



Department
for Education

Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review Programme

In December 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) launched Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: *a plan for improving social mobility through education*. The plan sets an overarching ambition: no community left behind.

Ambition 1 is to close the word gap in the early years. Children with strong foundations will start school in a position to progress, but too many children still fall behind early, and it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. We need to tackle these development gaps at the earliest opportunity, particularly focussing on early language and literacy skills, so that all children can begin school ready to thrive.

The drivers of outcomes at age five are broad, and supporting children to develop involves a range of local services including, but not limited to, early education and childcare: for example, early help, family support, public health, primary care and so on. Local authorities sit at the heart of what a locality offers disadvantaged families and have an important role to play in coordinating the efforts of different support partners such as public health. High quality integrated services are essential if we are going to make a positive impact for those children and families that need additional support.

The Government has committed £8.5m to spread best practice on improving early language outcomes, with the Early Years Social Mobility Peer Review Programme at its heart. The Department is partnering with the Local Government Association (LGA) to design and deliver the programme, building on existing peer review models such as the Corporate Peer Challenge Programme.

The programme will be piloted over the summer, with the full programme rolling out from autumn 2018. If you are interested in taking part in the programme, or becoming a peer reviewer, please see below for Q&A and details of how to apply.

Link to Improving social mobility through education: Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education>

Questions and Answers

What is peer review?

1. A peer review is a robust and effective improvement tool managed and delivered by the sector, for the sector. It is not an inspection. Local government leaders and experts, together with key partners – as ‘peers’ – are at the heart of the process. Peer reviews help councils with their improvement and learning by providing a practitioner perspective and ‘critical friend’ challenge. The make-up of the peer team will reflect the requirements of the council receiving the peer challenge. Typically, there will be 3-4 peers plus an LGA peer review manager in a team with reviews taking place on-site for 3-5 days depending on the type and size of local authority.

What will the peer review focus on?

2. The peer team will explore the effectiveness of local services in improving early outcomes for disadvantaged children at age 5, including a particular focus on early language, and identify opportunities for improvement. The programme will cover the areas that will be critical for improving outcomes; so might cover leadership, data and performance, partnership working, the quality of local early years services and provision, and access to targeted support.
3. The LGA will work with individual local authorities to agree key lines of enquiry. This will ensure that peer reviews remain focused on those areas of particular importance or potential for impact on outcomes for disadvantaged children in that local area.

What would you get from participating in the programme?

4. The Department for Education is funding the peer review programme. You will receive a peer review that provides robust and external analysis of how local services in your area are performing against the social mobility ambition, with recommendations that will enable you to drive improvement. Following completion of a review, LAs will have access to a targeted fund to support improvement in their local area.

What does being a peer reviewer involve?

5. Being part of a peer review team is intensive but rewarding. It is a valuable learning experience, enabling a two-way exchange of good practice and provides an opportunity to reflect on your locality’s performance. It highlights innovative ways of working that can support sustained improvement and offers the chance to work alongside people from across the country who have a passion for the early years and children’s services. It is also an opportunity to build long lasting professional networks. We expect peers to have an excellent understanding of services for disadvantaged children and families, and the drivers of outcomes at the age of five; to be inquisitive and open minded; and be able to challenge effectively. Peer reviewers will work at a senior level within their organisations (i.e. assistant director, head of service or senior manager). Peer reviewers will need to commit to a 1 day peer reviewer training/assessment event and at least one peer review per year (minimum of two in total).

What you need to do?

If you are interested in your local authority taking part in the early years social mobility peer review programme, or in becoming a peer reviewer, please express your interest by contacting earlyyears.socialmobility@lga.gov.uk

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