CSP.

This section includes findings from a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) the Department for Education (DfE) has developed to assess the CSP, which we also collected as part of the evaluation. The KPIs in Year 2 were similar to Year 1.

We also explored whether a local area's Annual Performance Assessment (APA) rating for 2010, size and self reported commissioning maturity impacts on the findings in question. This analysis did not generate any key trends in terms of usage or impact of the CSP in relation to these factors⁸.

What we learnt in Year 1

In Year 1, the evaluation findings were mainly linked to the first two phases of our evaluation framework, or 'change journey' (see Figure 3.1, Methodology). Awareness and product usage was high with networking and online resources being the most visible activities and products to the wider Local Area commissioning workforce. Users saw the programme as being relevant to wider commissioning activities within their local area, although the main beneficiaries to date were local authorities.

The CSP was valued as being flexible, responsive, independent, genuinely supportive and free. The Self Analysis and Planning exercise (SAP) was well received by the majority of Local Areas. In particular, it was seen as a process to help crystallise priorities in a partnership setting.

It was too early in Year 1, to assess what impact the CSP had on the ability of local areas to effectively commission the full range of services or on outcomes. Some respondents perceived an early impact on staff skills and commissioning knowledge, and on service delivery as a result of bespoke support and training and development.

There were some local areas that reported gaining less value from the CSP, for example from the SAP or the experience of their CSP local lead. These criticisms tended to come from local authorities with relatively mature commissioning knowledge.

The remaining sections of this chapter focus on the extent to which users of the CSP have made progress along the change journey from awareness of the programme through to improved outcomes on services. Where appropriate, comparisons will be made to Year 1, although it is important to be mindful that the scope of the evaluation has been revised and that, whilst the qualitative fieldwork has captured the views of some common populations in both Year 1 and Year 2, the e-survey respondents are anonymous and not necessarily the same respondents as Year 1. This chapter also explores the features of the programme and its perceived value in comparison with traditional field forces.



Awareness of the programme

This section relates to the starting point of the change journey; awareness of the programme. Without this, engagement with the programme and further benefits would not be possible.

The sector has high levels of awareness of CSP

In Year 2, 89% of e-survey respondents were very aware or quite aware of the programme, which is a slight decrease from 91% in Year 1. This may be indicative of the recent 25% churn in the wider commissioners' population. The majority (n=46) of Directors of Children's Services we spoke to were aware of CSP but, as was the case in Year 1, the depth of their awareness of CSP was not as extensive as Commissioning Champions. Respondents participating in the evaluation described being at different stages of engagement with the programme.

⁸ The majority of the DCS and Commissioning Champion interviews were from local authorities performing adequately or performing well. This was also the case for the e-survey respondents, and reflects the performance distribution of the wider population of local authorities

Four out of five e-survey respondents were aware of all core CSP activities

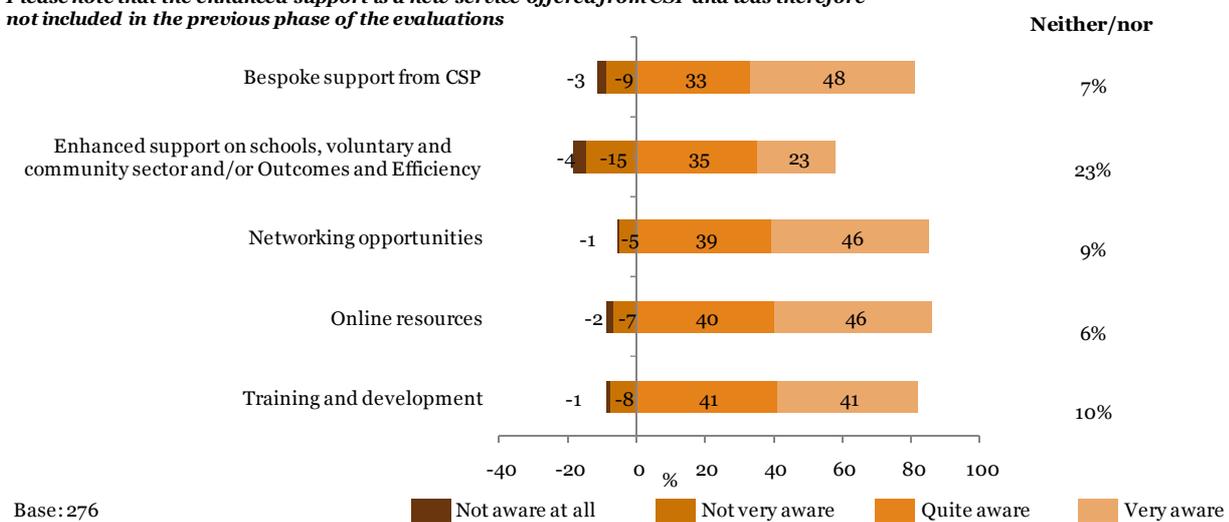
Figure 1 below shows that commissioners surveyed had high levels of awareness across all CSP activities. Respondents were most aware of the two universal elements of CSP, with 86% aware of CSP’s online resources and 85% aware of the networking opportunities. Training and development and bespoke support were the next most commonly recognised activities at 82% and 81% respectively.

Commissioners were least aware of the enhanced support offer (58%), a relatively recent aspect of CSP’s services. For example, the Outcomes and Efficiency enhanced support offer was launched in spring 2010 and, whilst the Schools Commissioning enhanced offer has been in place since early 2010, the offer was revised in the summer following the general election and new policy positions. The Voluntary and Community Sector commissioning offer has been available since September 2010.

Figure 1 : Awareness of CSP’s range of activities

How aware are you of the specific activities undertaken by the CSP?

Please note that the enhanced support is a new service offered from CSP and was therefore not included in the previous phase of the evaluations



The majority of commissioners felt that CSP was accessible to them

CSP’s direct marketing approach seems to have contributed to the high levels of awareness. In Year 1, commissioners stated that they first heard of CSP predominantly through personal contact from CSP and by word of mouth. Respondents were less likely to hear about the programme for the first time via printed materials. In Year 2, CSP was able to maintain high levels of awareness and use by ensuring there were low barriers to access; for example, CSP was free to local authorities and available to all local authorities regardless of their performance or other factors. Seventy one per cent of commissioners surveyed felt that they did not experience any difficulties in accessing CSP.

Where barriers to access were described by e-survey respondents, the most commonly cited reason (n=42) was that users could not access the support at a time which was right for them. ‘Other’ reasons included technical issues with the website and the fact that CSP support in their local authority did not specifically target them as an individual.

“The individual support was channelled through Children’s Trusts. This was appropriate to engage with executive officers involved in strategic commissioning but officers involved in operational and individual commissioning were overlooked.”

(E survey respondent)

A small number of respondents reported that budget cuts, which prevented attendance at events, and a lack of stability within the local authority had made accessing the programme more difficult.

“Sector churn and cost saving on attendance are affecting the sectors’ ability to engage with CSP.”

(E survey respondent)

The personal contact marketing approach and low barriers to access appears to have maximised CSP’s visibility to local authorities, and supported engagement with the programme. The only area where there was a relationship between local authority size or self reported maturity and access to specific CSP activities was the enhanced support offer (discussed further below).

Engagement with the programme



In this section, we explore the extent to which perceived relevance of CSP activities has resulted in sustained engagement with the programme in Year 2, thereby contributing to an increase in the skills and knowledge of individual users. This section explores engagement and the perceived value of CSP’s overall offer first, before looking at specific programme components and the contribution to enhancing the skills and knowledge of the sector.

In Year 2, the majority (71%) of commissioners surveyed stated that their main reason for accessing CSP was to build commissioning skills and knowledge within their local area, and 62% felt that the CSP, overall had a quite significant or very significant impact in this regard. Only five felt that CSP’s overall offer left no impact and two believed it was too early to tell (the remaining nine were unclear and/or did not feel able to respond).

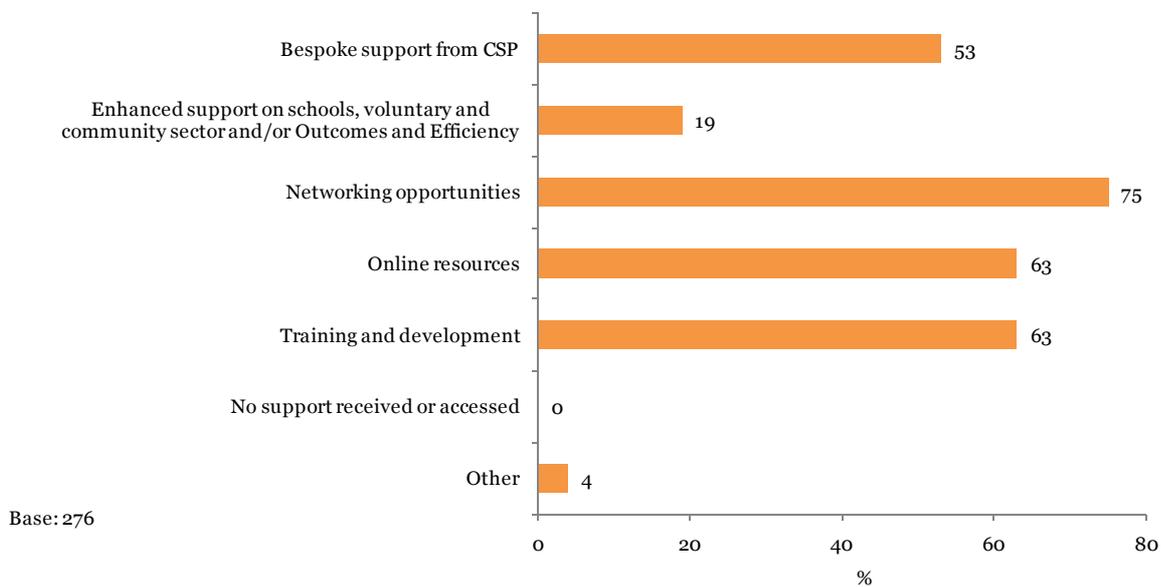
In Year 1, we reported that engagement with CSP occurred at strategic and operational levels, as defined by the local authorities’ support package, this continues to be the case in Year 2.

Commissioners surveyed had mainly used the universal elements of the CSP

The main three activities commissioners surveyed had participated in were networking opportunities (75%), online resources (63%) and training and development (63%) (see figure 2 below). This reflects the universal elements of the programme (further training and development can also be a part of the bespoke support) and is consistent with the usage of programme elements in Year 1. Over half (53%) of commissioners surveyed in Year 2 had participated in the CSP bespoke support to their local authority, and of these 146 users, 87%, stated that they were very involved or quite involved with the bespoke support at a personal level.

Figure 2: Usage of CSP core services in Year 2

Which of the following CSP support services have you (as an individual) accessed or participated in?



Only 19% of commissioners surveyed had participated in the enhanced support, which was rolled out in staggered phases during 2010. This is reflected in the interviews where only 18 Director of Children Services and 17 Commissioning Champions recalled accessing enhanced support. Of these 35, there were 21 contacts with the Outcomes and Efficiencies package; 18 contacts with the Schools Commissioning package; 11 contacts with the Voluntary and Community Sector package; and five local authorities that had used all three thematic areas.

A small number of Commissioning Champions (n=6) also stated that their local authority was not ready to make best use of the enhanced support, in terms of their level of internal thinking and capacity at the time. Local authorities who were more developed in their thinking and commissioning structures appear to have made the most of the enhanced support offer. This was evidenced by the fact that local authorities who self reported themselves as quite mature to very mature had a proportionally higher take up of the enhanced support offer, comprising 67% of all respondents who had accessed enhanced support.

On taking up CSP’s enhanced support offer:

“[The] timing wasn’t right...[we] needed to do more internal thinking before we could look outwards [we] don’t want outsiders putting torchlight on things yet.”

(Commissioning Champion, County/Rural)

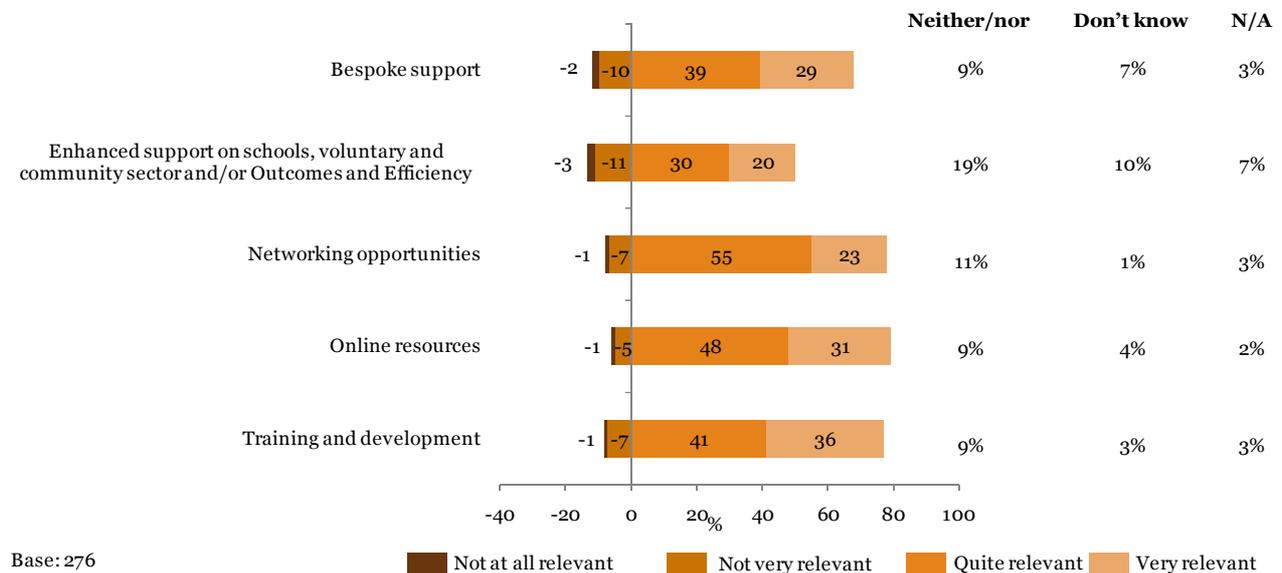
CSP’s overall programme offer is valued by the sector

Commissioners surveyed believed that the CSP’s services were relevant to supporting their individual commissioning activities. Eighty one per cent of survey respondents stated that CSP staff understood the issues facing local areas. Figure 3 highlights the universal elements of the CSP: online resources (79%); networking opportunities (78%); and training and development (77%) as being the top three services perceived to be of most relevance to individual commissioners.

As described earlier, the enhanced support is the newest part of CSP’s offer and was delivered in phases during 2010. This may contribute to almost a third (30%) of commissioners responding “neither/nor” or ‘did not know’ when asked whether enhanced support was relevant to their main commissioning activities.

Figure 3: Perceived relevance of CSP's core services.

How relevant are the following services provided by CSP, in supporting your (as an individual) main commissioning activities?



When Commissioning Champions were asked which aspect of CSP provided most value to their local authority, bespoke support was the most commonly cited service (28 of 53 Commissioning Champions) with 45 of 53 Commissioning Champions agreeing or strongly agreeing that accessing a CSP package of bespoke support was ‘a worthwhile investment of their and their colleagues’ time’. Other commonly cited areas of most value were training and development and online resources.

The CSP brings people together to share good practice and benchmark

The CSP continues to support the building of skills and knowledge in the sector by bringing together practitioners through the networking events and other events instigated via local and regional leads. Thirty five of 53 Commissioning Champions interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that the network of contacts made through the CSP has helped them to ‘commission services more effectively in a significantly changing (networked) environment’. These communities of practice at an informal and formal level provided commissioners with case studies against which to benchmark their local practice.

“The [most valued element of CSP has been the] sharing of good practice. The CSP could point to an authority who could help us. Their expertise around models has really helped and the extra capacity when setting up workshops and facilitating the networks has been fantastic.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Rural)

“Don't underestimate the importance of getting the right level of people in the room to discuss principles and case studies.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

Three quarters of commissioners who had used bespoke support felt it had enhanced skills and knowledge in their local area

In Year 1, the majority of Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions interviewed had started their packages of bespoke support to varying degrees and respondents were positive about the support received. In Year 2, the majority of Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions we spoke to had almost completed their bespoke support. The CSP’s bespoke support continues to be viewed positively by those in the sector who have used it. Just over half, 53% (n=146) of e-survey respondents had accessed bespoke support, of which, 70% had first accessed it more than six months ago and 30% within the last six months.

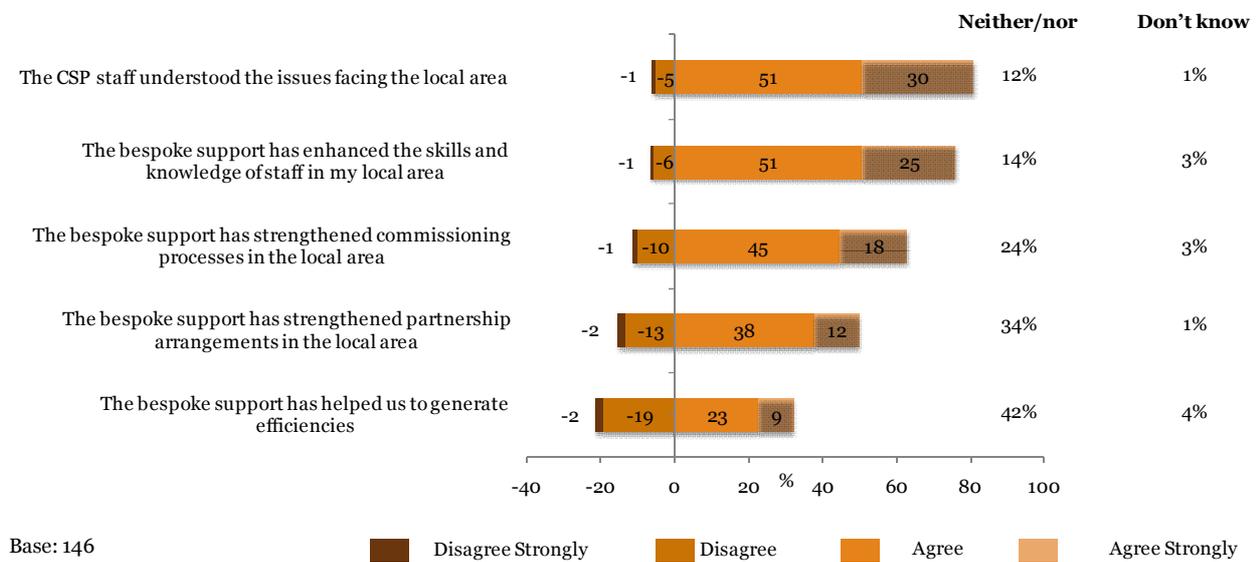
There were two main themes for bespoke support, as described by Commissioning Champions, centring on capacity and capability on the one hand and commissioning processes on the other. A number of bespoke support packages were a mixture of the two themes.

In Figure 4, 76% of commissioners surveyed and almost all Commissioning Champions believed that bespoke support had enhanced local skills and knowledge. Similarly, 63% felt that bespoke support had strengthened commissioning processes in the local area. Further evidence that CSP is helping local authorities to move along the change journey is that 31 (of 51) Commissioning Champions felt that the CSP had strengthened commissioning processes in their local area.

Figure 4: Commissioners' views on statements relating to bespoke support

To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements (in relation to bespoke support)?

Please note that this question was asked only to those participants who had accessed the bespoke support



These are positive signs given that bespoke support is working towards transforming the way local authorities commission, although 24% of commissioners stated that CSP had a 'neither/nor' impact in this area, indicating that more can be done. For example, whilst the majority (n=42) of Commissioning Champions felt that the pitch of the bespoke support was right, in a small number of cases it required some recalibration along the way in cases where the CSP local lead was not 'plugged into' the local authority's agenda.

"Lots of work took place at the beginning to understand exactly what was needed [via the SAP] and the CSP was very flexible in what they could provide."

(Commissioning Champion, Metropolitan/Urban)

Commissioners were more positive about the impact bespoke support has had on strengthening partnerships arrangements in their local area. Fifty per cent of commissioners feel that the CSP has had an impact here, compared to 40% in Year 1. Similarly, just over half (n=28) of Commissioning Champions view bespoke support as having an impact on partnership working. In Year 1 partnership working was an area where CSP was felt to have had an early impact, however this was also due to Year 1 focussing on the SAP, a process which involved local area partners. The 34% of commissioners who stated that bespoke support was having a "neither/nor" impact on strengthening partnership arrangements may reflect that other factors will also impact on partnership working, such as changes to local area partnerships as a result of Children's Trust's no longer being statutory.

Over three quarters of commissioners believed that training and development had helped develop individual commissioning skills

Seventy eight per cent of commissioners' surveyed state that CSP's training and development has helped them to develop as a commissioner (compared to 81% in Year 1). Similar to Year 1, the benefits of the training were irrespective of LA size or self-reported maturity of commissioning practice (see CSP chapter in the appendices). This is even more of a positive result given that 63% of e-survey respondents had accessed CSP training and development opportunities and that the main reason local area officers reported for accessing CSP was 'to build their commissioning capacity' (71%).

Interestingly, whilst over three quarters of commissioners felt they benefited from the training, less than half (45%) felt that training and development led to a significant improvement in local capability, and 38% felt that there was not enough evidence to answer. Similarly, less than half (47%) of commissioners who had accessed training and development felt that the package was tailored to the local area's needs. CSP's training has been targeted at strategic commissioners. In the future, a sector-led model may benefit from a training needs analysis at a local area level to maximise the benefit to the local workforce.

This is in contrast to the views held by Commissioning Champions who were more positive in this regard. Thirty six (of 51) Commissioning Champions agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that *CSP's training and development activities have led to a significant improvement in commissioning capability in my local area*. This difference in opinion might be explained by Commissioning Champions being more sighted on strategic-level training.

A number of Commissioning Champions also referenced the national 'train the trainer' event as a key plank to their in-house strategy of nurturing commissioning capability. One local authority planned to run tailored workshops based on this event to schools and other commissioning partners.

Commissioners value the opportunities provided by the CSP to learn what other local areas are doing

The majority (75%) of commissioners surveyed had attended at least one networking event. When it came to contributing to increasing their skills and knowledge, the networking events were not seen as effective as training and development or bespoke support, with over half (55%) stating that the networking events had helped them to commission services more effectively. This is despite the fact that 78% of commissioners surveyed felt that the networking events supported their main commissioning activities.

Commissioners from more mature local authorities were slightly more likely to feel that their individual commissioning skills had improved as a result of participating in CSP networking events, as they comprised 61% of those who feel that their individual commissioning skills have been improved via CSP networking.

A key message from Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services in Year 2 was that it was difficult to attend the networking events, but they were generally well received when they were attended. Commissioning Champions appeared to be more positive about the impact of the networking events as the majority (n=40) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the CSP events they attended helped them to commission services more effectively. Commissioners valued the opportunity to share information and best practice and 85% of commissioners reported that the events had provided them with useful information.

"The most valuable aspect was being able to get together with others and speak to them which was not available at first...there was a learning curve for everyone when learning to share knowledge and information."

(Commissioning Champion, Metropolitan/Urban)

Whilst there were no trends from our e-survey sample regarding attendance of networking events according to local authority size, Commissioning Champions did state that networking events do hold specific benefits for small local authorities in terms of new perspectives based on similar circumstances. A sector-led programme in the future may consider giving participants the option to attend networking events with other local authorities of similar profile, that they may not have been in contact with previously.

“We are a small LA to have networks outside gives us a new dimension.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

“Networking is always good and being able to find out what’s happening at other LAs. The downside is that it would have been more useful to have been paired with authorities of the same size and population.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Rural)

Commissioners value the online content on CSP’s resource bank, and over half state that the website has helped them to commission services more effectively

The majority of Commissioning Champions and 63% of commissioners surveyed had accessed CSP’s online offer, comprising the resource bank and community area. This reinforces the finding that the second and third main reasons for commissioners accessing CSP were out of ‘general professional interest’ and to ‘seek background information to inform strategic priorities around commissioning’.

Over three quarters (79%) of commissioners believed that the online resources supported their main commissioning activities and two thirds (67%) of commissioners used the website on a monthly or two monthly basis.

“The constant focus on commissioning has encouraged the Borough to reconsider its own practices on a regular basis. Best practice highlighted in CSP materials has been used at team meetings and when developing new services.”

(E survey respondent)

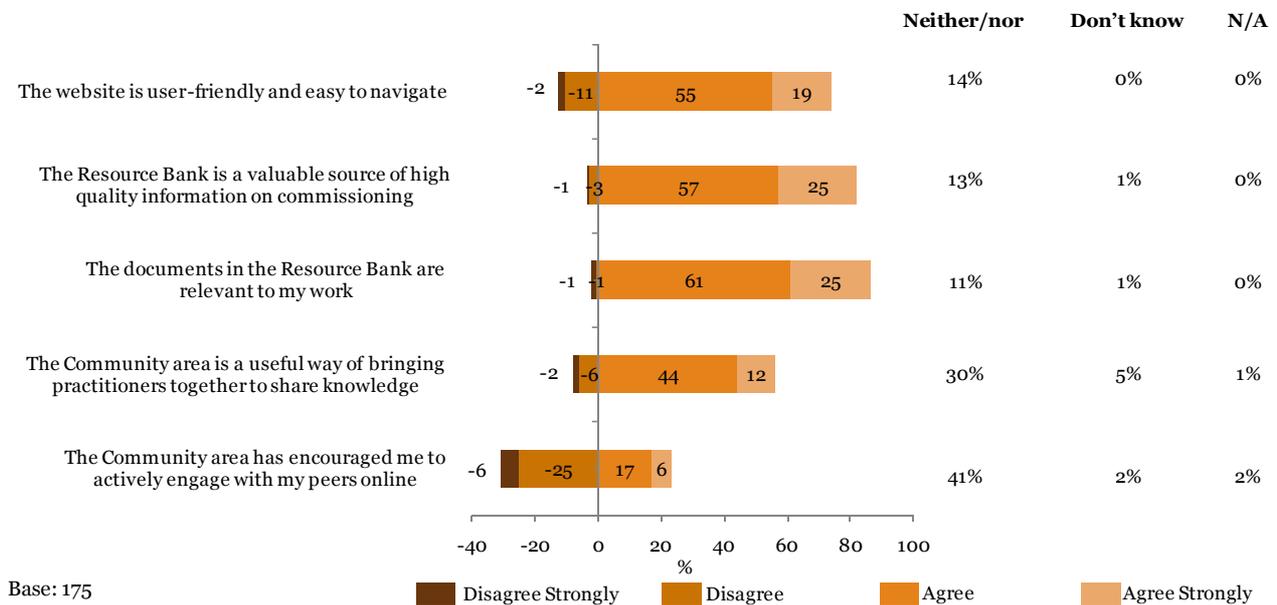
“Excellent resource bank which I continually draw upon.”

(E survey respondent)

Figure 5 below throws a positive light on the usefulness of the website, with 86% of commissioners feeling that the website was relevant to their work and the Resource Bank was the most popular aspect of the website. As in Year 1, the interactive aspect of the website, the community area, continues to be the least popular aspect of the website, roughly a third responded ‘neither/nor’. to the community area being a useful way of bringing practitioners together to share knowledge. This was also confirmed by anecdotal views from the Commissioning Champion interviews who stated that they did not have the time or technical inclination to participate in the community area. Over half (56%) of commissioners who had accessed online resources reported that they felt it was a useful way to share knowledge. Commissioning Champions reported that they rarely used this function.

Figure 5: Engagement with CSP website

To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements (in relation to online resources)?



Commissioning Champions and commissioners stated that the resource bank contains a useful body of sector knowledge in relation to commissioning, and just over half (52%) of commissioners surveyed felt that it had helped them to commission services more effectively, indicating that whilst the information was useful to reflect on and incorporate into live projects, in terms of improving skills and knowledge, there were specific aspects of the CSP’s offer which would appear to be more effective at improving skills and knowledge. Bespoke support and training and development for example, require more active engagement with the user, compared to an informative, yet static web tool.

Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions believe the Commissioning Champion role has enabled meaningful engagement with CSP

In the first year of the evaluation the Commissioning Champion role was seen to help drive local area engagement with CSP. This view continues to prevail amongst the majority of Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children’s Services. Commissioning Champions tend to be at Assistant Director level and a number of Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions felt that it was important for the role to be held by a senior officer as it reflected the Directors of Children’s Services commitment to commissioning.

“[Commissioning Champion is a] really important role, and important that it’s a senior post. [He/she] champions across the council. Enables Directors of Children’s Services to signal the approach internally.”
 (Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

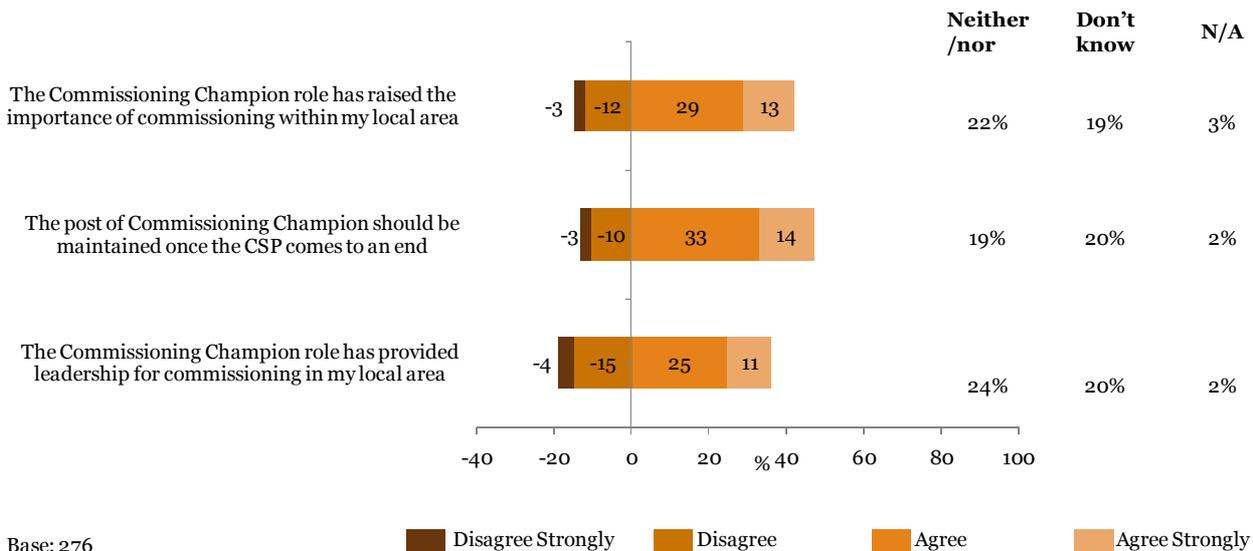
The most commonly cited benefit of the role is that it provides a ‘single point of contact’ for CSP, to enable true engagement between the programme and the local authority, while raising the profile of commissioning throughout the authority and to local partners. The most commonly cited issue was the additional workload the role brought to some individuals on top of their main ‘day job’.

“The huge benefit of having a Commissioning Champion in place is that everything is now run by the same person and there is one single focus.”
 (Commissioning Champion, County/Rural)

As shown by Figure 6, commissioners surveyed were not as positive about the Commissioning Champion role as Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions appeared to be. Some 34% felt that the role provided leadership for commissioning in their local area and 22% of commissioners surveyed thought that the Commissioning Champion had a “neither/nor’ impact on raising the profile of commissioning in the authority .

Figure 6: Commissioners views on the role of the Commissioning Champion

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the role of the Commissioning Champion, as a senior link to the programme within your local area?



The long term value of the commissioning champion role was questioned.

Some Directors of Children’s Services were unsure whether the Commissioning Champion role would continue in the future as directorates were restructuring and also in light of funding challenges. Whilst the majority of Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions we spoke to hoped this role would continue in some form’, there was challenge from a small number of Directors of Children’s Services as to the added value of the post. These Directors of Children’s Services indicated they were looking to distribute the function across a team. Just less than half of e-survey respondents (47%) felt that the Champion role should continue after CSP comes to an end.

“[We] are now trying to move away from having one Commissioning Champion to a Commissioning team that everyone is involved with.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

CSP local leads are an effective delivery model for driving, co-coordinating and delivering packages of support but there are mixed views of their value compared to traditional field forces

Within the CSP delivery model, the primary relationship holder with the local authority is the local lead. The local leads’ main point of contact with the local authority is the Commissioning Champion⁹. In Year 1 respondents were generally positive with their local lead, with the exception of a minority of cases where the match had not been right for the local area or the turnover in local leads made it difficult for a relationship to take hold.

⁹ The CSP delivery model did not require direct engagement with the Directors of Children’s Services, although this took place within the initial SAP process.

In Year 2 of the evaluation Commissioning Champions continued to hold positive views about their local and regional lead. Regional leads were not as visible to Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services, although the majority (n=42) of Commissioning Champions agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that *"When looking for regional support to address common challenges, the CSP provided what we were looking for, and when we needed it."*

The most common benefits regarding local leads were the same as those cited in the first year of the evaluation: flexibility; providing an independent perspective; strong planning and facilitation skills; and a frank and open relationship with the local authority.

"The most valuable aspect was having this independent person who you trust to be critical about the way you are doing things. It's best to have some challenges from someone who is confident to challenge the senior managers."

(Commissioning Champion, London/Urban)

"Overall the impact of having a critical friend has been invaluable in an authority which is new to commissioning and has very few staff with experience in commissioning. My local lead has been something of a mentor for me in that respect, and has empowered me to make changes I may not have otherwise made. My local lead has positively pushed me to achieve change, and ensured I have support and back up, so that I am not a lone voice."

(E survey respondent)

"Field forces have a specific agenda to report back on your progress...local and regional leads were clear that they are not working in that way, they helped [our] local authority to develop their own agenda [they were a] critical friend to sensitive issues."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Rural)

The Commissioning Champions are the target contact for CSP local leads, and the majority (n=22) who held a view, felt that CSP local leads brought more value, compared to traditional field forces. Nine Commissioning Champions felt that they provided a different value and five felt they brought the same value. A minority (n=5) thought they provided less value, and the remaining Commissioning Champions were unsure.

Directors of Children's Services were less certain of their view of local leads in this respect, partly explained by the lower frequency of their contact with the local lead. Seventeen believed the local lead to hold more value compared to traditional field forces, 11 felt they held the same values, five thought they provided less value, and the remaining 13 were unsure.

"It's about the individuals not the programme for CSP and field forces. CSP brought good connections, and could broker to right people to help solve problems."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

"[CSP] brings more value as the advice is specific to supporting key topics tailored to local needs, with experience."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

"We felt it was more tailored to our needs and requirements and not just a conversation on how they should do things in their eyes which they valued."

(Directors of Children's Services, Met/Urban)

In contrast to the Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions, only 21% of commissioners surveyed agreed with the statement that local leads provided greater value than a traditional field force. Over a quarter (27%) did not know whether they added greater value and 29% felt that local leads replied ‘neither/nor’ to this question. This finding is explained by the fact that not all commissioners have had a relationship with their local lead.

There were no trends to report regarding the type, size or maturity of a local authority in this regard.

Impact on services



This section explores the extent to which local authorities have started to benefit from their engagement with the programme in terms of improved services to children and young people. In Year 1, some Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions felt that an early impact on service delivery was evident, as a result of the bespoke support and online resources.

In Year 1, commissioners felt that it was too early to tell what impact CSP may have had on the ability of local areas to effectively commission the full range of services or on outcomes. In Year 2, commissioners remained hesitant in giving either positive or negative views, and this is reflected by the proportion of commissioners who responded “neither/nor” to questions relating to impact (see Figures 7 - 11).

In the previous section, we discovered that whilst the three universal services (online resources, networking and training and development) were perceived to be of most relevance to commissioner’s main jobs, and reported as having the most ‘reach’ or take up within the sector, in Year 2, the e-survey and Commissioning Champion evidence states that bespoke support and training development appear to be the two elements of CSP (one bespoke and one universal), which are driving local authorities progression along the change journey.

This section will primarily focus on how bespoke support and training and development are impacting on service delivery, with reference to networking and online, particularly where it is helping to sustain CSP’s impact on service delivery.

Half of commissioners and Commissioning Champions perceive that CSP has led to a significant improvement in the commissioning of at least one service within their local area

Around half (n=27) of Commissioning Champions agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that “CSP’s package of bespoke support has led to a significant improvement in the commissioning of at least one service within my local area where it has been deployed.” Eleven Commissioning Champions disagreed with this statement and 13 felt that there was not enough evidence to respond

Just over half (55%) of commissioners agreed to some extent or a great extent that the CSP in its entirety impacted on their local area. Commissioning Champions variously described the impact of the programme as improving skills and experience, contributing to a change in culture, and providing the momentum to achieve real change.

- **Improvements in skills and experience** – are critical in creating a workforce who will be driving the operational processes that will ultimately result in improved service delivery. It is recognised by some respondents that whilst improved outcomes are linked to a better service, CSP’s more direct impact is on the upskilling of the workforce.

“For us, CSP has been about skills and people rather than outcomes.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

- **A change in culture** - The majority of interviews with Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions highlighted the ongoing complexity of attributing improvements in service delivery to CSP, when there was wider local authority activity also in place.

“Their impact is in the language people are using. Leader of council was talking on TV about “intelligent commissioning and not salami slicing. This wouldn’t have happened before CSP.”

- **Providing momentum for change** – Local authorities’ trajectory for commissioning improvement is impacted by the workforce churn amongst commissioners, Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children’s Services. The CSP’s core services are perceived by some Commissioning Champions to equip them with the skills and knowledge to maintain the direction of travel for better commissioning.

The majority of interviews with Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions highlighted the ongoing complexity of attributing improvements in service delivery to CSP, when there was wider local authority activity also in place.

“CSP has moved us to a point where we can effect real change.” /Rural)

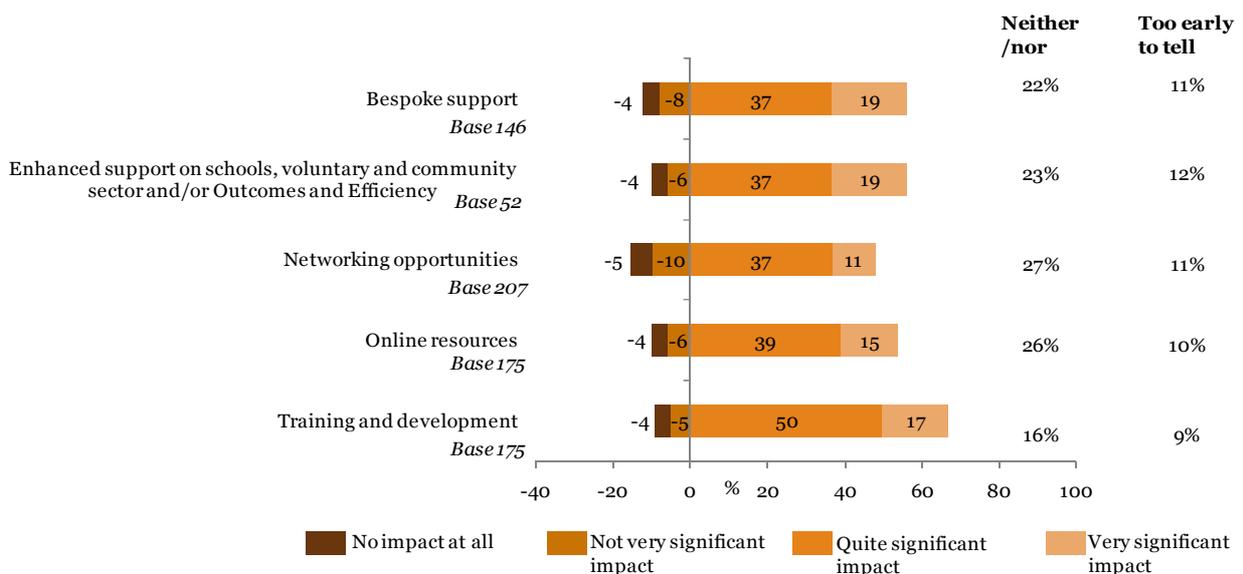
There is a consistent view that the key areas which have the most likely impact on service delivery in Year 2 are training and development and bespoke support.

In Year 1, all respondents found it difficult to identify where CSP has had an impact on service delivery to date. To some extent this was still an issue for Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions in Year 2 and in fact Directors of Children’s Services (who were more removed from the programme) were more likely to state that they felt that CSP has had a perceived impact on service delivery to date. This may be due to their strategic view of the CSP but it also signals their value of the potential of the CSP.

There were consistent views in Year 1 and Year 2, in relation to CSP activities which would have the most benefit towards service delivery. The top three areas commissioners forecasted in Year 1 as having the most impact in 12 months time were training and development, bespoke support and online resources. Figure 7 shows that these were indeed the services delivering most impact on service delivery to date in Year 2.

Figure 7: Impact of CSP on service delivery to date

How would you describe the likely impact of CSP support on the effectiveness of your commissioning (as an individual) in 12 months time? Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed



Given the wide reach of training and development (63% of commissioners have accessed training and development), and the actual benefit it has had on skills and knowledge (78% stated it has increased their skills and knowledge) it is not surprising that this aspect of CSP is the leading perceived impact on service delivery. Whilst the reach of bespoke support is not as wide as training and development, its role in improving service

delivery has the potential to be far reaching, given the nature of the support and the direct engagement with strategic and operational commissioners.

"[We've had] evolving bespoke support, working with the commissioning team to build understanding and awareness, common language and our commissioning framework. More recently have been looking at efficiencies, and building a strategic approach to efficiency such as market testing and broadening the involvement to senior management team. [This has had] resonance around the Council."

(Commissioning Champion, County/Rural)

CSP's online resources are one of the most commonly accessed aspects of the programme, 63% of commissioners surveyed had used the website (the same amount as people who had accessed training and development opportunities). Commissioners saw the website primarily as a repository for information. The website may have the potential to support sustainable benefits from the programme by making sure that learning is still available post 31st March 2011.

"Yes the content was pretty good. They felt at first the website was not very good but over time more authorities have joined up and started sharing their materials which has made the website much more valuable."

(Commissioning Champion, Metropolitan/Urban)

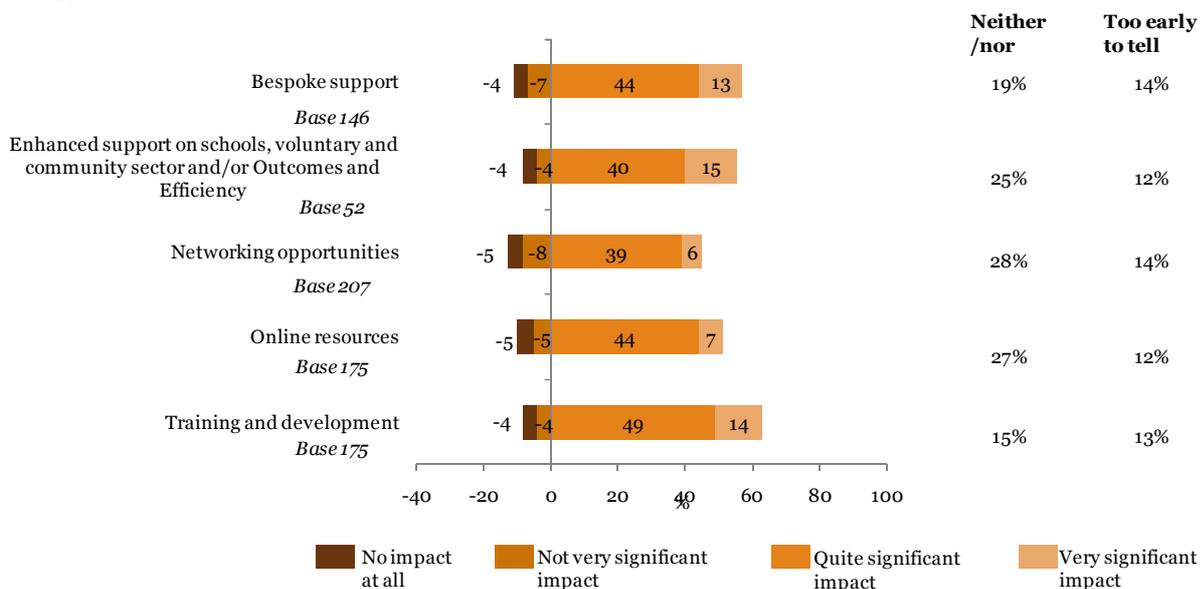
Commissioners were hesitant to forecast the impact of CSP on service delivery in 12 months time, although Figure 8 below indicates that enhanced support may play a greater role in driving this.

Training and development (63%) and bespoke support (57%) remain the main aspects of the programme with the potential to impact on service delivery. Interestingly, those who had accessed enhanced support were hopeful that this too would have an impact on service delivery in the future.

Figure 8: Impact of CSP on service delivery in 12 months time

How would you describe the likely impact of CSP support on service delivery in 12 months time?

Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed



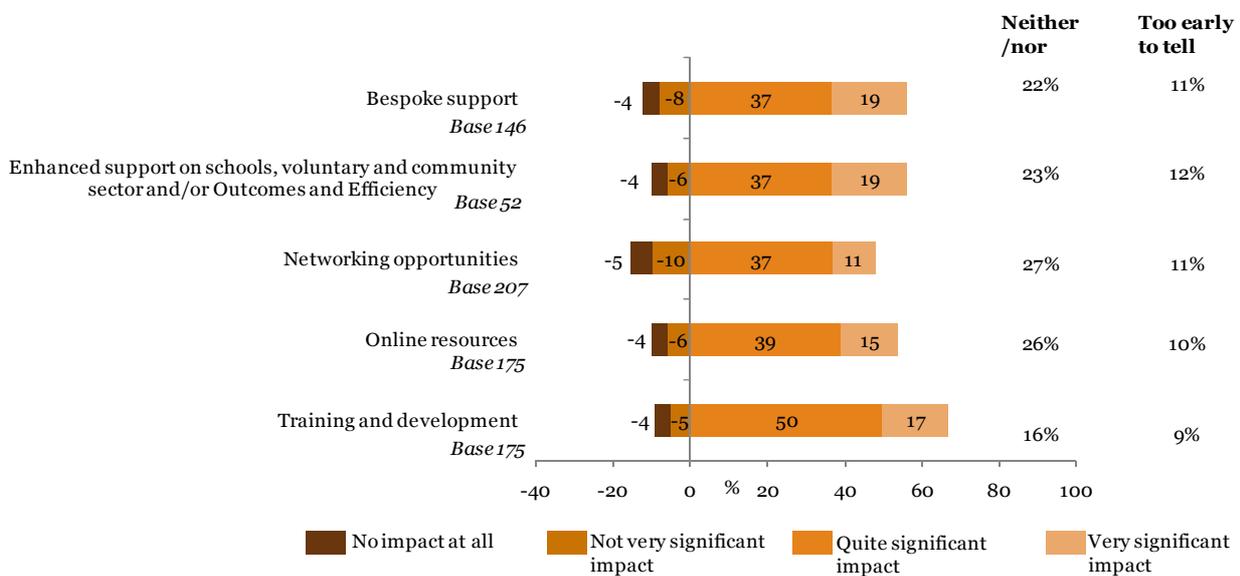
Commissioners are hopeful that training and development will have an ongoing impact on commissioning effectiveness

As described by our change journey framework (see Methodology chapter), improving skills and knowledge is a precursor to impact on service delivery. Overall, as shown in Figure 9, commissioners surveyed in Year 2 were unsure of the impact on commissioning CSP would have in 12 months time.

Overall, half of commissioners surveyed felt that CSP’s impact would be sustainable, and of this the impact of training and development (67%), bespoke support (56%) and enhanced support (56%) are seen as the main activities driving improvements in commissioning.

Figure 9: Perceived impact of CSP on commissioning effectiveness in 12 months time

How would you describe the likely impact of CSP support on the effectiveness of your commissioning (as an individual) in 12 months time?
 Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed



There is a realisation that the degree to which CSP benefits are sustained will be tempered by existing pre-conditions. It was recognised that the financial climate and changes to the commissioning landscape also frustrate improvements to commissioning as a result of CSP.

“Any potential impact is dwarfed by CSR changes.”
 (E survey respondent)

“CSP has put us in the position whereby we can use shared understanding of commissioning to improve services we were not in this place 12 months ago. How we sustain this is to be confirmed.”
 (Commissioning Champion, County/Rural)

Impact on outcomes



This section explores the extent to which local authorities have started to benefit from their engagement with the programme in terms of improved outcomes for children and young people. In Year 1, the majority of Directors of Children’s Services, Commissioning Champions and commissioners said that it was too early to tell. Like impact on services, it was also difficult to isolate the impact of the programme from wider initiatives.

“CSP has laid some foundation, and provided gravitas and timeliness, but is not the sole driver of the change.”
(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

This section will also explore what conditions enhance a local authority’s readiness for CSP support and whether CSP’s impact to date will be sustainable, so that learnings can be drawn for a sector-led model in the future.

Roughly a third of commissioners believe that CSP has had an impact on outcomes to date, an improvement in expectation since Year 1

A higher proportion of respondents in Year 2 felt able to give an opinion on CSP’s impact on outcomes for children, young people and families, around a third of commissioners felt that CSP has had an impact on outcomes to date, across all core services. This is an increase from Year 1, where less than a quarter of respondents felt that CSP has had an impact on outcomes to date, across all core services.

“Outcomes [in our area] have improved in the last 2 years and the CSP has had a small part of getting the more focused and having more conversations with the people it relates to.”
(Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

Figure 10 below shows that respondents are still hesitant in describing what this impact is and what it may be a result of. This may be a realistic reflection of perceived impact in some cases, given that commissioning time frames can be protracted and the CSP has only been in operation for two years.

Figure 10: CSP impact on outcomes for children, young people and families to date

How would you describe the impact of CSP support on outcomes for children, young people and families in your local area to date?

Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed

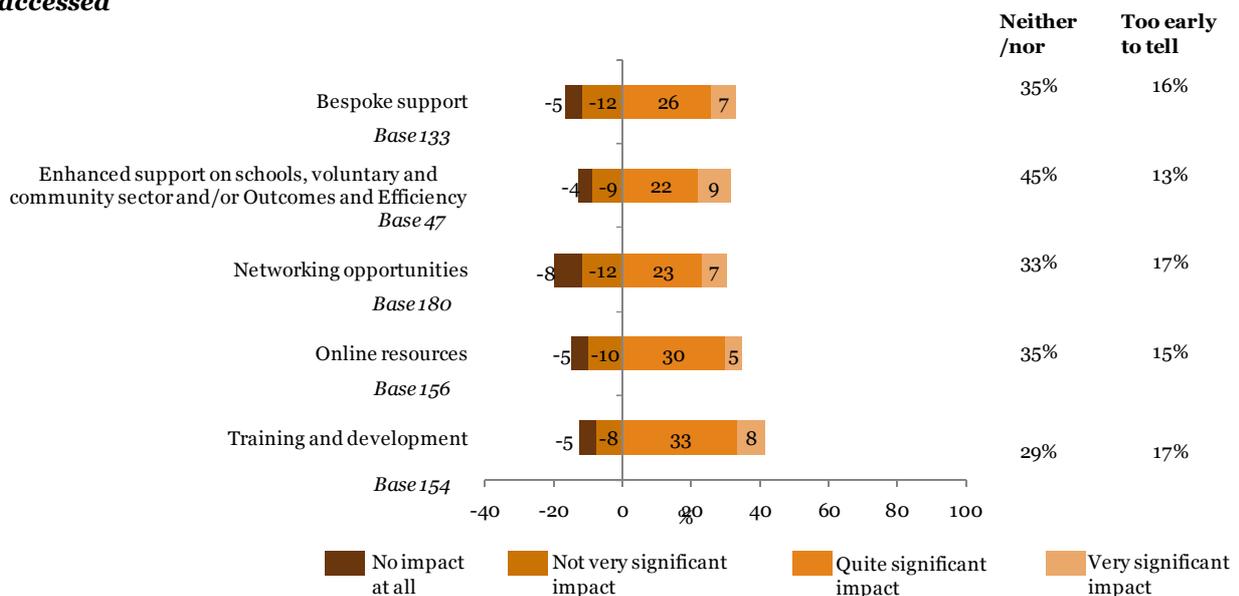


Figure 10 also shows that the three aspects of CSP's offer believed to have contributed most to outcomes are training and development (41%), online resources (35%) and bespoke support (33%). In contrast, enhanced support, bespoke support and online resources are the three aspects commissioners are least decided upon. This indicates that commissioners have divided views about the potential of bespoke support to improve outcomes for children and young people. Twenty per cent of commissioners perceived networking to have the least impact on outcomes to date (-20%), followed by bespoke support (17%) and online resources (15%).

"[We are] much better at understanding what commissioning means, and what competencies are required and are moving beyond contracting and procurement. [We are] shaping the market, and evaluating impacts [identifying] what skills and knowledge are required.... Not all things have moved because of CSP alone, but it's definitely been a catalyst."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

"Hard to link the programme to outcomes there have been a huge raft of changes."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Urban)

Training and development and bespoke support are perceived to help improve outcomes in 12 months time

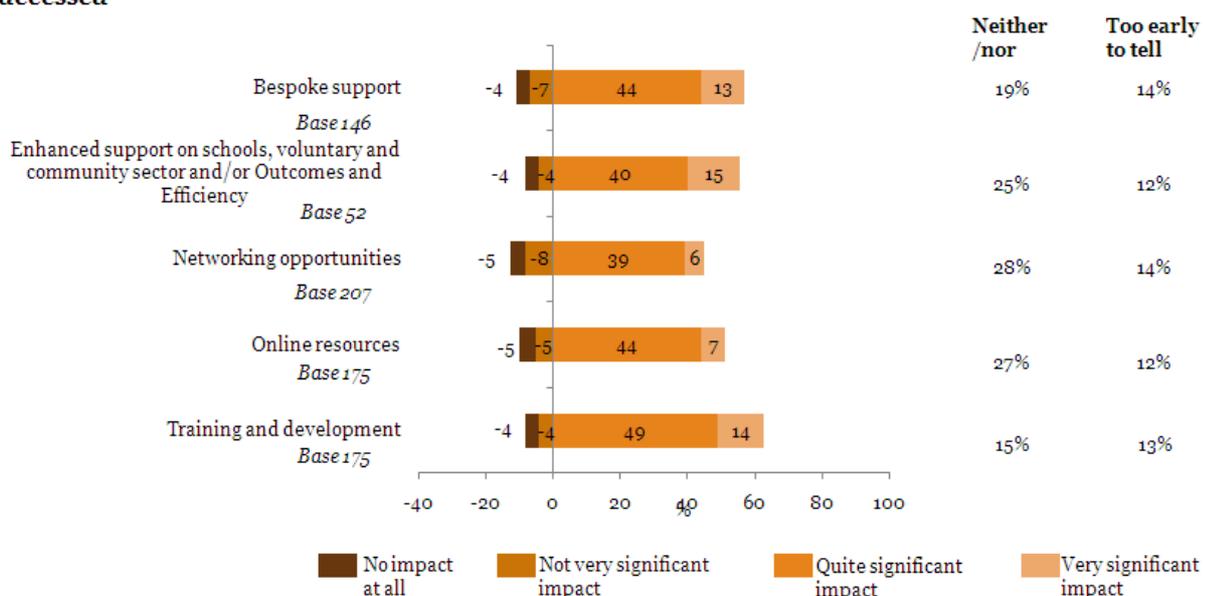
Over half of all commissioners surveyed believed that training and development (57%) and bespoke support (54%) would impact on outcomes in 12 months time (Figure 11). The fact that 19% of respondents were undecided and 14% felt it was too early to tell whether bespoke support would have an impact in 12 months time also reflects the fact that that much of the bespoke support was delivered in the second half of 2010. As mentioned earlier, a range of lead times for making changes to arrangements exist across local areas and this will have an impact on when commissioners are in a position to assess whether there has been an impact on services.

Respondents were less likely to think CSP's contribution was "neither/nor" and bears out the hypothesis that the benefits of bespoke support are longer term in nature, as well as linked to wider work happening in the authority. Again, networking was perceived to have the least impact on outcomes in the future.

Figure 11: CSP impact on outcomes for children, young people and families in 12 months time.

How would you describe the likely impact of CSP support on service delivery in 12 months time?

Please note that respondents were only asked this question in regard to the services they had accessed



CSP's impact on creating efficiencies to date is varied, but Directors of Children's Services, Commissioning Champions and commissioners were positive that it would have an impact in the future.

The majority of Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions felt that it was too early to comment on whether or not CSP had had an impact on efficiencies to date. A minority (n=5) of Commissioning Champions believed that where this had happened, it was mainly due to its contribution to enhancing skills and knowledge, which have laid a foundation for achievement of potential efficiencies. Any impact here was also qualified as complementary with other efficiency drive efforts.

"[Staff] now have a better understanding of commissioning, better partnerships, moving through the steps of making better outcomes. There will be efficiencies but it is likely to be in a few years time."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural, Medium)

"Hard to track down CSP has dovetailed with our VfM approach. Together, both are demonstrating efficiencies."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services were more positive about CSP's impact on efficiencies in the future. When asked a number of statements relating to CSP's ability to commission more effectively and efficiently in the future, the results were as follows:

- The majority (n=36) of Commissioning Champions agree or strongly agree with the statement that 'through its impact on commissioning, CSP's package of bespoke support has led, or will lead, to the better use of resources in my local area where it has been deployed.'
- The majority of Directors of Children's Services agree or strongly agree with the statement that "Through its impact on commissioning, CSP support has led, or will lead, to the more efficient use of resources in my local area where it has been deployed."

"CSP probably gave us reassurances that processes can make this possible but cannot say there is tangible evidence. CSP gave good basis to challenging salami slicing probably too early to tell for us if impact here."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

- The majority (n=35) of Commissioning Champions agree and strongly agree with the statement that "CSP's package of bespoke support has led to more effective commissioning in my Local area where it has been deployed "

Some 59% of commissioners who had accessed training and development and expressed a view, felt that it would help them to generate efficiencies. Some 81% of the commissioners who had accessed bespoke support and expressed a view, felt that it would help them to generate efficiencies.

Commissioning Champions were able to identify conditions that made a local area more likely to benefit from CSP support

In considering the conditions that made it most likely that a local area could benefit from the support offered by CSP, Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services offered a range of views. These views also describe factors which can influence a local area's readiness for improvement. These included:

When local area strategic partnerships are developing their vision and a commissioning approach

Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions recognised that CSP was able to increase understanding at a critical time for them, when the Children's Trust Board was being developed and a clarification of vision and 'levelling of commissioning knowledge' was required across the partnership, before it could confirm its strategic approach and culture. In this sense CSP is buoyed by political drive within a local area. This theme was also present in Year 1 of the evaluation. Looking into the future, this form of support would also be valuable to local authorities when navigating relationships within new commissioning arrangements such as GP led consortia and the revised role of schools' commissioning.

"[CSP] works best if there is a willingness within the NHS to work closer with children's services, and there is a strong sense of partnership. Stable children's services economy helps, ranging from frontline to the leadership team."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

"CSP came along at the right time for us, however the strong Trust partnership is being 'shaken up' by dissolution of PCT and new role of GP led consortia. This provides a new context to joint commissioning for the local area and CSP tools may be helpful in adapting when forging new relationships with new partners."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

When the local area is developing joint commissioning arrangements (operational level)

Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions found that bespoke support could provide helpful support on a number of operational issues such as developing section 75 arrangements, joint commissioning frameworks and market development. On an operational level, CSP support was felt to increase a shared understanding of trajectory for improvement but it was recognised that the context required for this to be a success was financial stability and a workforce committed to working in an integrated manner.

"Understanding of commissioning has enabled me to move into the area of pooling resources to meet local needs. Extended use of our school building being a key resource for the local area."

(E survey respondent)

"[As a result of CSP we are] clearer about the outcomes to be achieved, better commissioning in ensuring costs are fully understood and better market management so we are developing services to respond to local needs ensuring we keep children at the heart of the commissioning process."

(E survey respondent)

When there is wider stability within the local area

An important pre-condition which enhanced CSP support within a local authority is stability on a number of levels and includes stability: of local leadership (political and executive); of organisational structures; of workforce; and of finances. Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services who had engaged less with the programme or appeared to have benefited less from their engagement tended to be from authorities who had instability on one or more of the levels mentioned. Currently, many councils are operating in a flux on a number of levels, and any future sector-led model would benefit from recognising that a phased support package may be required, over a longer time window, to enable some local authorities to fully participate and benefit from the support they need.

"LA needs stability. For us timing is not right new structures need to settle in."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

"Leadership and partnership working all have to be functioning and need to be at a certain level of maturity."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

Conditions that made it less likely that support from CSP mainly related to:

- A lack of political drive and staff capacity to engage with the programme, both to attend events and to access universally material available on the website; and
- Local authorities being preoccupied with other internal affairs, such as decisions and actions regarding their budget settlement and internal restructures.

For all of the conditions above, there were no trends regarding a particular local authority size, type or performance.

The current environment for local government presents many challenges and opportunities for a programme like the CSP. Local authorities face the pressure to deliver more or better services more efficiently and this is compounded by the re-drawing of local accountability structures around commissioning. Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions recognised that there were opportunities for the programme if it could translate its offer to help ‘kickstart’ commissioning in a new environment. In some instances, it was reported that the CSP were already meeting this gap.

“CSP is currently delivering a bespoke commissioning skills programme across the council and PCT. This will enable the council to meet the challenge of the current national policy direction with regard to plurality of provision and GP commissioning. There will be greater emphasis on commissioning against outcomes and robust contract and performance management against locally agreed targets and value for money.”

(E survey respondent)

Local areas can benefit from CSP at early levels of commissioning maturity if they are ‘open to learning’

- Whilst CSP’s flexible package of support enabled it to be of benefit to local authorities at all levels of commissioning maturity, some Commissioning Champions felt that CSP appeared to be of most benefit when local authorities were at a relatively earlier stage of the commissioning maturity, as CSP support could help shape and accelerate thinking.

“It’s been most effective with the Joint Commissioning Arrangement. Helped us to think the whole process though and we believe that the support came in at exactly the right time.”

(Commissioning Champion, Metropolitan/Urban)

- Of the 35 Commissioning Champions who could recall their commissioning maturity score at the beginning of their engagement, these tended to be score 1 (n=14) or score 2 (n=17)¹⁰. These are authorities who describe themselves as *having no clear agreement about what is needed to move forward* (score 1) and *agreeing what is needed to move forward and are beginning to move forward* (score 2).

“CSP came at the most effective time for us...we needed to level understanding and culture. I will regret not having the support in next 12mths. It is a shame as LAs role fundamentally changes and the landscape for commissioning changes.”

(Commissioning Champion, County/Rural)

- As a result of CSP engagement, 23 scored themselves at level 3 and 11 at level 4, which describes local authorities who are *making good and very good progress towards meeting the standard*. This also illustrates the fact that the CSP tends to make an impact when local authorities are open to learning and there is commitment to improve. These factors are also interdependent with political drive and stability on a wider local area level.

“[We are a] small unitary authority, co terminus with PCT, forward thinking in approach and style, prepared to try new things, not steeped in bureaucracy, and like to challenge ourselves.”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

¹⁰ Score 1: We have no clear agreement about what is needed to move forward; Score 2: We do agree what is needed, and have begun to move forward; Score 3: We are making progress towards meeting the standard; Score 4: We are making very good progress towards meeting the standard and; Score 5: The standard is fully achieved across the Children’s Trust

There are mixed views of the sustainability of benefits gained from CSP

The sector was positive about the sustainability of the benefits of the CSP programme in terms of its contribution to increasing the appreciation of the value of effective commissioning as a driver of better outcomes, and the skills to deliver it.

Whilst the majority (n=33) of Commissioning Champions believe that CSP has embedded commissioning skills within the sector in a way that is sustainable in a rapidly changing financial environment, 11 did not have enough evidence to answer this question.

CSP has been valued and used by commissioners, with training and development and bespoke support being the key elements which are enhancing commissioning skills and knowledge. Some 63% of e-survey respondents felt bespoke support has strengthened commissioning processes and 50% felt it has improved partnership arrangements in the local area. These are the types of impacts which make it more likely that the benefits of the change will be sustainable.

In exploring the factors which enable a momentum for self-sustaining commissioning improvements to take place, Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions cited a number of common factors, many of which CSP's programme of support has addressed.

A virtuous circle for self-sustaining improvement is reported to occur when there is:

- **Stable local leadership**

The extent to which there has been churn amongst the Commissioning Champion and Directors of Children's Services population is important context for a local area's cycle for self-sustaining improvement. Since Year 1, there have been 38 new Commissioning Champions and 22 new Directors of Children's Services in post.

"There needs to be Strong Senior leadership from within to be able to dedicate resources to their new plan."

(Commissioning Champion, London/Urban)

"[The] ability to retain skilled staff is the challenge. Commissioning is a central responsibility [in our area it is] embedding not embedded."

(Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

- **A clear governance arrangement around commissioning**

A partner-wide and council-wide understanding of roles and responsibilities is vital for improvements in commissioning to take root.

"The voluntary sector have a place on the steering group and the Board of the Children's Trust, influencing allocation of resources and priorities. All senior and middle managers in Children's Services now understand the centrality of commissioning to improvement of services which better meet the needs of children and families."

(E survey respondent)

"We needed to have a Commissioning Champion due to immaturity and inconsistent views about commissioning...[we need] common understanding and skills and can lead the programme. Able to move our fragmentation forward."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

- **A shared understanding or 'culture' of commissioning amongst partners**

Similar to the above point, this is an important requirement, particularly in local areas where there is less consistency in language and/or understanding of commissioning.

“Engagement with CSP has reached enough of our commissioners from LA, health, and representatives from the third sector this will help sustain CSP legacy.”

(Commissioning Champion, London/Urban)

- **An enhancement of staff commissioning skills and knowledge base, resulting in process improvements**

A workforce which is skilled, knowledgeable and experienced of commissioning theory and practice provides the basis for improved and more efficient ways of commissioning across the council and local area partnerships.

“[We] have come a long way in the last 9 months [we have a] new joint commissioning unit and s75 agreements for the new financial year. The workshops for all Children’s Trust partners created momentum and buy in and...increased drive for improvements...Sustainable as we now know what we need, and how to ask for support from partners.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

- **Secure financial resources**

The majority of Directors of Children’s Services and Commissioning Champions identified themselves as having improved their commissioning capability as a result of CSP engagement, but were open regarding room for improvement. For example, continuing to invest in workforce development whilst working within reduced budgets was important to maintaining enough skills and knowledge in the commissioning system.

“Budget restrictions makes it difficult [for CSP] to have an impact. Shifts to schools and GP commissioning is not congruent with the CSP programme’s focus on LA commissioning, with partners.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

- **In house plans to roll out commissioning capabilities are being prioritised**

For example, some Directors of Children’s Services referred to CSP events such as the national ‘Train the Trainer’ conference as a strand of their in-house commissioning capability strategy in the future.

“[We are working on the] development of a training programme, including workforce development around commissioning skills.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

“[We are] working with a local university to fill skills gaps in senior commissioners embedding as part of sustainability.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

Conclusion

In the final year of the evaluation, there has been clear evidence that the sector (comprising of commissioners, Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services) value the overall CSP offer. As described in this chapter, there have been high levels of usage across all of CSP's core services.

Whilst commissioners have made most use of the CSP's **universal elements** (online resources, networking events and training and development), Commissioning Champions and Directors of Children's Services have reported that **bespoke support** is the element of the CSP that they have found most useful.

Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions have also identified the value of the CSP in bringing people together to share good practice and benchmark, and in being a critical friend and providing bespoke and responsive support.

Commissioners value the opportunities the CSP has provided via **its networking events**, in bringing people together to learn from each other. Over half (55%) of commissioners surveyed believed that the networking events had helped them to commission services more effectively. **Enhanced support**, being the more recent part of the CSP's offer, was the least accessed service, but those who have accessed it spoke positively, with some commissioners feeling it will play a greater role in 12 months time.

The **CSP local lead role is viewed positively**, with respondents more readily sighted on the CSP local lead compared with the CSP regional lead. There are mixed views in relation to the value the local lead provides, compared with a traditional field force. Commissioning Champions are the primary link with CSP local leads and over half of Commissioning Champions interviewed who held a view, perceived CSP local leads to provide more value than a traditional field force. A key benefit over a traditional field force is their independence and ability to start from the local authority's agenda.

The Commissioning Champion role was generally viewed positively, particularly as a point of contact with the programme which enabled real engagement between the local area and the programme. An additional benefit was cited as helping to raise the profile of commissioning within the local area. There was uncertainty whether the role would continue in the future as commissioning became more mainstreamed within teams and given the new financial climate.

The CSP support was reported to have improved the **skills and knowledge of staff**. Around three quarters of commissioners believed that the CSP's bespoke support and training and development services had improved their skills and knowledge. The Resources Bank on the CSP website is also seen as providing a valuable body of sector knowledge that is relevant to commissioners. Over half (52%) of commissioners stated that it had helped them to commission more effectively. In contrast, the community area has not been reported as being widely used.

The CSP was reported to have had an **impact on service delivery**. Half of the commissioners and Commissioning Champions we spoke to felt that the CSP has had an impact on service delivery to date. This was also reported to be due to training and development and bespoke support.

Roughly a third of commissioners perceive that the CSP has had an **impact on outcomes**, which is an increase from Year 1, where less than a quarter of commissioners perceived this to be true. Training and development is felt to have played the greatest part in this to date. Respondents felt that bespoke support was more likely to have an impact on improving outcomes over the next 12 months time.

The CSP's reported impact on creating efficiencies to date is varied, but Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions had a more positive view about the CSP's likely future impact on efficiencies and the majority of commissioners believed that that bespoke support and training will help generate efficiencies in 12 months time.

The sector was positive about the sustainability of the benefits of the CSP programme in terms of its contribution to increasing the appreciation of the value of effective commissioning as a driver of better

outcomes, and the skills to deliver it. There were however concerns about the continuation of the benefits given the new financial climate.

A number of factors were identified as defining the point at which effective commissioning becomes self sustaining. These were: a stable local leadership; a clear governance arrangements around commissioning; a shared understanding or 'culture' of commissioning amongst partners; an enhancement of staff commissioning skills and knowledge base; a secure financial base; and a set of in house plans to ensure commissioning capabilities are being prioritised.

*Conditions which enable a
sector-led model to develop*

Conditions which enable a sector-led model to develop

Introduction

This final section discusses some of the broader issues that arise from our evaluation and could inform the ongoing development of a sector-led model for improvement.

We begin by outlining the conditions which enable a sector-led model to be effective, including the factors enhancing an area's readiness for improvement and the conditions in a local authority that make it more or less likely that the support will have an impact. The focus here is on our general findings, with examples that are specific to the two programmes set out in more detail in the earlier sections of the report.

We then draw together some generic issues from both programmes on what the sector has valued and where the most benefit was gained. We conclude by summarising the priority areas for improvement identified by Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions and where further improvement support might be welcomed.

Factors which influence an area's readiness for improvement

We asked Director's of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions which factors needed to be in place to trigger or enhance an area's readiness for improvement. Interviewees reported a range of views and perceptions in relation to this question. Those raised most consistently were:

- The importance of strong leadership;
- Effective partnership working;
- Clarity and direction regarding the national policy agenda;
- Having sufficient resources;
- Clarity about performance and strengths;
- Having access to research and evidence; and
- External challenge and support.

We consider each in turn below.

Strong leadership and political drive is needed to enable improvement

Strong leadership was described by many (n=24) as an essential factor to enhance an area's readiness for improvement. Respondents said that without strong leadership, there was less likely to be clarity about the local area's vision, priorities and objectives. In turn, without senior sponsorship, it could be difficult to dedicate resources to plan and execute plans for improvement.

"You are always working in a political context – sheer fact that CSP existed and CC role being present is an example of this. DCS endorsement has been key."

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Rural)

"Leadership is the key, if an organisation is in turmoil it is very difficult to engage in improvement support, or for there to be clarity about local objectives and priorities."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

Effective partnership working can be a driver for improvement

Seventeen local authorities reported that effective partnership working is critical in influencing a local area's readiness for improvement. A clear approach to integration and partnership working at a local level was reported as a fundamental driver for improvement.

Effective partnership working was described as having integrity and honesty and supporting a culture of openness. In a practical sense it also needs to have partners that are genuinely engaged in and accountable for the support for children, young people, families and carers.

A number of local authorities specifically referenced the need to engage with schools as partners. In addition to local partnerships, there was also recognition of the value regional work can play in readying an area for improvement.

"You have to have the partners in place who are open to it. There needs to be a commitment at the top of the LA to push it forward"

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

"We need schools to engage with [the local authority] more. We find that few schools have a "wider moral purpose" beyond 'my school, my kids', rather than our approach of 'our kids, our schools, our community."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

"Those local authorities with strong regional and sub regional links in which service improvement as an acknowledged part of the agenda are more ready to seek external support and more likely to know what change will look like. Any external support should be linked with this type of regional link up."

(Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

Clarity and direction regarding the national policy agenda

A number of Directors of Children's Services (n=5) said that it was important that they had clarity about the direction and priorities of the national policy agenda. Understandably, the change in national government has created changes in children's services policy, and the sector is getting to grips with the changes and how policy will translate into practice.

Our interviews identified a degree of anxiety about how to continue to provide quality services that meet local needs that are in line with the new and emerging national requirements. This view was held by local authorities generally but it was expressed most acutely by authorities with lower performance ratings. There was a feeling that, without clear guidance, these authorities might continue to struggle in the future and could potentially be left behind.

The sector would also welcome greater links between key government departments, in particular the Department of Health and the Department for Education, to enable local authorities to strengthen their local area agendas and action plans.

"National Policy Agendas need to be in place as they are a massive driver in getting authorities to push forward."

(Directors of Children's Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

"We need stability within the national children's agenda. Currently the agenda is on shifting sands, which creates opportunities but is also de stabilising to the sector. There is an anxiety that the baby will be thrown out with the bath water."

(Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

Local Authorities need to have resources available to them to improve

Local authorities consistently reported that they needed a degree of capacity and resources to be able to plan and implement improvement strategies.

In the current context when all public bodies are tackling challenging decisions around budget cuts and workforce reductions, local authorities reported that it was difficult to identify resources to support making improvements to services. Some felt that this could result in progress on the improvement agenda being halted or lead to it going backwards.

“The current financial context and policy shift will stop the current direction of travel as a lot of people who have been up skilled or benefitted from CSP, may be made redundant and it will be a loss of skills, which need to be replaced. Commissioning workforce who will be left?”

(Commissioning Champion, Unitary/Urban)

External support and challenge

The factor cited most frequently by Directors of Children’s Services (n = 10) was the value of external support and challenge. The key factor mentioned here was that the support had greatest value when it was not provided as part of a performance monitoring process. Local authorities reported feeling able to be more open about the issues that they wished to resolve, as well as more likely to address them earlier.

A number of local authorities described external challenge as a catalyst for change which was helpful in planning for the future. The majority of local authorities that said that they valued external support and challenge had a performance rating of 3 (performs well).

Local authorities also acknowledged the value in being able to compare themselves with others. There was support for self assessment and peer evaluation models, but as part of a wider performance review and challenge process rather than as the sole mechanism for assessing performance. There were no consistent views from the sector as to how inspection and monitoring should be structured in future.

“It can be challenging to break through the mentality that things are okay. External judgement that improvements are needed jolt everyone is recognising when things aren’t working.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Unitary/Urban)

“There is a temptation for all of us that with the relaxed regulation it becomes easier to potentially take our eye off the ball, and not be as rigorous with our assessment as we once were.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Unitary/Rural)

“The children’s services sector, with all its diversity, needs to create the external challenge and support rather than it being set by central government. The peer challenge and support build into the C4EO model is a good example. Inspection and improvement is seen as linked by the government, but it should be two separate areas, and we shouldn’t structurally join the two.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, Metropolitan/Urban)

“Peer review and peer conversations can feel more comfortable for local authorities, but external support can provide the catalyst for change (but as long as it isn’t there to monitor or report.”

(Directors of Children’s Services, County/Rural)

Clarity about performance and strengths

Directors of Children's Services in particular recognised the importance of the local area having a solid understanding of its own performance and strengths. Local authorities were perceived as being more likely to be able improve their services if they took responsibility for investing in self-assessment on an ongoing basis.

A number of mechanisms for carrying out self-assessment were cited, including the use of peer review to provide an external perspective.

"There needs to be honest self assessment and appraisal, at the moment we discover a LA is in trouble when Ofsted tells us, or when something terrible happens. Sector led model needs to tackle this at earlier stage. A move to sector led model needs LA 'to own' self awareness."

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

"This is a critical piece there needs to be honest self assessment and appraisal, at the moment we discover a LA is in trouble when Ofsted tells us, or when something terrible happens. Sector led model needs to tackle this at earlier stage. A move to sector led model needs LA 'to own self awareness'"

(Directors of Children's Services, Unitary/Rural)

Having access to research and evidence (e.g. benchmarking) to inform effective decision making

Directors of Children's Services (n =15) stressed the importance of having access to good quality research and evidence to inform effective decision making. A key aspect of this was benchmarking data to enable them to compare their own performance and outcomes against other local authorities. Sharing evidence of best practice to support self assessment and self improvement was also seen as important.

Having access to examples of good practice was seen as a critical way of supporting poorly performing local authorities. More generally local authorities said that having access to more material describing successful collaborative working with partners and other local authorities (particularly multi-agency examples) would help to support improvement.

"Fundamentally, most important is that local areas have a strong performance culture. We need access to data this is not the be all and end all, but we need national comparative data that is delivered in a timely fashion and is non judgemental. We also need access to good material re practice and standards. There is no value created for local areas from field forces on tick box issues. We want access to a good quality, insightful government officer with a good knowledge of our local authority and what's going on nationally. It's challenging though!"

(Directors of Children's Services, County/Rural)

Local conditions which may enhance impact from support.

We also explored with local authorities the local conditions that enhanced the impact of what was achieved from the support they received. The conditions which were identified as being specific to the programmes evaluated are set out in the CSP and C4EO sections earlier in the report. Here we comment on three local conditions which were common to both programmes. These were:

- **The LA needs to be outward facing and ready to access support:** It was put to us that a local authority that is outward facing is more likely to have an understanding of how its performance stacks up compared to others. It is also more likely to be interested in understanding what good practice looks like from elsewhere and to engage with support programmes that help it replicate good practice and improved performance.
- **There is capacity within the local authority to draw down the support:** A number of local authorities reported that they would have made more or earlier use of both programmes if they had had greater

capacity within their authority to engage with the products and services. This may become a more significant issue in the future as local authorities face greater constraints on their capacity across all services.

- *There is sufficient stability in the local area to make use of support:* Respondents reported that where local authorities experienced significant turbulence, less use was made of available support. This turbulence could be as a result of factors within the local authority, such as departmental or authority-wide reorganisations and local political changes, or they could result from changes in partner organisations.

Core features of improvement support valued by the sector

This section summarises some of the general features of improvement support initiatives that have been most valued by the sector and which are considered to have resulted in greater use of the support by the sector.

Closeness to users

One of the greatest strengths a sector-led model can have is closeness to its users. A sector-led model needs to utilise this closeness to develop the programme of support. This could be via consultation with the sector on themes felt to be critical to the sector at the time, or it could be through use the results of a local area's self assessment activities to identify packages of bespoke support at a local or regional level. Both the CSP and the C4EO have used a mixture of these methods. The greatest benefit from external support is likely to happen when the programme of support closely mirrors, and is co-created in response to, the challenges the sector faces.

A delivery model which can respond to a range of needs

Both programmes have provided products and services that the sector was able to 'dip into' at a time that suited local needs and priorities. In addition, the range of support offered by both programmes increased over time in response to the expressed demand of users and was offered in a way that allowed different users to select different types of support and different ways of receiving it.

A single point of contact for the programme at a local level can help to build awareness and credibility for the support with the local area over an extended period of time. Respondents in Year 1 and Year 2 of the evaluation valued and spoke positively about having this type of relationship.

Benefits and issues of using current practitioners to deliver tailored support.

Both programmes offered a tailored or bespoke support programme element and this was highly valued by users. For example, the sector placed particular value on the fact that the C4EO sector specialists are serving practitioners. The recruitment, accreditation and training of this pool of practitioners has been important to not only encourage a pipeline of people able to perform this role but also to gain the confidence of the sector of the quality and credibility of the support.

The decision to use existing practitioners to deliver support also comes with a number of issues. A consistent concern was the extent to which there was sufficient existing capacity within the sector to support it, particularly in the current financial climate.

Significant value of having a reliable evidence base on which to make decisions

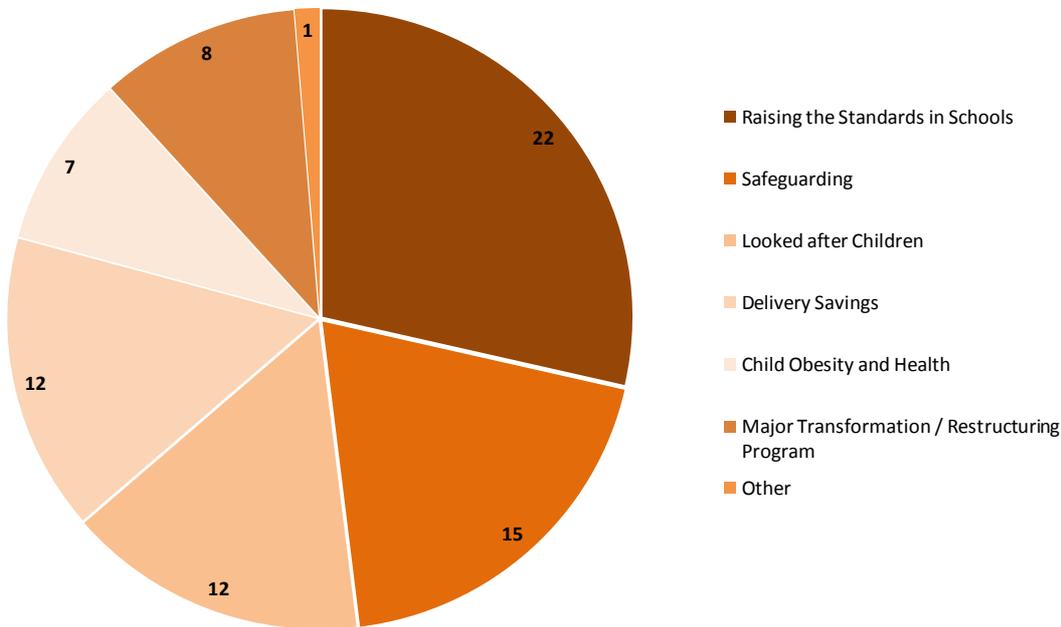
All respondents valued the increased research and evidence base that both programmes brought to the sector. The sector has valued the accessibility of the research and the development of validated examples of best practice and emerging ideas to address the challenges it faces. There is a continuing appetite to find out, "what works", both within the UK context and drawing on international experience.

Priorities for improvement

The evaluation asked Directors of Children's Services and Commissioning Champions what priorities for improvement their local areas had and what strategies they plan to adopt to meet these priorities.

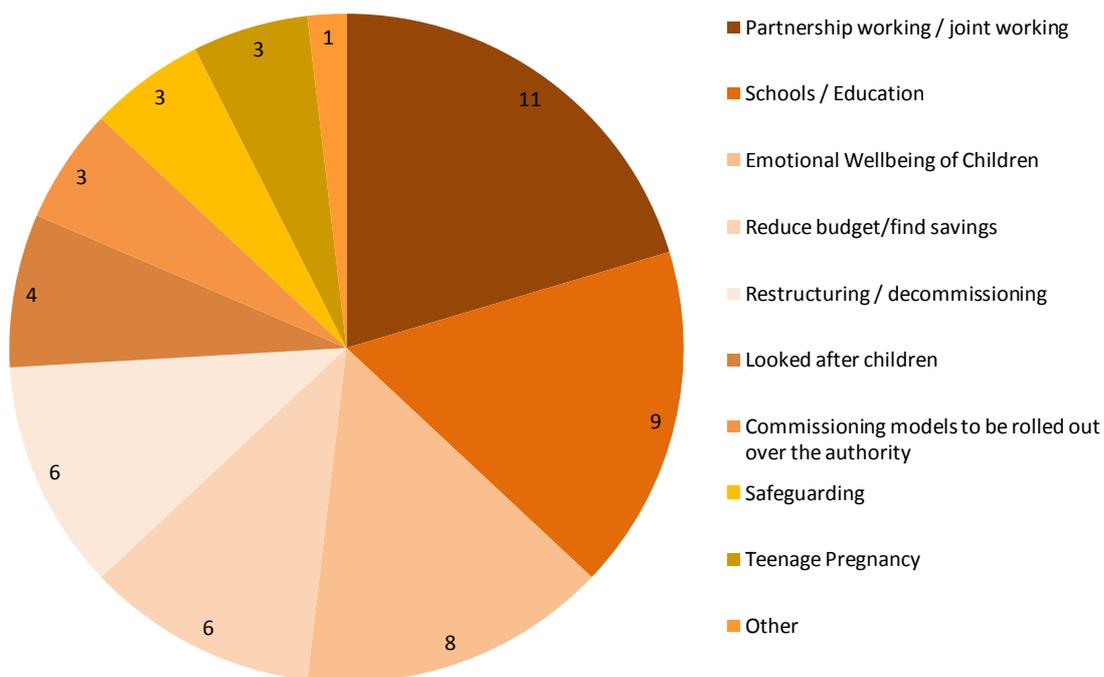
Director of Children’s Service reported that their top 4 priorities were: to raise standards in schools (21 of 47); improve safeguarding (14 of 47); improve services for looked after children (12 of 47) and; deliver savings without harming frontline services (11 of 47). This is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Priorities for improvement, Directors of Children’s Services



In contrast, the Commissioning Champions gave a slightly wider range of priorities for the coming year. Their top 4 priorities were: partnership and joint working (11 of 53); schools/education (9 of 53); emotional well being of children (8 of 53) and; creating efficiencies/savings (6 of 53). The full spectrum is shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Priorities for improvement, Commissioning Champions



This section presents the more commonly cited priorities for improvement and the types of issues that were associated with these priorities. The majority of authorities reported that their priorities have changed in the past 12 months due to the financial challenges. Many reported the increased difficulties they face but some reported an upside to this, noting that they now have greater focus on their priorities than previously. Unless otherwise stated these priorities were raised by all types of local authorities (regardless of performance rating, size or type).

Raising standards in schools is the main priority

Local authorities identified raising standards in schools as a top priority. This issue was raised by 21 Directors of Children's Services and a further nine Commissioning Champions.

Local authorities identified a number of areas where they were planning to make progress and where improvement support might be welcomed. These included:

- considering how best to structure, resource and deliver the services currently provided to schools in the context of significant reductions in funding and new government policies that alter the responsibilities of schools and local authorities;
- investing in building stronger relationships with schools; and
- developing new joint commissioning arrangements with schools.

Improve safeguarding

Child protection and safeguarding was reported as a priority, with it being most commonly cited by Directors of Children's Services of medium and large sized authorities. All Directors recognised that it will continue to be a core, statutory function for the local authority regardless of the future design or commissioning of other children's services, and that local authorities must demonstrate robust performance in this area. They were also mindful of increasing media and political interest and ongoing scrutiny of processes such as serious case reviews.

Local authorities identified a number of areas where they were planning to make progress and where improvement support might be welcomed. These included:

- developing new local area policies, including revised threshold levels for access to services;
- supporting strategic partnership working, including safeguarding boards and multi-agency public protection arrangements; and
- understanding the impact safeguarding contacts and referrals have on the system as a whole, including planning and delivery of services for vulnerable and Looked After Children.

Looked After Children

Directors of Children's Services who made Looked After Children a priority tended to come from either small or large local authorities. In addition, four Commissioning Champions identified this as a priority, two of which were from small local authorities. Over half of all local authorities that reported this as a priority were 'performing well'.

Directors of Children's Services who prioritised this area also commented on the impact of funding cuts, with many local authorities reviewing the provision of placements to achieve efficiencies while still meeting needs. There was also awareness of the continuing high level of scrutiny on outcomes in this area, and the key role that provision for this group can make to narrowing the gap in outcomes.

Local authorities identified a number of areas where they were planning to make progress and where improvement support might be welcomed. These included:

- driving down the costs of commissioned services, particularly placements costs and transport;
- achieving more joined up services, particularly in connection with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and wider health services;
- considering ways to raise the educational achievement and aspirations of children in care; and
- better managing the transition to adult services and leaving care.

Delivering high quality services whilst finding savings

The need to deliver high quality services whilst driving down costs cut across all the priority areas raised by Directors of Children's Services, and was cited as the main priority by many. Some 60% of local authorities that reported this as a priority had a performance rating of 3 (performs well) .

Local authorities identified a number of areas where they were planning to make progress in this area and where improvement support might be welcomed. These included:

- targeting services carefully to make efficiencies without damaging outcomes;
- better aligning corporate teams and the resources available to them collectively so that best value is obtained; and
- prioritising services around families and the services that they receive and value from the local authority.

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