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Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs Evaluation

Research report

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Glossary of terms

CM	Childminder
DfE	Department for Education
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EY	Early Years
EYER	Early Years Education Recovery
EYPP	Early Years Pupil Premium
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
IMD	Index of Multiple Deprivation
NCB	National Children's Bureau
PSED	Personal, Social and Emotional Development
PVI	Private, Voluntary or Independent setting
SBP	School-Based Provider
SCEYP	Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers
SEND	Special Education Needs and Disabilities
SPH	Stronger Practice Hubs

Key findings summary

This mixed method evaluation comprised surveys fielded to Hubs and settings, and qualitative interviews with the National Children's Bureau (NCB), the Education Endowment Fund (EEF), Hubs and settings. The evaluation found:

- Suitability, of the Hub model as a way of supporting the early years sector, namely a model that is peer-led, responsive, and inclusive of all types of early years providers.
- A good response to the model from settings. By Quarter 8 there were over 8,000 settings in network membership, and over 2,000 settings recruited to the funded programmes. Settings rated the programme activities highly (90% said they were 'high quality'), and showed good engagement levels (for example, 73% of settings in the more deprived areas engaged with 3 or more types of Hub activity).
- Around two-fifths (41%) of settings in the Post Survey had used the Evidence Store, with 79% of them using it on 3 or more occasions. The Evidence Store was seen as a good legacy outcome of the programme, and the use of exemplification videos were regarded as an accessible way for practitioners to see good practice in action.¹
- A high proportion of settings (74%) made changes to their practice following participation in SPH programme activities. The overall proportion making a practice change was similar for settings in deprived areas, and those in non-deprived areas, but settings in deprived areas had introduced a wider range of practice changes.
- The practice changes were seen to make a difference to children in the care of settings. Most commonly they had/ would improve children's language and communication skills, and children's personal, social and emotional development (88% of the settings who had, or were planning to make changes, felt each of these two areas would improve).
- Settings still face challenges in engaging with professional development. The main barriers to engaging more with SPH activities were the timing of activities, staff being too busy, geographical or logistical challenges, and securing staff to backfill.
- There were some gaps in programme delivery, with a desire for more support for working with children with special educational needs or disabilities, for children aged under 2, and more tailoring of resources to reflect the unique set-up of childminders.
- It takes time to build quality programmes, and to build awareness and trust in Hubs. Logistically, similar programmes would benefit from the investment of time to ensure local authorities are aligned with the programme, more opportunities for Hubs to work together, and a smaller geographical coverage for the Hub. Hubs also suggested more streamlined financial / project management to reduce time on these activities.

¹ 'Exemplification' meaning examples of best practice.

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the process evaluation of the Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme. The SPH programme was launched in November 2022 to run as a two year programme, though was subsequently extended to the end of March 2025. The aim of the programme was to support settings to address the impact of the pandemic on young children, by ‘strong’ early years (EY) settings (Hubs) sharing good practice and creating lasting local networks of early year practitioners.

The evaluation was undertaken to understand the implementation experience of the SPH programme, the response of the EY sector to the offer, and to understand the outcomes of the programme in respect of improving knowledge, confidence and practice of those working in EY.

The SPH programme was one strand of the government’s Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) package, announced in June 2021. This was an investment of up to £180m, and comprised a series of workforce training, qualifications and support programmes for the EY sector to address the impact of the pandemic on the youngest and most disadvantaged children in England. The majority of the strands of the EYER package are being evaluated, with a separate project to combine all the evaluations and data together to inform an overarching evaluation of the EYER package.

Methodology

The evaluation of the SPH programme took place across a two year period, with evaluation activities undertaken to respond to the roll-out of the programme. The evaluation used a mixed methods research approach that comprised:

- A quantitative semi-structured survey fielded to Hubs shortly after they had been set-up (Year 1 Survey), and then a further survey fielded to Hubs towards the end of the second year of the programme (Year 2 Survey). All 18 Hubs completed both surveys.
- A quantitative survey fielded to settings shortly after they had engaged with a Hub (the Baseline Survey, completed by 533 settings), and then a further survey fielded around 9 months later to understand the outcomes of the programme (the Post Survey, completed by 630 settings).
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups with the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) (the programme delivery partner), the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) (the evidence partner), Hubs and settings. Across the programme, 45 depth interviews were completed (7 NCB, 3 EEF, 13 Hubs, 22 settings) alongside 9 focus groups (2 NCB, 3 EEF, 4 Hubs).

Key findings

Implementation of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

Operational delivery

Overall, NCB, EEF and Hubs were proud to have been part of the SPH programme and felt a lot had been achieved in a short period, including the creation and delivery of new evidence-based practice to the sector. The Hub model was seen as the right fit for early years, being peer-led, responsive to local needs, and inclusive of the distinct types of providers within the sector. This being the case, there were some challenges to the implementation of the programme.

There were good working relationships between the parties delivering SPH (namely NCB, EEF and Hubs), and their dedication and commitment contributed to success. The presence of existing Hub partnership relationships, or experience of running similar programmes working with the Department for Education (DfE), was found to be a positive enabler in the set-up process, particularly given the speed of programme implementation.

Good collaboration with a local authority, where this existed, made it easier for Hubs to promote their offer, facilitated by access to setting details or the joint promotion of events. Working relationships with local authorities, however, were not always so strong, and some Hubs had to invest significant time building the local authority relationship. Hubs felt that some local authorities saw SPH as an overlap to their own professional development offer, had concerns about the gap left after the programme, or had a lack of connection because the Hub was based in a different local authority area. Hubs often could not get access to lists of local settings that local authorities held because of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which meant hand-building mailing lists from Google searches.

Hubs worked with a number of different parties (e.g. Experts and Mentors programme and Teaching School Hubs) to deliver the programme, and often with multiple local authorities across their area. Hubs felt the programme would have benefited from better pre-programme announcements and the investment of time to get all parties familiar with the programme and their roles, particularly with local authorities who were key in supporting the success of the programme.

The short time frame meant the programme had overlap of the design, set-up and delivery stages. This meant frustrating changes to requests and situations where Hubs had to re-work delivery plans and reports as the programme evolved.

More generally, Hubs felt too much time was spent on the programme monitoring requirements and financial management (in the Year 2 Survey, 11 Hubs said programme reporting was difficult while 4 said it was easy). The monitoring and financial

management requests felt disproportionate to the size and nature of the programme. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were set to reflect what could be achieved within the short time frame, but some Hubs did not feel they were sufficiently reflective of the work they were doing.

Across the programme, Hubs wanted more opportunities to learn from each other and from NCB's expertise as the central delivery partner. They valued the opportunities when they could share experiences together, but felt these opportunities were limited. Even within Hub partnerships it could be difficult to find the time to come together to discuss and develop plans.

Delivery against objectives

Hubs generally felt they had successfully delivered to the programme objectives:

- Proactively sharing information and advice on evidence-based approaches: all 18 Hubs felt they had been successful with this objective.
- Supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes: 17 Hubs felt they had been successful.
- Establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations: 16 Hubs felt they had been successful.
- Point of contact for bespoke advice, and signposting to other funded programmes: 15 hubs felt they had been successful.

The programme reached a large number of settings across the course of the programme delivery. By Quarter 8 (Q8) of the programme (October to December 2024), there were over 8,000 settings in network memberships, with 43% of these settings based in deprived areas². Further, over 2,000 settings had been recruited to the funded programmes agreed with EEF, which aimed to support the development and exemplification of evidence-based practices for the sector.

Relating to the focus on evidence-informed practice, **Hubs and settings were positive about the high quality of the professional development offered** through the SPH programme. However, at the outset Hubs had not realised how much of their budget would go on the evidence-based funded programmes compared with activities they would have preferred to offer to settings.

In terms of providing access to evidence-informed programmes, **the development of the Evidence Store was seen as a good legacy outcome of the programme**, and a valuable resource for the early years sector. The Store was developed over the

² This classification was based on the postcode of the setting which was categorised into a quintile of deprivation using the IDACI tool. The 43% applies to settings based the quintiles of 'most deprived' and 'deprived' areas.

programme and benefited from having more material on it during the second year of the programme. The exemplification videos were a particular success, providing an accessible channel for practitioners to see good practice in action. The content and language of the Store benefited from EEF's ability to work with a range of provider types (and charities) to make it less academic.

Response from the early years sector

Awareness levels were relatively good for the programme, and were similarly high across all setting types, including those in the most and least deprived areas. Data from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP) Pulse Survey in May 2024³ found that around two-thirds (66%) of all early years providers in England were aware of the SPH programme.

The evaluation found that the response of the early years sector to the SPH programme was positive. Settings engaged with the range of Hub activities, with many doing so on a repeated basis. Aside from signing-up to the regular newsletter, the most common forms of engagement were attending Hub webinars or receiving information about specific issues in the early years sector (73% of settings responding to the Post Survey) and reading blogs and social media news from their local Hub (70%). Although less common, two-in-five (41%) settings had used the online Evidence Store on at least one occasion, with the vast majority (79%) of users doing so on 3 or more occasions. Hubs also reported that engagement rates increased over the lifetime of the programme.

There appeared to be great appetite for settings to gain access to the funded training and professional support. Settings were most likely to have engaged with Hub's activities to benefit staff professional development (89%), to improve childcare provision (83%), to connect or network with other providers (63%), to get free advice (62%), and in terms of their own role as a mentor to others (60%). Childminders (CMs) responded well to the opportunity to engage in the networks that Hubs were facilitating.

Engagement levels with the Hub activities were good for settings based in more deprived areas. The Post Settings survey found that settings based in more deprived locations (the bottom two Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quintiles) were more likely to engage in a higher number of different Hub initiatives (73% had engaged with 3 or more types of initiatives, compared with 67% on average).⁴

Feedback from settings suggested that most felt the aims of the programme were clear, and they understood how their setting would benefit from engaging with the

³ [Pulse Surveys of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2024](#)

⁴ The different types of initiatives included in this calculation included: attending webinars, attending network meetings, using Evidence Store, receiving information about funding can access, attending evidence-informed training, receiving tailored or one-to-one support.

Hub. There was also high agreement that the activities that the settings engaged with were relevant (92%), high quality (90%), accessible (87%), and practical / actionable (88%). Hubs and settings felt that the settings were increasingly buying into the evidence-based approach and developing a strong understanding of the principles and benefits of it.

Some gaps in programme delivery were, however, identified. These were a lack of:

- Programmes and resources for working with children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) (and how to adjust for these children).
- Tailoring of support for childminders reflecting the uniqueness of their setup (i.e. often working with a small group of children of different ages),
- Programmes and resources for under 2 year olds.
- Child-led learning interactions. It was recognised these are difficult to capture as they are spontaneous, but there was a desire for more guidance around these, as they were more typical of day-to-day interactions with children in nursery settings.

Hubs were very creative in the format of their activities to ensure they were as accessible as possible (e.g. offering activities at different times of the day, in different formats, and through different channels). **Most settings, however, experienced one or more barriers to greater engagement with their local Hub.** These centred around the timings of the activities not working for them, geography or logistical challenges, and staff at the settings being too busy to engage. Settings based in more deprived areas gave higher than average mentions of difficulties around being too busy and concerns around securing staff for backfill.

Indicators of impact and outcomes

A high proportion of settings in the Post Survey (three-quarters, 74%) reported they had changed their practice following participation in the SPH programme. Many who had not done so at the time of the survey showed an intention of making practice changes in the future, leading to a further 12% who agreed they intended to make changes (some felt there had not yet been sufficient time to build in practice changes).

The more engagement a setting had had with different types of SPH activities, the more likely they were to have made practice changes, though causality of this cannot be proved. For example, the proportion making practice changes rose to 88% for settings who had engaged with 4 or more types of activity.

The incidence of making practice changes was high across all provider types.

Overall, there was no difference in the incidence of making practice changes by settings based in more deprived areas compared with their counterparts in less deprived areas

(76% and 77% respectively, using the IDACI measure), but settings in deprived areas had introduced a wider range of practice changes.

Settings that had made changes to their practices most commonly introduced new practice around supporting communication and language development practices (85% of those making practice changes). This was followed by the introduction of new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development (71%), developmental or language delays (62%) or mathematics development (55%). Although new practices around mathematics development were less common, this topic was rolled-out later in the programme. Settings based in more deprived areas (IDACI measure) were more likely to have made changes relating to both communication and language development (93% vs. 75% of those in less deprived areas) and mathematics development (62% vs. 50%).⁵

Settings generally agreed that making the changes to their practice were easy. The lowest rating was for introducing new practices around supporting communication and language development (58% of those making changes in this area said it was easy), with very few saying it was difficult (4%).

Most settings participating in the programme and completing the Post Survey reported that the programme had had a positive impact on children: 78% felt the communication and language development of the children in their setting had improved, 73% that the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) had improved, 62% that school readiness had improved, and 58% that early mathematics development had improved. Settings in deprived areas were more likely than average to report improvement in 3 of these 4 areas, namely communication and language development, school readiness and early mathematics development.

The majority of practice leaders felt the SPH programme had had benefits for their staff, with four-in-five saying it had improved staff skills (82% agreed) or staff practice (81%). The programme was not felt to improve staff retention, which qualitative evidence suggested was a more systemic issue for the sector.

The surveys also found positive signals of shifts in practitioner measured skill levels. The Baseline and Post Surveys among settings engaging with the programme included 21 measures of practitioners' confidence, knowledge and skills area. Comparisons between the two surveys saw a few positive shifts in these measures, with a greater shift and a higher number of positive shifts evident when the data was filtered on setting in more deprived areas (7 of the measures showed an increase in the proportion who 'strongly agreed' that they had the confidence, knowledge or skill area). Skills for individuals at settings would be expected to improve to some extent over the

⁵ 'More deprived' combines those settings located in areas ranked in the bottom two IDACI quintiles, while 'less deprived' combines those in the bottom two.

evaluation time period, and there was no counterfactual measure to assess these uplifts against, but these changes give a signal of positive shifts in skill levels. Of the 190 settings completing both the Baseline and Post survey, the highest skill-level increase was recorded for being confident interpreting evidence and applying evidence-informed approaches (a 13% net increase); improvement in this area was one of the key aims of the SPH programme (see [Introduction](#)).

There was evidence of some intended legacy impact from the programme. Most settings making practice changes intended for them to be permanent (92%), and most said they would continue to engage with other local settings to share best practice (87%). EEF intend to continue to build the Evidence Store away from SPH branding, with the Evidence Store benefiting from videos of evidence-based practice that is accessible to those working in early years. That said, most Hubs (17 out of the 18 Hubs) ‘strongly’ disagreed that the length of the programme was sufficient to have a lasting impact on the sector.

Conclusions

The SPH programme was an ambitious programme aimed at generating change with the challenge of setting up and delivering in a short space of time. Nevertheless, **some strong achievements have been realised.**

The evaluation findings suggest that there have been behaviour changes achieved by the programme (equating to Level 3 changes of the Kirkpatrick Model)⁶. A high proportion of settings (74%) who engaged with the programme and responded to the Post Survey had made changes to their practice as a result of the programme.

The programme reached settings from areas of deprivation. This was evidenced by the Management Information data on network membership, and survey data that showed settings based in the more deprived IDACI areas engaged with a greater range of different types of Hub activities. Overall, the proportion of settings making practice changes was similarly high for settings in deprived areas and less deprived areas. Settings in more deprived areas, however, introduced practice changes in a greater number of areas.

Most settings completing the Post Survey felt their involvement with the programme had had a positive impact on children in their care, and there were reported increases in confidence, knowledge and skills levels of practitioner staff who had taken part in SPH activities (measured by the survey and expressed in interviews). A higher level of improvements in a range of child development areas were recorded by settings based in deprived areas.

⁶ Summary of the model is shown in the Conclusion Chapter (Figure 18. Summary Kirkpatrick Model).

Across the evaluation there were many positive stories about the response of the sector to the programme, the high-quality level of training delivered, and the benefit of the programme in helping to recognise childminders within the early years sector. Most settings who engaged with programme activities rated them highly. Many also engaged with the activities on multiple occasions, including the Evidence Store.

Overall, the evaluation indicated an appetite for funded professional development and the opportunity to network across settings. The evaluation, however, did find that most settings experienced barriers to greater participation, despite Hubs being creative in the format and channels on offer.

The evaluation found support for the Hub model as a way to improve professional practice in the early years sector. This, together with the positive outcomes from the programme, suggest there should be consideration of the Hub (or similar) model to continue to support the sector. Ideally any similar programme would be of a longer length to ensure the reach and embedment of evidence-based practice. Otherwise, the main themes cited as areas for improvement included:

- **Upfront planning, and discussions with parties that Hubs would need to liaise with**, particularly ensuring local authorities lend support to the programme.
- **More collaborative process** for the measurement of key performance indicators and monitoring requirements to engender full buy-in and efficiency to the process.
- **Reducing and streamlining reporting** requests and aligning budget to the academic rather than fiscal year (and/or ensuring financial skills capacity is built into the Hub make-up).
- **Generating a learning community** of Hubs to improve learning and co-ordination across regions and to minimise any duplication of effort (while retaining the tailoring of materials to local needs).
- **Consideration of location and/or number of Hubs in each region**, or use of more satellite locations, to reduce distance between the Hubs and the settings they are working with, and/or more alignment with local authorities in the region.
- Consideration of how to **support staff to be freed-up to attend the professional workforce training**, either with greater in-house models or backfill support.

Introduction

The earliest years are a crucial point of child development and attending early years education lays the foundation for lifelong learning. Higher quality early years education in particular is associated with better child outcomes at age 7, especially for those children who are from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted children's opportunities for early learning. The majority of under 5s missed out on the rich and varied experiences of formal childcare when settings closed from March to June 2020 to all children except those classed as vulnerable and the children of key workers. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) reported in 2022 that parents and schools perceived that school-starters in September 2020 were developmentally disadvantaged due to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to starting Reception, schools reported that the main areas of concern were personal, social, and emotional development, communication and language, literacy, and maths. At the end of the school year, overall concerns had reduced but schools were still worried about literacy, personal, social, and emotional development, and communication and language.⁸

To tackle this, in June 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the Early Years Education Recovery funding, a package of up to £180m of support to help the sector recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ The package consisted of several strands of work, one of which was the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme. This EYER package was designed for early years practitioners, leaders and settings and aimed to:

- Offer training in child development; communication and language, early mathematics, and personal social and emotional development (PSED); Nuffield Early Language Intervention; leadership of settings; and supporting caregivers in the home learning environment.
- Provide additional funding for graduate-level specialist training leading to early years teacher status; accredited level 3 early years special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) qualifications; and a review of the level 3 qualification and criteria.
- Provide support and guidance through Stronger Practice Hubs and expert coaches and mentors.

⁷ [Study of early education and development \(SEED\): impact study on early education use and child outcomes up to age 7 years](#)

⁸ [The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's socio-emotional wellbeing and attainment during the Reception Year](#)

⁹ [Education recovery support - GOV.UK](#)

Most of these elements have been evaluated separately, and **this report presents findings from a process evaluation of the Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme.**

The SPH programme was launched in November 2022 and was a new initiative to be delivered across a two year period. **The aim of the programme was to support settings to address the impact of the pandemic on young children**, by ‘strong’ early years (EY) settings (named Hubs) sharing good practice and creating lasting local networks. The SPH programme was set-up at a fast pace, with the programme initially designed to last for 2 years.

Established early years (EY) providers (schools-based providers (SBP) or private, voluntary, or independent (PVI) settings) with ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ Ofsted ratings were encouraged to apply to become a Hub. In total, 18 Stronger Practice Hubs in England were established. The Hubs were distributed across England, with 2 Hubs in each of the 9 English Government Office Regions. Each Hub comprised a lead setting and up to 4 partners¹⁰.

Hubs were recruited in 2 waves; 12 Hubs were recruited by November 2022, with a further 6 Hubs established and with agreed delivery plans by end September 2023. For this second wave of Hubs, this meant a short operational period of around 14 months before the original planned deadline of the programme (November 2024), although subsequently the programme was extended until end March 2025.

The intention of the Hubs was to support other EY settings in their area to adopt evidence-based improvements. This support was to be focused to settings and children in most need due to COVID-19, with a particular focus on supporting children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. And, more specifically, to focus on areas of development that research had shown to be most impacted by COVID-19, namely personal social and emotional development (PSED), communication and language, early literacy and mathematics. Hubs would support other early years settings in their local area by:

- Sharing information and advice on evidence-based practices, for example, through newsletters, blogs, and social media (i.e., proactive support)
- Acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice (including to those settings referred by experts and mentors), and facilitating access to the evidence-based programmes identified by EEF, or signposting to other funded support (including other strands of the EYER package) (i.e., reactive support)

¹⁰ [Early years stronger practice hubs - GOV.UK](#)

- Establishing local networks of early years settings in which knowledge and effective practice is shared

In the first year of the programme the intention was for Hubs to support settings within their own local authority area (described as ‘their home area’), with this reach extended in the second year to support settings in a wider region.

Alongside the Department for Education (DfE), the 2 partners in the delivery of the SPH programme were the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) and EEF.

The NCB was appointed as the ‘delivery partner’ for the programme, with the following responsibilities:

- Lead the implementation of SPH programme, including recruitment process
- Lead day-to-day delivery of SPH programme
- Develop and cultivate one-to-one relationships with Hubs, including conducting monthly 1:1s with Hubs
- Lead on development and execution of Hubs’ delivery plans
- Manage and coordinate Hubs’ reporting requirements

The EEF were appointed as the ‘evidence partner’ for the programme, with the following responsibilities:

- Support NCB with their work with the Hubs using expertise in evidence mobilisation
- Develop a framework to support Hubs with understanding the evidence around early years pedagogy
- Develop a curated list of programmes from which Hubs can support access to (by funding places) or signpost settings to

Evaluation aims

The aim of this process evaluation, undertaken by IFF Research, was to understand how the Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been implemented and to understand how staff and leaders in other EY settings have responded to the offer of advice and support from a local Hub. More specifically the research questions to address were:

- What were the experiences of the stakeholders of the Hubs programme?
- What level and type of advice and support do Hubs offer EY settings in practice, and how does this compare across regions?

- To what extent do EY settings engage with Hubs, and do their characteristics differ from those who do not engage?
- Do staff and leaders in EY settings that engage with Hubs report changes in their knowledge, confidence, and practice?

Data and insight from this evaluation is being combined with that collected from the other separate evaluations of the strands of the EYER package to inform an overarching evaluation of the EYER package.

Methodology

The evaluation of the SPH programme was undertaken across a two year period, with evaluation activities undertaken to respond to the roll-out of the programme and to allow evaluation findings to build iteratively. The evaluation used a mixed methods research approach that comprised:

- A quantitative semi-structured survey fielded to Hubs shortly after they had been set-up (Year 1 Survey), and then a further survey fielded to Hubs towards the end of the second year of the programme (Year 2 Survey). All 18 Hubs completed both surveys.
- A quantitative survey fielded to settings shortly after they had engaged with a Hub (the Baseline Survey, completed by 533 settings), and then a further survey fielded around 9 months later to understand the outcomes of the programme (the Post Survey, completed by 630 settings).
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups with the National Children's Bureau (NCB) (the programme delivery partner), the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (the evidence partner), Hubs, and settings. Across the programme, 45 depth interviews were completed (7 NCB, 3 EEF, 13 Hubs, 22 settings) alongside 9 focus groups (2 NCB, 3 EEF, 4 Hubs).

Quantitative elements

Hubs – Year 1 Survey

The focus of the Year 1 Hub survey was on the application and set-up processes of becoming a Hub, and the early stage activities being undertaken to engage local settings in the programme. This survey was completed by the first cohort of 12 Hubs between 30th May and 12th July 2023, and the second cohort of 6 Hubs between 20th December 2023 and 22nd April 2024. The survey was sent to the lead setting for the Hub. As all 18 Hubs completed the survey, data were not weighted as findings were representative of the entire Hub population.

Hubs – Year 2 Survey

The Year 2 survey was designed to explore the longer-term experiences of Hubs now that they were in the second year of programme delivery. The Year 2 Survey was fielded to all 18 Hubs on 8th August 2024, with Hubs given until 27th September 2024 to complete the survey. As above, data were not weighted, and the survey was completed by the lead setting for the Hub.

Settings – Baseline Survey

Initially, the Baseline survey was only fielded to settings who had an active form of engagement with their Hub (e.g. attending meetings or events, receiving one-to-one support or using the Evidence Store), but in December 2023 the sample was broadened to include Hubs that had signed-up for newsletters and blogs but had otherwise not undertaken any specific Hub activities. It was felt that these newsletters and blogs were stand-alone comprehensive and insightful resources of information, and therefore additional value could be gained by widening the survey base to allow experiences with these more passive forms of engagement to be captured.

The survey was predominantly conducted online, although with some telephone interviewing between 7th February and 9th March 2024. The sample for the survey was provided by 17 Hubs¹¹ participating in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme, and included settings who had engaged with a Hub from the start of the programme until end March 2024. The survey was conducted on a rolling monthly basis, as new settings engaged with their Hub.

A total of 6,866 settings were sent an invitation to the Baseline survey, and 533 settings completed the survey (a response rate of 8%). A response rate of 11% was achieved for settings who were categorised as 'active/ engaged settings' in the sample provided by Hubs, and 2% for settings who were newsletter subscribers only on the sample.

Questions were included in the survey to check the information held about the setting and to collect missing profile data (e.g. type of setting, size of setting), including the types of Hub activities they had engaged with. It is the responses to these questions which are used for reporting any sub-groups within this report.

Survey data have been weighted, with the main purpose of this weighting to bring the profile of engaged settings in line with the population profile of engaged settings invited to the survey, in respect of Hub group and provider type (based on sample information).

¹¹ One Hub did not provide contact details for their settings, and therefore the settings who engaged with this Hub would not be included in the Settings survey.

Settings – Post Survey

After an elapsed period of around nine months since their initial engagement, settings were invited to complete a post-interventions survey to gather feedback on their experience of the programme and assess changes in their skills, practices, and outcomes. Fieldwork for this post-intervention survey started in March 2024, was paused for the pre-election period, began again in July 2024, and continued until mid-November 2024.

All settings who had been invited to the Baseline survey were invited to the Post Survey (excepting, for example, where they had opted out of further mailings). In total 6,727 settings were invited to take part in the post-interventions survey, with 630 completing the survey (271 via telephone and 359 online). This represents a final overall response rate of 9%. Post Survey data were weighted using the same method as used for Baseline Survey data, outlined above. 190 settings completed both the Baseline and Post Surveys, meaning that some longitudinal analysis could be undertaken to establish any changes in settings confidence, skills and knowledge. This analysis is explored in the chapter that covers Indicators of impact and outcome.

Qualitative elements

NCB and EEF – Depth interviews and group discussions

In each of the first and second years of the Evaluation, interviews and focus groups discussions were held with NCB and EEF.

Initial interviews with NCB and EEF took place in April 2023 and comprised 4 interviews with NCB (each conducted online via Microsoft Teams) and 1 group discussion with EEF (in-person, 3 attendees). These interviews were designed to cover the background to the Stronger Practice Hubs, expectations for the Hubs, the experience of setting up and implementing the Hubs, early working relationships, identified challenges and plans to address them and early successes at this stage.

A second stage of interviews was conducted in July and August 2024. These comprised 3 interviews with NCB and 3 interviews with EEF (all online). These interviews were designed to cover any changes to the programme management or context; the activities of the programme; observed outcomes of the programme; partnership working across DfE, NCB, EEF, and local authorities; reflections on the programme and thoughts on its legacy.

Both at the end of the first year of the programme, and the second year, a group discussion was held with each of the NCB and EEF teams. This was to assess their experiences of the programme since the interviews, and to provide an end-of-year assessment to support some findings of this evaluation. The first year group interviews

took place in January 2024, and the second year group interviews in November and December 2024.

The interviews and group discussions typically lasted for around one hour.

Hubs – Depth interviews and group discussions

In each of the first and second year of the Evaluation, depth interviews were conducted with Hubs to hear about their experiences of the SPH programme. Six interviews were held in Year 1 and 7 interviews in Year 2, with different Hubs selected for interview in the second year compared with the first year. The interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and were conducted in August and September 2023, and then between September and October 2024. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each.

These interviews were further supported through the conduct of 2 group discussions at the end of the first year of the programme, and a further 2 group discussions at the end of the second year of the programme. All Hubs were invited to attend one or other of these groups, with 14 Hubs represented in the first year groups and 11 Hubs in the second year groups. Groups were held in February 2024 and December 2024.

A discussion guide was used for these interviews and focus groups to cover the experiences of being a Hub and managing the programme, the activities run and the engagement that they have seen, the outcomes of the programme and, in the second year of the programme, closing reflections on the potential legacy of the programme.

Settings – Depth interviews

A total of 22 depth interviews were conducted with settings. Some of these were conducted as a baseline and follow-up interview with settings. This applied to 6 settings with interviews conducted in October 2023 and April-May 2024. The rest of the interviews were conducted in the second year of the programme, and were split to cover settings who had more actively engaged with the programme (6 interviews) or were lesser engaged (4 interviews). These interviews were conducted between October 2024 and February 2025. All interviews were recruited off the back of the online survey, and were conducted online via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes each.

A discussion guide for the settings was used to cover the experiences of the settings' engagement with Hubs and the impacts and outcomes that this engagement had on their setting as well as overall reflections on the programme and its likely legacy. For those settings who had engaged less with their Hub, the interview explored why engagement levels were lower and what might have encouraged further engagement.

Structure of the report

This report is structured as follows:

Implementation of the programme

This chapter reports on the operational experience of delivering the SPH programme, covering the stages from recruitment and set-up in the first year to ongoing delivery of the programme across the second year. The chapter focuses on the experience of Hubs, although it also draws on the reflections from the NCB and EEF in the set-up and operationalisation of the programme and the development of the Evidence Store. The section also provides details of the activities undertaken by Hubs, identifying which they felt were particularly helpful in achieving their objectives.

Response from the early years sector

This chapter summarises the findings of the evaluation in relation to the response of the sector to the SPH programme. It covers the level of awareness in the sector of the programme, the forms of engagement, drivers and barriers to engagement and satisfaction from settings in respect of their experience of programme.

Perceptions of impact

This chapter focuses on the impact of the SPH programme upon settings and Hubs and looks to explore some of the outcomes experienced. To do this, the chapter looks at the changes which settings made to their practice following participation in Hub activities; any benefits engaging with the SPH programme had on settings; and the impact the programme had on staff confidence, knowledge and skills. The chapter also explores the potential legacy of the programme.

Reporting conventions

For quantitative findings from surveys with early years settings, results are presented as a proportion of 'settings', unless the finding in question came from a specific subset of the settings population (e.g. practice managers) in which case this is made clear in the text. This is followed by discussion of difference among key subgroups of interest. The key subgroups include, but are not limited to:

- Provider type (SBPs, PVIs or CMs)
- Deprivation level (based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) or Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures)
- Proportion of children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)
- Proportion of early years pupil premium (EYPP) children at the setting
- Settings' level of engagement with programme (how many Hub activities they engaged with)

Quantitative survey findings among Hubs are reported as whole integers, not percentages, due to the low number of total Hubs (18).

Qualitative findings are used throughout this report and are denoted by separate paragraphs, quotation marks, and the source noted below the quotation itself.

Some external data sources (management information (MI) data supplied by NCB and data from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP) Pulse Survey in May 2024¹² has been used in this report to complement findings from this Evaluation.

¹² [Pulse Surveys of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2024](#)

Implementation of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

This chapter reports on the operational experience of delivering the Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme, covering the stages from recruitment and set-up in the first year to ongoing delivery of the programme across the second year. The chapter focuses on the experience of Hubs, although it also draws on the reflections from the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

Key findings

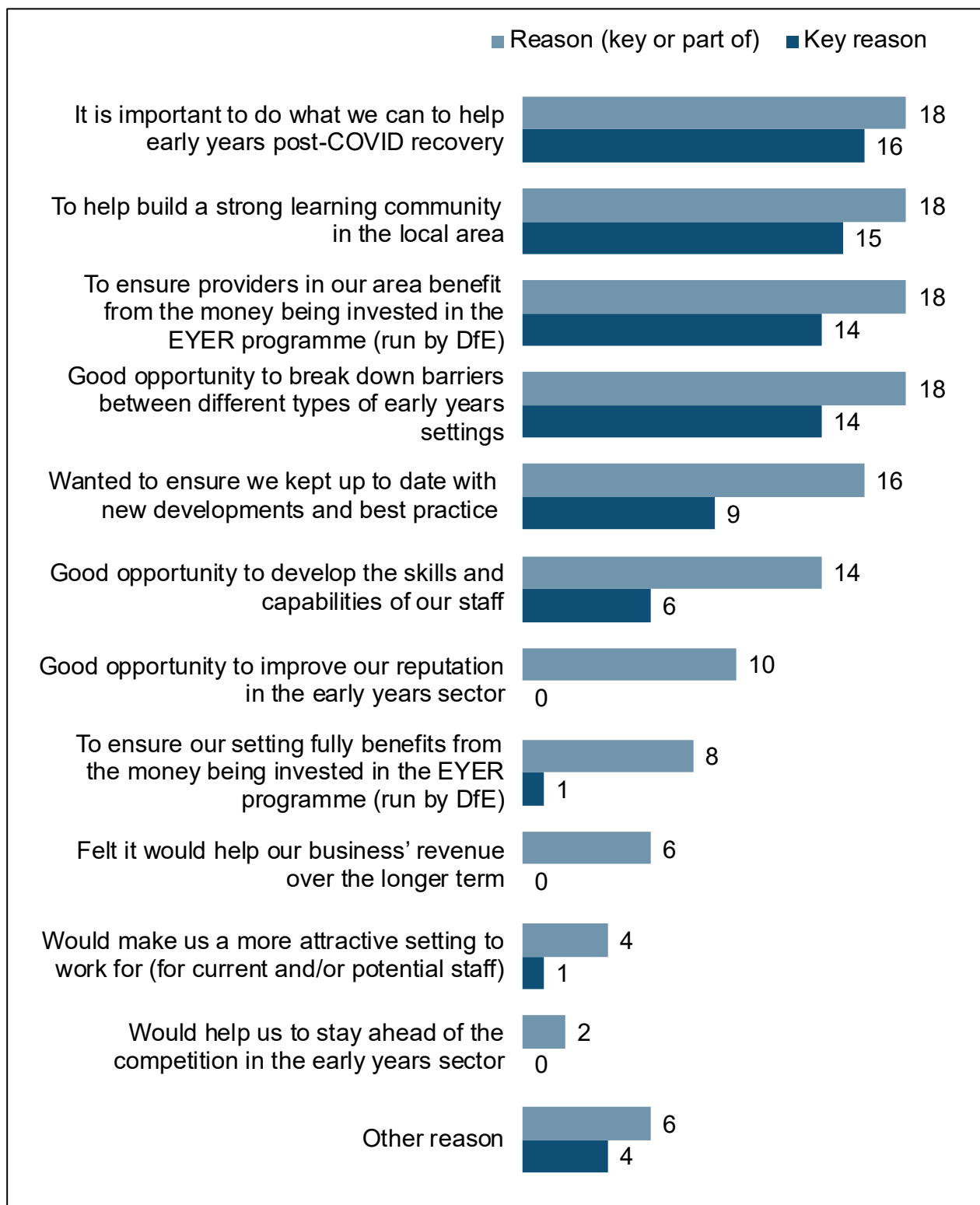
- Overall, NCB, EEF and Hubs were proud to have been part of the SPH programme and felt a lot had been achieved in a short period. The programme was seen as helping to reignite passion in the early years sector and recognising the contribution of childminders in early years. Good steps had also been made in respect of bringing evidence-informed practice to the sector. The Evidence Store was seen as a good legacy outcome of the programme.
- The Hub model was seen as the right fit for the early years sector, being peer-led by working practitioners with relevant expertise, responsive to local needs, and inclusive of all types of providers. The model helped to unite a fractured sector by building and maintaining networks across settings.
- SPH was set-up at a fast pace, and there were challenges with the short time period from recruitment to set-up. This meant that planning and delivery needs overlapped and created some situations of re-work for Hubs.
- Hubs felt too much time was spent on the programme monitoring requirements, and the financial management caused difficulties. The monitoring and financial management requests felt disproportionate to the size and nature of the programme.
- Existing relationships, particularly with LAs, were a key enabler in the set-up process, particularly given the speed of programme implementation.
- Experience of running similar programmes in collaboration with the Department for Education (DfE) was also a key enabler.
- There were good working relationships between the parties delivering SPH, and their dedication and commitment contributed to success. However, improved relationships (e.g. with LAs) could have been supported through better pre-programme announcements and discussions. Hubs also wanted more opportunities to learn from each other and from NCB's expertise as the central Delivery Partner.
- There was a strong recognition that all parties had worked hard to deliver the programme and that the level of commitment from all had contributed to its success.

Motivations for being a Hub

Motivations for being a Hub aligned with the programme objectives of supporting the early years sector. As shown in Figure 1 all Hubs wanted to help the early years sector recover from the COVID-19 impact, to build a strong learning community in the local area, to break down barriers between different types of settings, and to ensure their area benefited from the Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) funds.

Reasons for being a Hub were not, however, solely altruistic. Most Hubs also saw it as a good opportunity to keep up-to-date with new developments, to develop the skills/capabilities of their own staff, and to be able to improve their own reputation in the early years sector.

Figure 1. Reason for choosing to apply to be a Hub



B1. To what extent were the following reasons for choosing to apply to be a Hub?
 Base: All Hubs (Year 1 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Hubs echoed many of these points in the qualitative interviews but also spoke about the end-benefits for children, raising the profile of the sector and providing support for providers, specifically childminders, who had had little support over recent years.

“It helps the settings but ultimately it supports the children... have the best education and support possible. It’s about the children that are at the middle of this.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

“I’ve always wanted to dispel the rumour – we’re not just local mums. We’ve chosen this career and worked really hard at it. Raising the view of the public towards early years education.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

“We have experience of it, and we were in a great position. We had lots of understanding of evidence-based approaches. We knew how important it was. The sector is so fragmented, so the idea of being able to support all different elements, to bring everything together and upskill everyone was really attractive.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

“It’s also to invest particularly into some of those areas that have had absolutely no support, and have no meaningful partnership at all, particularly childminders, who’ve had nothing.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

Application and set-up processes for being a Hub

Application process

Views on the overall application process for becoming a Hub were mixed; 6 Hubs described it as easy, and 8 Hubs said it was difficult. Most Hubs who thought the process was difficult tended to rate it as ‘moderately’ difficult (7) rather than ‘very’ difficult (1).

During the application process, Hubs found it easy (very or fairly) to demonstrate their settings’ competencies according to the DfE selection criteria.

“When we applied to do it, we knew exactly what we were applying for and why and what would be required. All of that was really clear, starting with the webinar at the very start, and all the way through.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

All but one Hub said it was easy to demonstrate their abilities in respect of sharing excellent practice, building networks and partnerships, having the necessary capacity, and being able to understand and exemplify evidence-informed practice. The Hub that found this difficult, appeared to have had less experience of evidence-informed practice.

“As a setting we were not using many evidence-based programmes at the time of application - so it was difficult to demonstrate our use of them!”

– *Hub, Year 1 Survey*

The aspects of the application process that Hubs felt worked well included:

- Clear expectations and criteria for success in the application.
- The application form being “easy and convenient” to complete as it was online, and they could save progress and complete in stages.
- The opportunity to work collectively with stakeholders, partners, and existing networks to prepare information to support their bids.
- The face-to-face interview and in-person visit as it gave Hubs the opportunity to present their capabilities and understanding effectively.

Hubs valued aspects of the application set-up that provided space to showcase their capabilities and were less satisfied with elements that restricted this. The Hub that said the process of sharing excellent practice in the application process was difficult indicated that both the limit in the form, and the time restrictions, constrained what they were able to showcase.

“It is hard to demonstrate effectively [...] within the word limit (much of what we had to say had to be cut out to meet the limit). Similarly interviews were very restricted for time given the responsibilities to be placed on the Hubs.”

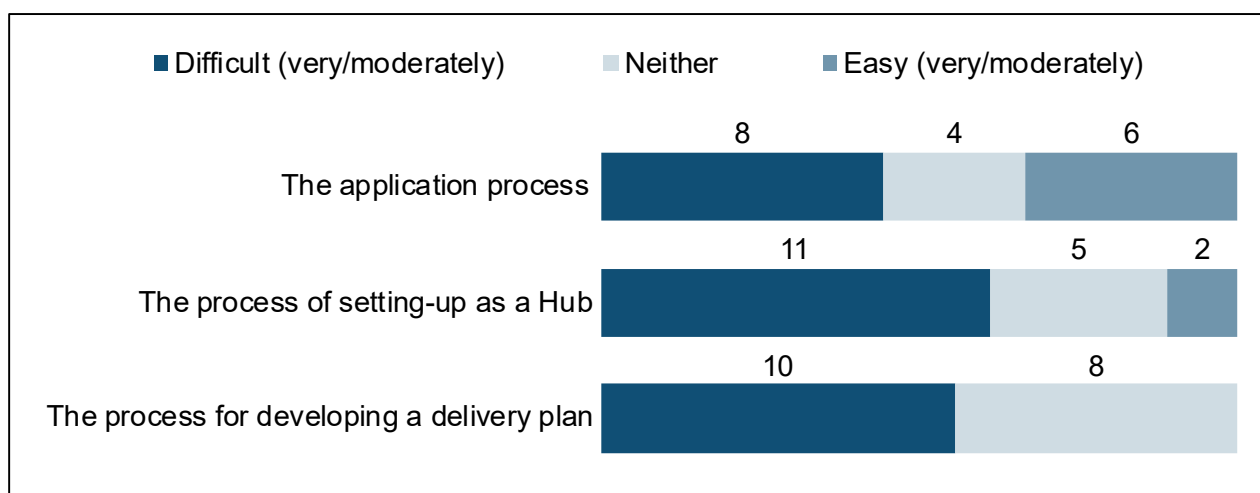
– *Hub, Year 1 Survey*

Aside from the difficulties of condensing all evidence into the application form, **Hubs pointed to some challenges around the timescales and deadlines for the application process.** Some Hubs felt the process was time-consuming, lengthy and intense. Others mentioned insufficient time for each of the stages of the application process, and difficulties of managing the process around annual leave. There was some uncertainty about the timings for each stage and the difficulty therefore with determining how much administrative support to bring in.

Setting-up process

The process of setting-up as a Hub and for developing a delivery plan was more challenging, compared with the application process. Eleven Hubs said the set-up process was difficult (of which 4 said it was ‘very’ difficult). 10 said the process for developing their delivery plan was difficult (of which 2 said it was ‘very difficult’), and none said it was easy (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ease of application and set-up processes for being a Hub



C1. Generally speaking, how easy or difficult were the following processes...?

Base: All Hubs (Year 1 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Facilitators to the set-up process

Hubs felt that previous experience of running similar programmes to SPH or working with DfE was a real benefit in respect of the initial set-up of the SPH programme. This meant they had systems or procedures from previous programmes that could be built upon, or existing relationships that could be capitalised. These relationships were among partners in the Hubs, or with other settings within or outside of their local authority.

“We had very strong existing partnerships, and good local and regional connections with schools, PVI providers and less so with childminders.”

– Hub, Year 1 Survey

“The infrastructure of running a Hub was already in place. [We] already have the teaching schools Hub and Maths Hub.”

– Hub, Year 1 Survey

NCB reflected that there were a lot of systems and structures to put in place for this programme which ultimately impacted on the amount of time that Hubs had for

operational delivery. Hubs however acknowledged the value of the support they received from NCB at this stage, in the form of clear guidance and regular communication.

In nearly all Hubs, the partnerships or relationship of settings were pre-existing; this was felt to be of great benefit to them when creating themselves as a Hub.

Hubs talked about having a collaborative working relationship within their partnerships and operating with a shared vision and commitment to the local area. They valued the opportunity to share expertise and knowledge among different types of providers (school-based providers (SBPs), private, voluntary or independent (PVI) and childminders (CMs)), and felt the opportunity to draw on different specialisms and expertise across the partnership helped to drive better outcomes from the programme.

“It was a natural partnership. We’ve always worked hand in hand and when this opportunity came up to be a Hub, we continue to work hand in hand.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

“This joint working has offered a range of perspectives when offering support, network activity and training. Our partnership covers 2 local authorities, which also give a different perspective and local availability. We have established a good working relationship with our partners which has enabled us to deal with any minor challenges with ease.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

Challenges to the set-up process

In terms of any difficulties at this early stage, Hubs most commonly talked about the constraints of time, with 14 Hubs saying the short gap between recruitment to set-up was a challenge (Figure 3). This was the case for both wave 1 Hubs (9 Hubs expressed this as a challenge, out of the 12 wave 1 Hubs) and wave 2 Hubs (5 out of the 6 Hubs). Playing into this challenge was finding time for the partnership of settings within Hubs to work together. Hubs said this was made difficult at times as partnership settings had to balance the programme with meeting other work commitments, with time constraints specifically mentioned in terms of childminder and PVI settings. The physical distance between the partnership settings was also a challenge at times in terms of finding ways to meet or for making decisions rapidly when needed.

“Physical distance between our partner settings is a problem as it makes it difficult to meet centrally (we cover 4 LA's). It is challenging when we need to make quick decisions and our partners are often busy.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Survey*

Other commonly mentioned challenges, cited by half of the Hubs, were:

- the need to recruit or reallocate staff to the programme;
- finding out about the profile and needs of settings in their local area; and
- the contract and paperwork involved.

Figure 3. Challenges in the setting-up process



C8. Which of the following aspects, if any, were particular challenges of setting-up as a Hub? Base: All Hubs (Year 1 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Half of the Hubs mentioned an ‘other’ challenge that was not included in the pre-coded list on the Year 1 Survey. These mentions included the release of information and lack of clear guidance around data management, KPIs and finance, with Hubs wanting the details on these aspects earlier in the set-up process.

“Delay in NCB producing key documents such as QA Framework, data management information requirements which meant we were developing documents without guidance and are being asked to change them.”

– Hub, Year 1 Survey

In interviews, first wave Hubs speculated that the second wave Hubs would benefit from the work that went into the first round of set-up. This was the case to some extent, and some second round Hubs reported to have good relationships with other

Hubs in their region which was helpful to them. EEF also felt that the new Hubs benefitted from the working foundation that had been developed for the first Hubs.

Development of delivery plans

Hubs used local and regional intelligence and contacts to inform their delivery plan, often working with their local authority. They also made use of the expertise and knowledge from the different types of settings within their Hub partnership through activities such as “partnership days”. Having strong working relationships with various stakeholders, and within the partnerships, reinforced Hubs’ understanding of local needs and was a key enabler for Hubs to develop their plans. Some Hubs also ran information sessions, workshops and fielded surveys with local area settings to develop their needs-analysis for the local area. This consultation with settings to develop the programme of activities continued throughout the programme.

“The opportunity to hold focus groups and form networks has helped us really tease out what it is that people need.”

– Hub, Year 1 Interview

In terms of the development of delivery plans, **Hubs said this was made difficult through the lack of guidance and clear expectations early in the process** of what was needed. Consequently, there was some dissatisfaction in having to re-work plans to new templates as monitoring measures and KPIs were introduced and refined.

“We are happy with our plan now, but the process was tricky in the first three months. Especially, as a result of the pace of national rollout, the paperwork kept developing over time which meant we had to review plans and review our CRM (customer relationship management) set up for example. Ideally, we would have liked all the paperwork at the start.”

– Hub, Year 1 Survey

“The expectation to develop a plan without clear guidance was a challenge [...] the short time frame before EEF programmes were allocated impacted upon the delivery plan and was not accounted for as a risk.”

– Hub, Year 1 Survey

Hubs also mentioned dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the delivery plans they had to work to. They felt there was a high level of scrutiny of their capabilities during the application process to judge them as a ‘quality’ provider, and therefore they felt they should have been given more freedom in the shaping of their plans. Aligned with this, many also felt there was a disconnect between the funded programmes they were allocated and what the main needs-based priorities were for settings in their region.

“The lack of clear guidance and infrastructure was a challenge and amongst other things this meant we didn’t appreciate the lack of autonomy in how we run the Hub, which was not clear at the outset.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Survey*

“Our hands have been tied, because we’ve been needing to prioritise doing work in the space of the things that the EEF decided needed to be done and some of those things are perfectly useful, but we know that leadership is an issue, and staff and retention, and SEND and neurodiversity, but we can’t do much about that because our hands have been tied.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

Monitoring KPIs

As part of the set-up of the Hubs, local monitoring KPIs were set for the Hubs, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Monitoring KPIs for Hubs

Objective 1: Reach
20% of HOME settings received/opened newsletter
10% of WIDER settings received/opened newsletter (introduced Q5, Jan 2024)
Minimum 1 output per month on SPH website (introduced Q5, Jan 2024)
Objective 2: Network
Network membership comprises 20% of SBPs
Network membership comprises 20% of PVIs
Network membership comprises 20% of CMs
10% HOME settings engaged in network activity
5% WIDER settings engaged in network activity (introduced Q5, Jan 2024)
Objective 3: Advice
90% queries responded to within 5 working days
Objective 4: Recruitment
90% available places signed-up, agreed with EEF

Hubs had some criticism of these monitoring KPIs during the qualitative interviews, although **NCB felt that they were appropriate and realistic** given the short programme time. Overall, 16 Hubs in the Year 1 Survey felt the KPIs were ‘appropriate’, although

opinion tended to veer towards them being ‘fairly’ appropriate (12 Hubs) rather than ‘very’ appropriate (4 Hubs). Two Hubs felt the KPIs were ‘not very’ appropriate.

In terms of criticism of the KPIs, some Hubs found them demoralising as they were not sufficiently reflective of the full work and contribution they were making. They would have liked greater opportunity to input to the design of the KPIs to ensure they aligned with their intended outcomes. As examples, Hubs felt the KPIs focused on base outputs (i.e. number of newsletters opened), rather than activity impact. This was compounded by the fact that it was difficult to be sure of the accuracy of the percentage measures in respect of ‘percentage of home settings or wider settings reached’ when it was difficult to measure both the open-rate of newsletter, or to know the number of settings in their localities (i.e. the denominator number for the percentage calculation).

“If I’m being picked up on the actual percentage of settings that I’m engaging with in my home area, I need to know that the number I’m being measured against is accurate.”

– Hub, Year 1 focus group

Complaints also centred on the KPIs not recognising all of the good work the Hubs were doing. For example, in the first year, with the focus of the KPIs on their home area, some Hubs felt the work they were doing outside of their home area was not being sufficiently recognised. Others talked about how health visitors or local authorities would attend their training and benefit from it (using any spare places) but this could not be recognised.

Operational delivery of the programme

NCB and EEF delivery

The delivery of the programme was implemented by NCB, EEF and Hubs. Early in the programme delivery, NCB recognised that the programme would need more resources to manage than anticipated, as it was an evolving programme and there was the need to design and develop aspects such as KPIs and quality assurances. Additional capacity was added to the NCB team in the first year.

EEF were able to respond to the capacity needs for the programme but felt they would have benefited from a more direct and integrated relationship with Hubs in the early stages of the programme. Limited information on Hubs’ practitioner skills made it slightly more difficult to know how to pitch their messages or where to focus content. EEF had to develop some content for the Evidence Store before Hubs were commissioned, although as the programme progressed they worked together with Hubs to co-create content.

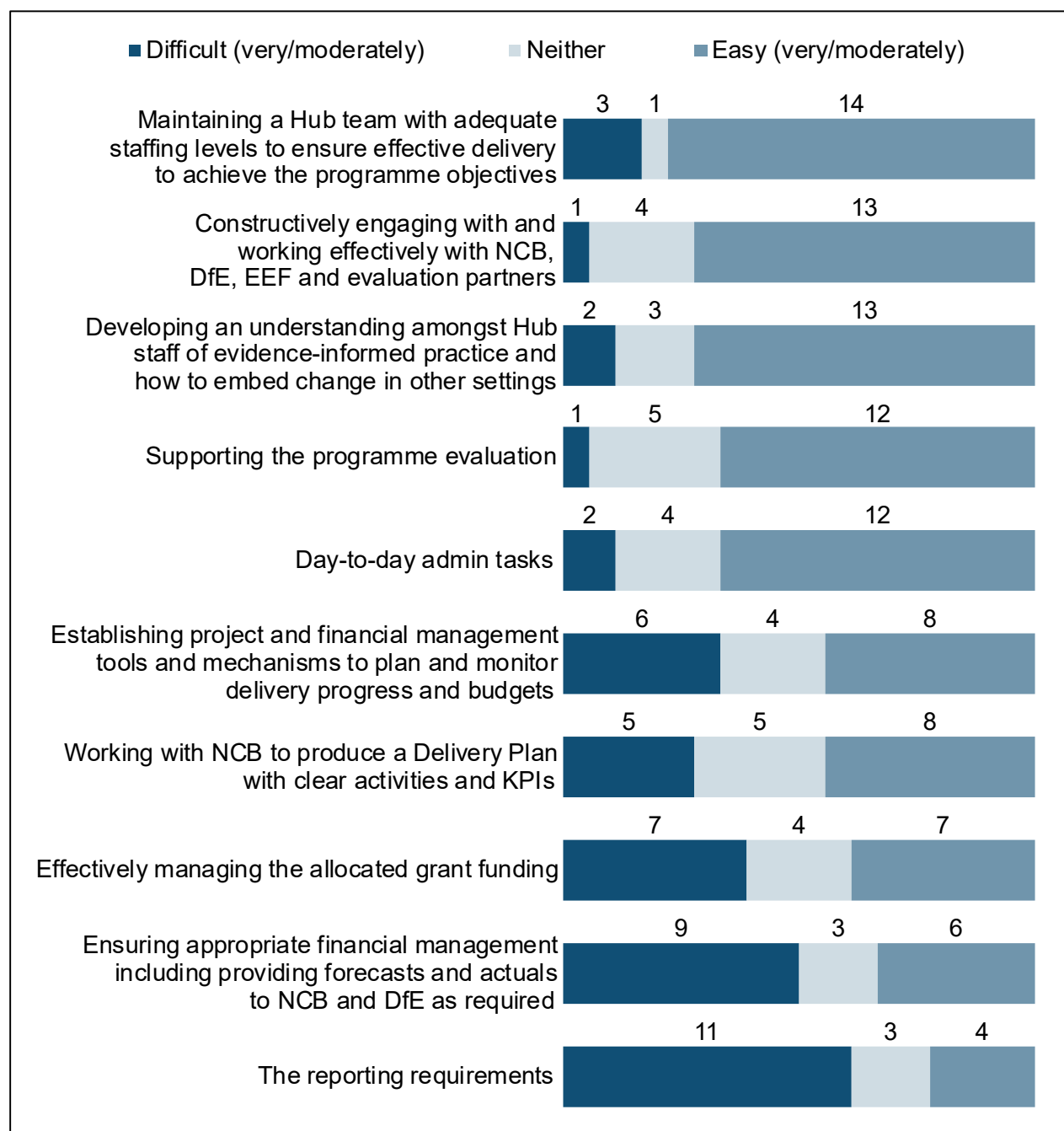
Overall, however, NCB and EEF both appeared to be clear about the scope of their responsibilities and roles in the programme, so avoided duplicating efforts and maintained clear lines of communication and reporting for the Hubs.

Hub delivery

For Hubs, there were some operational challenges in delivering SPH. Positively, as shown in Figure 4, most Hubs felt it was easy to maintain a Hub team with adequate staffing levels (14 Hubs), constructively work with delivery partners (13), develop staff understanding of evidence-informed practice and how to embed change in other settings (13), support the programme evaluation (12) and deliver on day-to-day tasks (12).

Conversely, however, the majority of Hubs (11) found the reporting requirements to be difficult. Related to this, half the Hubs (9) found appropriate financial management, such as providing forecasts and actuals to NCB and DfE, to be difficult, and 7 Hubs felt that effectively managing the allocated grant funding was difficult. The difficulties around the reporting requirements and financial management were felt to be driven by the volume of NCB and DfE reporting requests, exacerbated by the tight time frame of the programme.

Figure 4. Ease of delivering the operational elements of being a Hub



A2/A3. Generally speaking, how easy or difficult have you found the following aspects of operating as a Hub? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Financial reporting challenges

As noted earlier in this chapter (and reflective of the tight set-up times for the programme), Hubs reported that there was a lack of clear guidance on the expected governance structure of Hubs and that **there was a “trial and error” process of developing requirements and processes through delivery**. There was an understanding by all involved that the programme was being developed as it was being

set-up, and that it had to work to a short time-scale, but these changes in requests to Hubs were felt to be burdensome and unproportionate to the time and budget of the programme. Hubs mentioned that such things as changing report templates caused confusion and they created undue repetitive work, all of which took their time away from supporting settings and the delivery of programme activities. They created some anxiety as some of the information was not always (easily) available. Furthermore it gave Hubs an uncomfortable feeling that there was a lack of trust in their operation.

“The financial grip on us is beyond anything I’ve ever seen working for any other funding organisation [...] I don’t understand why we have such a robust and painful reporting requirements here.”

– Hub, Year 2 focus group

During the first year, NCB ran an event to support Hubs on finance and how to deal with queries over payments from DfE. Further, reporting requirements settled more during the second year of the programme, with the development of a dashboard for monitoring data. More generally, however, there was a recognition from some Hubs and NCB that **not all Hubs had the necessary ‘financial or management’ skills that the programme demanded.**

Hubs said they had not expected to manage the budget and payment to providers of funded programmes, and this was an additional complication for them. Further, there was a misalignment in timings between Hubs’ delivery plans (structured around the academic year) and the budgeting of the programme (calculated based on the financial year).

Budget challenges

The budget was split across two financial years, although the scale of activities was markedly different across the two years. With the set-up of the programme in the first year there were fewer engagement activities. As a consequence, Hubs had an underspend of their budget and were disappointed that this could not be rolled into the second year. In the second year, as the programme picked up momentum, there was increased demand and Hubs were delivering activities on a much larger scale. However, they were not able to roll over the underspend from the first year into the second year, and the cut-off of the financial year in the middle of the academic year meant that **Hubs were finding they did not have sufficient funds to deliver their plans for the second year.** This posed a substantial operational challenge, as Hubs were required to change the timings and bring activities forward to make sure they had access to the funds before the financial year ended. Overall, Hubs proved to be split on whether the delivery timescales within the past financial year had given them sufficient time to spend their allocated grant funding (7 agreed, 7 disagreed in the Year 2 Hub survey).

Timeframe challenges

Contributing further to operational challenges was the programme time frame (even with the extension) to deliver the programme, which felt too short to achieve the main objectives. Although as discussed later there was a great sense of pride in what has been achieved in the short time, this did put challenges on all parties, especially with the introduction of a new concept of evidence-based practice. The programme was delivering 'quality' training and trying to create practice-changes, and parties involved in this programme recognised that time was needed to create and embed new quality practices. It was also commented on that it took time to build effective networks, and time to build a presence as a 'quality' provider of professional development.

"[It's] quality work that we're offering and training and we've only been going for a very limited amount of time and the challenge is to spend the money and deliver within this timeline."

– Hub, Year 1 focus group

"I think the idea that you have to really think hard about designing effective professional development, and then it takes a lot of time to get people to do that well, has been one of the things the development cycles have really shown."

– EEF, Year 2 focus group

"Feels like the first year was almost a pilot year and we were trying to establish ourselves and find out where the programme was going. Now in the second year we're picking-up the momentum."

– Hub, Year 1 focus group

The extension to the programme, from November 2024 to the end of March 2025, was welcomed by all, but did also create its own challenges. The delay in confirmation to the extensions meant that some Hubs were winding down and looking to implement exit plans. Further, some staff had already left, so Hubs had to recruit or transfer in new staff to cover the extension.

Geographical challenges

The SPH programme involved setting up 18 Hubs across England. Two Hubs were set up per region with the aim of offering good regional coverage and achieving a good reach across the sector. However, when considering the location of the Hubs within the regions, **there were substantial geographical gaps, and situations where Hubs were located too remotely for many settings** to be able to engage fully and in person with the Hubs' offer. Face-to-face delivery was seen as the 'gold standard' and important for some of the training events, and particularly for engagement with childminders. However,

Hubs recognised that there was a cost associated with this delivery format and had to weigh up cost and travel time against likely attendance levels.

Exacerbating this, **feedback from Hubs suggested that there was insufficient guidance for Hubs in the same region to work together** or coordinate their activities, risking duplication of efforts or leaving gaps between the Hubs in terms of their reach. The limited number of Hubs also meant that there was sometimes a slight mismatch between the geographical location of the Hub and the local authorities, with the local authority perceiving the Hub to be working in a different area with different needs to their own region. Generally, Hubs felt that to make the programme more effective the number of Hubs would need to be expanded, or the geographical reach of each would need to be narrowed.

In addition, **Hubs talked about a missed opportunity to create a learning community between themselves** and would have liked greater opportunities to share tips and ideas with each other. Hubs felt there was lack of formal structures or platforms for them to come together to the extent they would have liked, and their understanding was that they should not link up informally with each other. Hubs valued the opportunities they had to chat with each other during breakout sessions in the webinars, but felt these opportunities were all too brief.

Working relationships

SPH involved many stakeholders including NCB, EEF, Hubs, local authorities, and early years settings. Effective working relationships between the main delivery parties of the programme has been a key strength of the programme and a key factor of success.

Relationships within programme delivery partners

The working relationships at the strategic and management level were positive and effective. NCB, EEF and Hubs all agreed that they established good working relationships based on respect of each other's strengths and expertise. The working relationship appeared to have strengthened and become more effective in the second year of the programme, as the understanding of each other's role in the delivery of the programme became clearer, and parties developed better understanding of the evidence-based approach standards.

By and large, Hubs agreed that working with NCB had been a positive experience, and Hubs and NCB built good rapport and worked effectively together. As shown in Figure 5, there were high levels of agreement from Hubs that they had a collaborative working relationship with the NCB (in the Year 2 Survey 16 agreed that they had a

collaborative working relationship, none disagreed) and that NCB were responsive to queries and concerns (15 agreed, 1 disagreed).

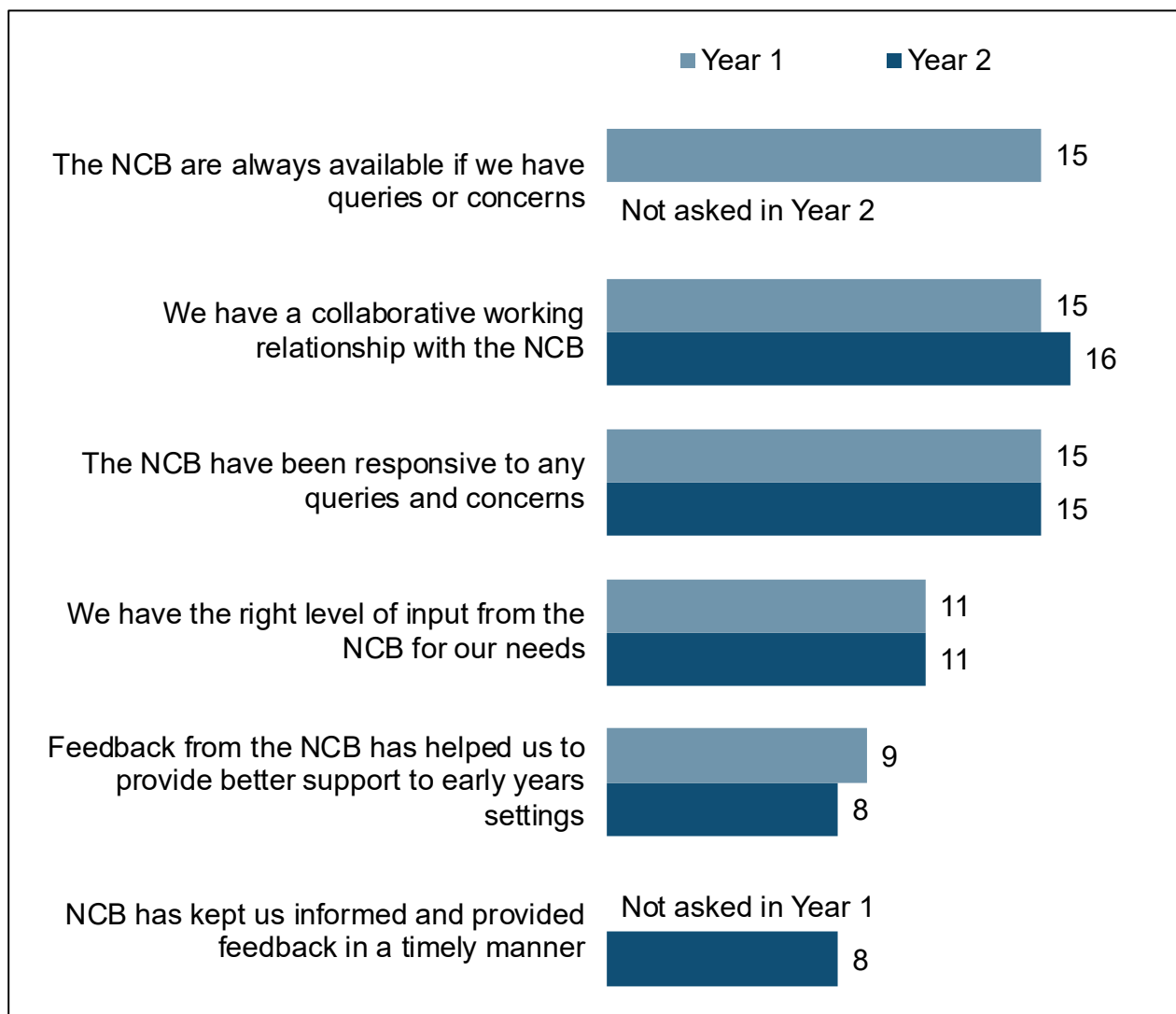
During the first year of the programme, the focus was on the operational aspects of setting up the Hubs and Hubs felt that they always received a good response from NCB to their queries. However, in the second year of the programme Hubs wanted NCB to spend less time on operational aspects and provide them with more feedback in terms of content and quality of work. This was not a reflection on NCB but tied in with the desire from Hubs to have less demanding contract monitoring arrangements driven by DfE for the programme, and to be able to spend more time to capitalise on best practices and the expertise that NCB could offer.

Affecting the relationship with NCB was the frustration around the multiple reports Hubs were required to put together on a monthly basis for NCB and DfE, which added substantial burden to their workload. At one-to-one catch-ups with NCB, Hubs often had to talk through these reports, which did not make best use of time. There was also mention of a lag in terms of providing feedback on their plans and signing-off on training activity. Some Hubs mentioned that by the time training activity was signed-off, it could mean that they had lost their provisional booking with a trainer.

“We’re now due our quarterly reviews [...] we still haven’t had our annual review feedback. They’re asking us to fill out a form for a quarterly review which talks about improvements on your data and your tasks but we haven’t actually had the report from our previous review, so it makes it quite challenging to keep on top of.”

– *Hub, Year 1 focus group*

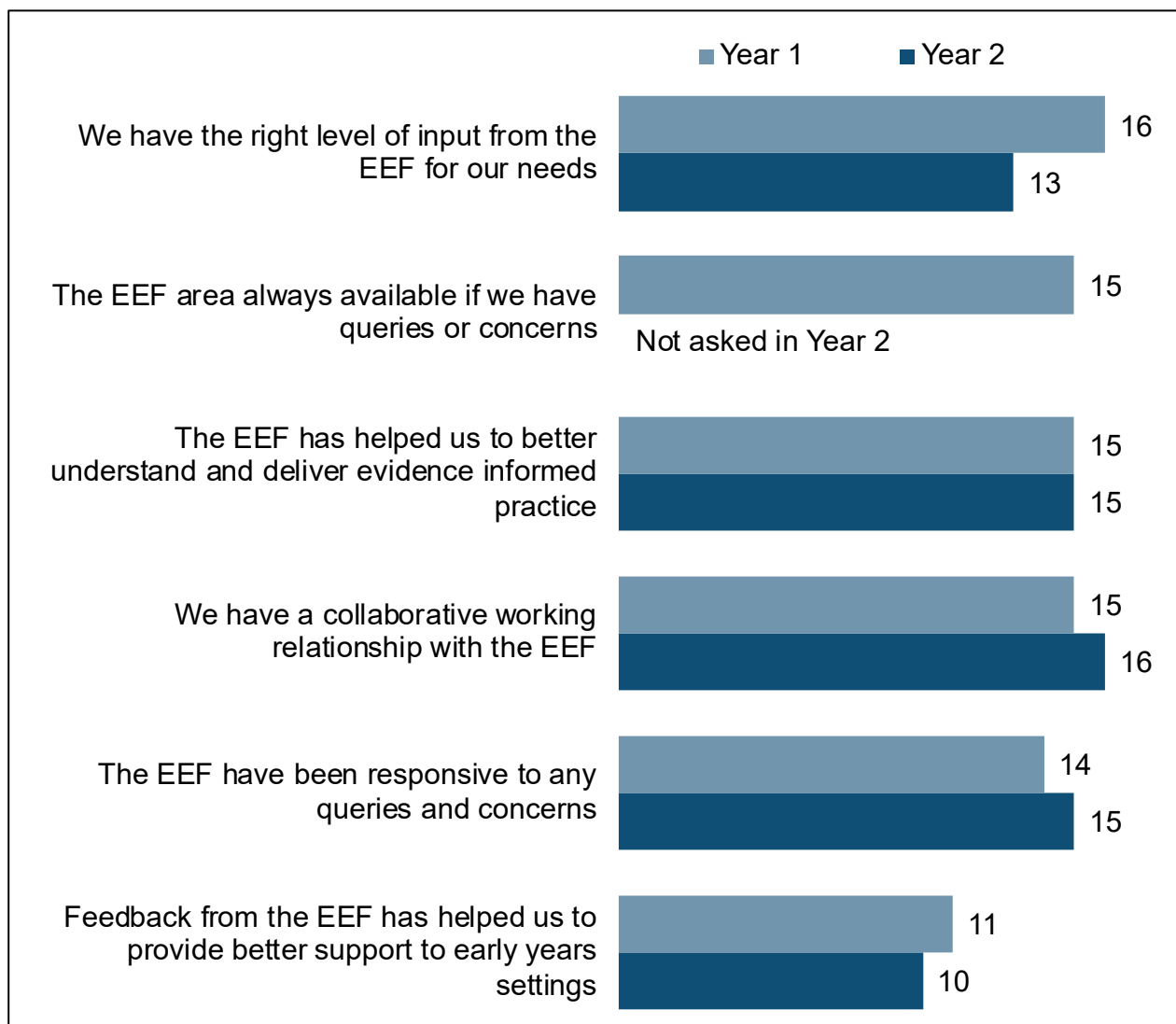
Figure 5. Rating of working relationship with NCB - number who agree



Year 1 Survey F4 / Year 2 Survey C1. To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below? Base: All Hubs (Year 1 and Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

Hubs were positive about working with EEF. Most Hubs agreed they had a collaborative working relationship with the EEF (16 agreed in Year 2, none disagreed), that EEF were responsive to queries and concerns (15 agreed, none disagreed), and EEF helped them better understand and deliver evidence-informed practice (15 agreed, 1 disagreed) (Figure 6). Compared with Year 1, opinions on working with the EEF were relatively unchanged, although slightly fewer Hubs mentioned they had the right level of input from EEF for their needs (16 Hubs in Year 1, 13 Hubs in Year 2).

Figure 6. Rating of working relationship with EEF - number who agree



Year 1 Survey F6 / Year 2 Survey C2. Now thinking about the EEF, to what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below? Base: All Hubs (Year 1 and Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

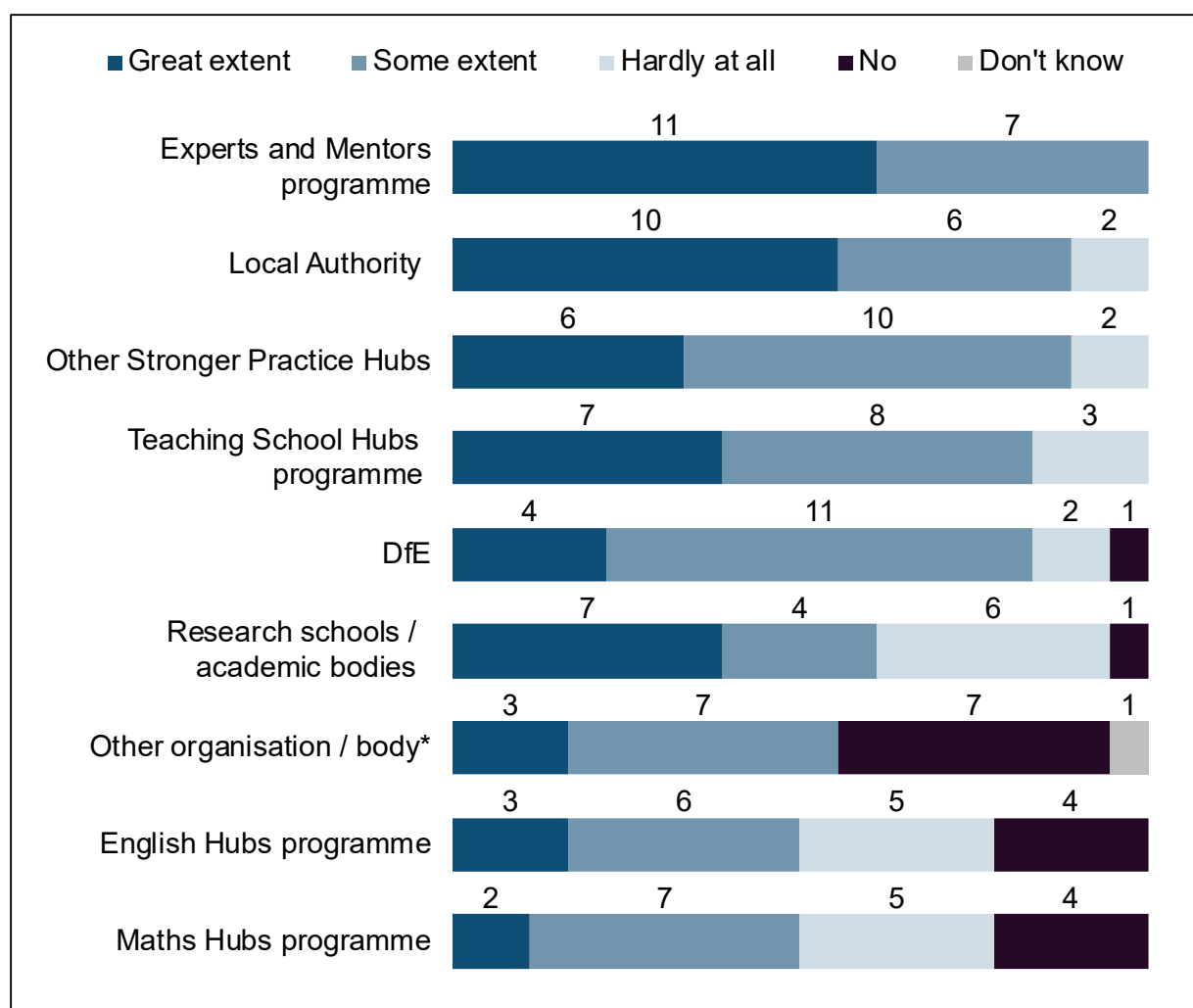
Hubs who had worked with EEF on exemplification materials seemed happy with the process. Hubs talked about how meetings prior to filming were useful and provided clear direction, they appreciated the communication and process for the consent forms before filming, and they felt the team were easy to work with.

Relationships with other parties

One of the complexities of delivering the SPH programme was the need for Hubs to liaise with lots of parties, and with multiple local authorities within their areas. In terms of frequency of working with other organisations, all Hubs had worked with the Experts and Mentors programme, with most Hubs (11) reporting that they worked with the Experts and Mentors programme to a 'great' extent. Sixteen Hubs had worked with their local authority (10 to a great extent) or with other Stronger Practice Hubs (6 to a great extent).

Hubs were least likely to have worked with the Maths Hubs and English Hubs programmes (9 Hubs had worked with each of these Hub programmes to some extent, and 4 Hubs not at all). In terms of 'other' organisations / bodies shown in (Figure 7), a few Hubs mentioned the National Literacy Trust and Family Hubs.

Figure 7. Extent to which Hubs worked with organisations to deliver SPH



C9. Have you worked with any of the following organisations so far to deliver the Stronger Practice Hubs programme? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Despite working a lot with the Experts and Mentors programme, in the qualitative interviews and the survey responses, **Hubs did not talk much about crossover with the Experts and Mentors programme.** That said, some mentions were made of some confusion for settings between the two programmes (with Hubs feeling they helped settings navigate the EYER offer and the opportunities offered by the Experts and Mentors programme), and that a more joined-up response between the two programmes would have been beneficial.

“But the thing that they (settings) are saying is that the communication from DfE about this whole programme has been so muddled and the timing of it has been so out of sync. It just confused them, and they feel confused about the difference between the different strands. So, the Expert and Mentors strand came out first and that was a lot of bombarding [...] And then we come along, and we offer an SPH, and it’s not clear how is that different from the mentoring strand.”

– Hub, Year 1 interview

“Establishing a much more direct connection with the mentors and experts so that we could deploy them, and they could direct people they support onto our offer.”

– Hub, Year 2 Survey

Hubs expressed mixed views about their working relationship with local authorities. A good working relationship was a strong enabler to programme success. Good collaboration made it easier for Hubs to promote their offer to the settings in their region. This was facilitated by Hubs having access to contact details of local area settings (held by local authorities) or joint promotion of events for local area settings. Some Hubs had previous relationships with their local authorities and this helped them with programme delivery. Other Hubs mentioned that their local authorities were very receptive to SPH because they had little resource and capacity themselves and saw the Hubs as filling a gap.

“[SPH] came at a vital time; it’s helped boost their resources because in the local authority, there’s only a team of really two or three people.”

– Hub, Year 1 interview

“We’ve been quite fortunate. I would say we have a Hub meeting each week where we come together as Hub partners, and we’ve had representation from the LA as being keen to support us and that’s worked really well.”

– Hub, Year 1 focus group

In some cases, the relationship between the Hub and the local authority was not so positive, and Hubs mentioned having to invest significant time in building local authority relationships. There was evidence of relationships improving in the second year of the programme, although several Hubs still reported difficulties working with their local authorities. These difficulties were felt to be driven by a perceived regional disconnect with the Hub being based in a different area to the local authority, perceived competition as local authorities were providing traded services (this meant local authorities needed to fill places on their own training otherwise funding for future years would be cut), or concerns about the gap that would be left after the end of the SPH programme. Further, even when the relationship was good, there were challenges with local authorities sharing data, such as childminder information, because of General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

“It’s taken us quite a while with some local authorities to develop that trusted relationship [...] and to get them to understand that the work that we are doing in meant to be complementary to the work that they are doing.”

– *Hub, Year 1 Interview*

Hubs felt that local authorities had not been well informed about the SPH programme and had difficulties distinguishing it from other strands of the EYER funding. Hubs felt that the programme would have benefited from DfE initially providing a structured overview of the programme to the wider agents in the early years sector, and to have invested upfront in terms of getting buy-in from local authorities.

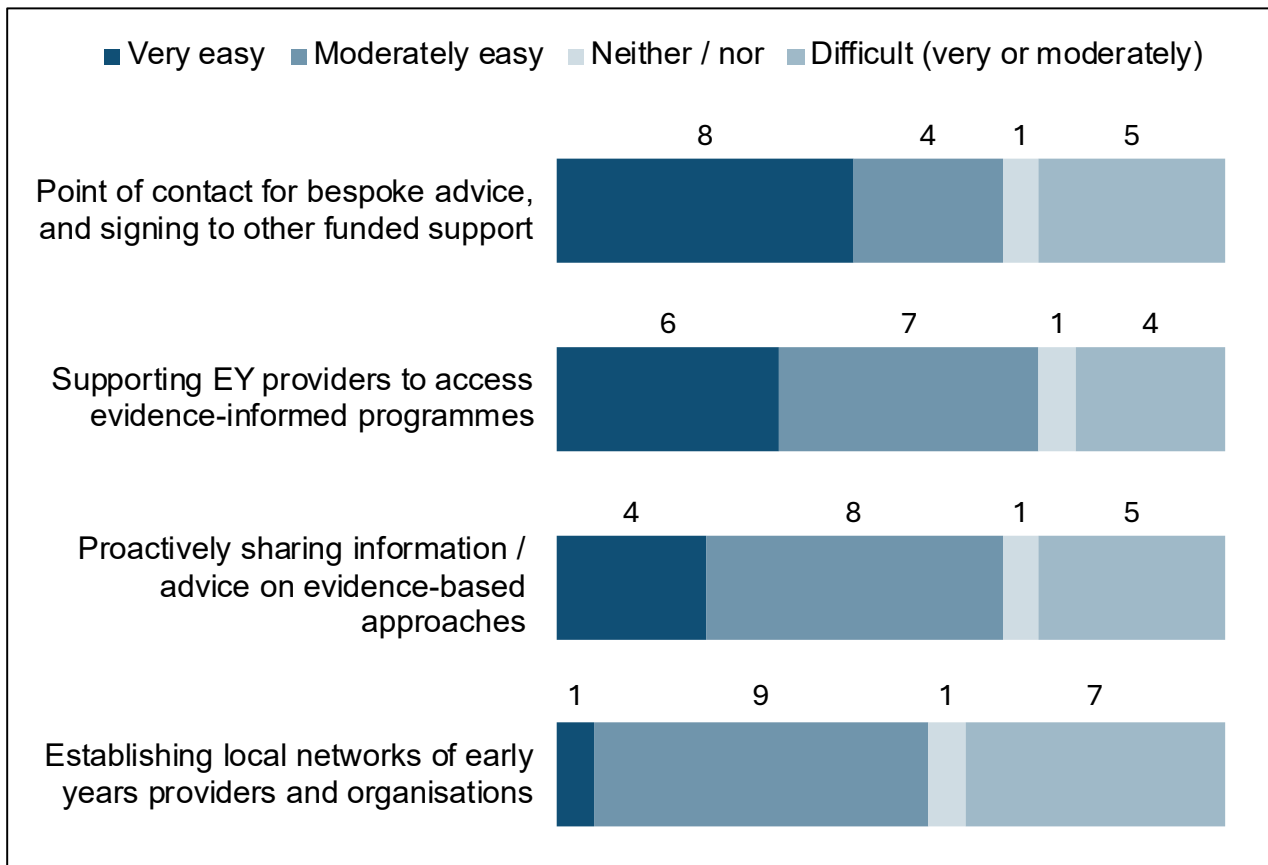
“As a new Hub, we presumed the LAs knew about SPH. We found with all our LAs, they didn’t know anything about the Hubs. And we weren’t given any information about those teams. We still don’t know who people are and that’s just been quite frustrating.”

– *Hub, Year 1 focus group*

Meeting objectives

Reflecting some of the operational challenges that Hubs faced, there was recognition by some Hubs that it **had been difficult meeting all the programme objectives** (Figure 8). This was more commonly cited in respect of the ability to establish local networks of early years providers and organisations, which 7 Hubs felt had been difficult (3 said it was ‘very’ difficult).

Figure 8. Ease of meeting objectives



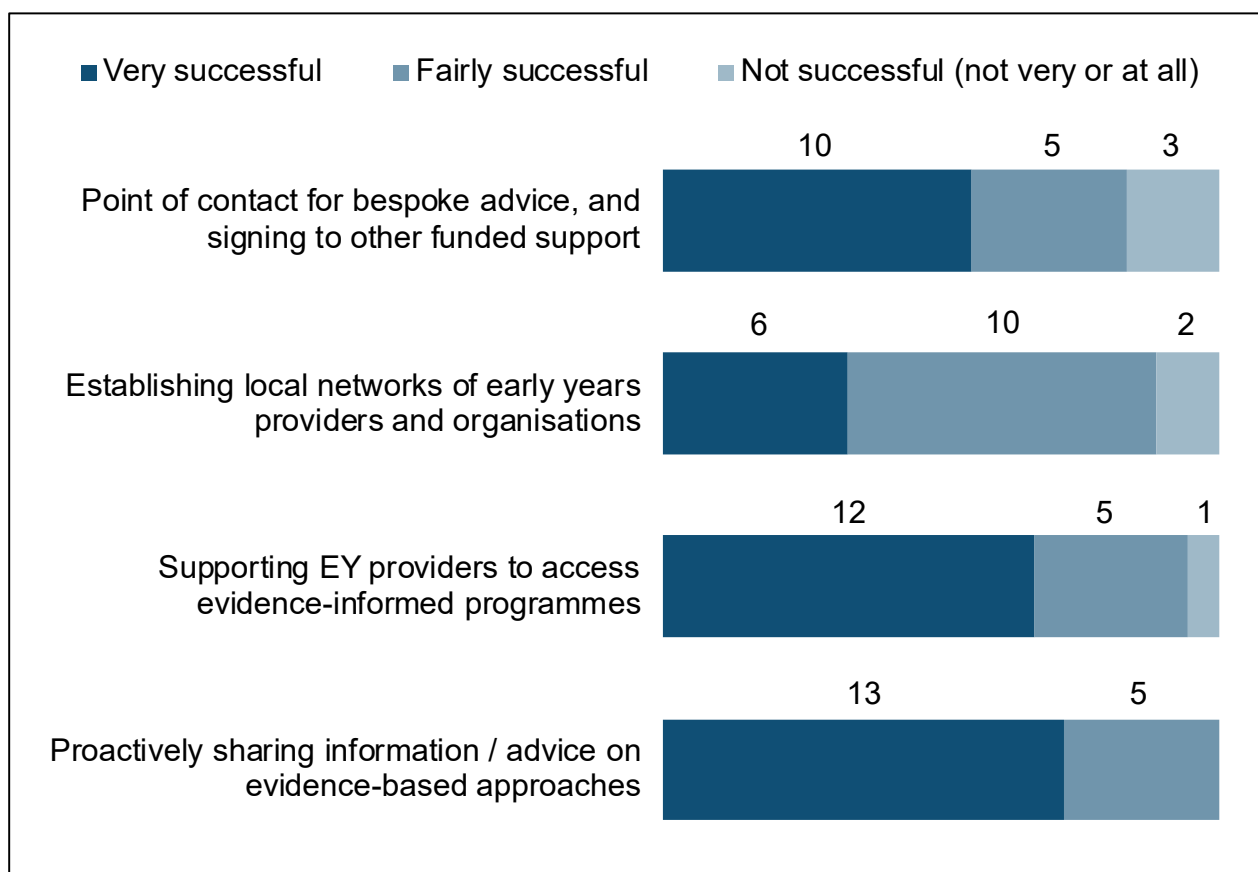
A2. Generally speaking, how easy or difficult have you found the following aspects of operating as a Hub?
 Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

As shown in

Figure 9, **Hubs broadly felt that they had been successful in achieving the objectives of the programme.** Every Hub felt they had been successful in proactively sharing information and advice, and most Hubs felt they had been successful if achieving the other programme objectives. The lowest rating of success was given for acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice, although 15 Hubs still felt they had been successful achieving this objective (3 Hubs felt they had not been successful with it).

The next section in this chapter outlines what Hubs had done to meet these objectives, and the activities they felt were helpful in terms of being successful with the objective.

Figure 9. Success of meeting objectives compared with initial intentions



B1. How successful would you say your Hub has been in achieving the programme objectives compared to what you initially intended? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18). Figure presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Sentiment of meeting programme objectives was echoed by NCB and EEF. In particular NCB felt the programme had been successful in uniting a fractured early years sector and supporting childminders. EEF felt that the programme had given a high number of settings the opportunity to access evidence informed professional development programmes, and that the Evidence Store had been developed rigorously and with co-construction with the early years sector.

Further, there was a high level of agreement among Hubs that **early years settings in their local area were showing a good level of interest in the activities and support** that was provided by Hubs through the programme (17 agreed in the Year 2 Survey, none disagreed). Similarly, agreement was high when considering the idea that Hubs' plans were reaching and benefitting disadvantaged children (16 agreed in Year 2, none disagreed). The engagement of settings with the programme is covered in the next chapter.

Management information (MI) data from Hubs was collated by NCB across the course of the programme. Hubs delivered a large number of communications and events across

the two year programme, with the volume of activities increasing over time. Of particular note, by quarter eight (Q8) of the programme (Oct-Dec 2024), there were over 8,000 settings in network membership. SPH was intended to be targeted towards settings and children in deprived areas, and 43% of those in the network members were working in settings in deprived areas. Further, over 2,000 settings had been recruited to funded programmes agreed with EEF, which would support the quality and availability of evidence informed professional development for the sector. A full breakdown of management information data collated by NCB can be found in [Appendix C](#).

By Q8, most of the KPIs were being met. There was, however, a gap for the 'reach' of network activities into settings in the 'wider' area (i.e. non-home area) for the second year (At Q8, 3 Hubs met the objective of 5% of wider settings engaging in network activity, but 15 Hubs did not meet this objective). Hubs acknowledged that it took time to build up connections and network activities. They also did not necessarily have contact details for settings in the wider area to allow them to promote their offer to them. Hubs talked about the need to manually compile a list by conducting Google searches, when contact details could not be provided by their local authorities.

As part of the Year 2 Survey, Hubs were asked to indicate the types of activities they undertook to deliver to each objective, and the ones that they felt were particularly helpful.

Objective of sharing information and advice on evidence-informed practice

As seen in Table 2, the most common activities undertaken by Hubs in respect of the objective of sharing information and advice on evidence-informed practice was establishing a newsletter platform and mailing list to grow the membership, actively using social media to encourage engagement among settings and an initial launch of the Hub (all 18 Hubs undertook these activities).

Most Hubs (15) felt that establishing a newsletter platform and mailing list was particularly helpful to this objective, followed by actively using social media to encourage engagement (12).

Table 2. Activities undertaken to work towards the objective of sharing information and advice on evidence-informed practices

	Activity undertaken	Particularly helpful
Established a newsletter platform and mailing list to grow membership	18	15
Actively used social media to encourage engagement amongst settings in content/resources and to grow membership	18	12
Had an initial launch of the Hub to local settings and childminders	18	6
Produced blogs highlighting evidence-informed practice	17	8
Collected regular feedback on the needs/wants of local settings regarding content and channels	17	7
Collected and recorded data in relation to this objective (social media to encourage engagement)	16	0
Designed engagement plans with targets to inform delivery planning	15	1
Other activity	8	4

B2. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

Table presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Around a half of the Hubs (8) said they had undertaken 'other' activities, some of which included attending conferences, holding networking meetings to share advice through established networks, holding regular stakeholder meetings, and promoting the EEF Evidence Store.

In terms of what could have been done differently, some Hubs cited the need for additional training for Hub leaders and strategic leaders. This was mentioned in relation to both the setup phase and roles and responsibilities of the Hubs, and in using the EEF Evidence Store to support settings.

Objective of establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations

Regarding the objective of establishing local networks of early years providers, all Hubs (18) had ensured that network meetings were scheduled to run with regularity and had

created working relationships with other organisations such as their local authority and other types of Hubs.

A large number of Hubs (13) found offering a mix of both virtual and face-to-face network meetings particularly helpful towards achieving this objective. Other activities that Hubs found particularly helpful were creating working relationships with other organisations (11), as well as ensuring network meetings were scheduled to run regularly but with varied timing and utilising existing networks to share evidence-informed approaches (both cited by 8 Hubs).

Table 3. Activities undertaken to work towards the objective of establishing networks of early years providers and organisations

	Activity undertaken	Particularly helpful
Created working relationship with: local authority, Area Leads, other Hubs such as English, Maths, Family and Teaching School Hubs, and Experts and Mentors in local authority	18	11
Ensured network meetings are scheduled to run with regularity but with varied timing for participants	18	8
Offered a mix of both virtual and face-to-face network meetings for network members	17	13
Utilised existing networks (e.g. local authority networks) to share evidence informed approaches	17	8
Collected and kept a record of data in relation to this objective	16	1
Gathered and shared intelligence with the NCB on key themes, topics and questions arising via your network, to help inform the overall Hubs programme	15	1
Created an engagement plan to inform delivery planning for how your Hub will establish and grow its network	13	3
Established a network tracking system to monitor engagement and feedback	13	1
Other activity	8	4

B4. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18).
Table presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Around half of the Hubs (8) said they had undertaken ‘other’ activities, such as setting up WhatsApp groups to support networks and mapping the most deprived areas in their respective regions in order to better understand the networks of SBPs, PVLs and CMs.

Hubs’ suggestions for how things could have been done differently to achieve this objective centred around increased engagement from their local authority (as covered earlier in this chapter). This included local authorities providing increased support, allowing Hubs access to existing, well established networks within the area, and providing Hubs with contact details and data to allow them to build their own networks more easily.

Objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice

In terms of activities that Hubs had undertaken to act as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice, the most common activities were creating and publishing a Hub advice line / email address for local settings and childminders (17) and making referrals to other strands of the DfE early years recovery programme (17).

Hubs reported that publishing a Hub advice line / email address was particularly helpful towards achieving this objective (10), as was the establishment of a referral mechanism for the Experts and Mentors programme (of the 12 Hubs that had established a referral mechanism / triage system for referrals to Experts and Mentor programme and the Childminder Mentor programme, 9 found this particularly helpful).

Table 4. Activities undertaken to work towards the objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice

	Activity undertaken	Particularly helpful
Created and published a Hub advice line / email address for local settings and childminders	17	10
Made referrals to other strands of the DfE early years recovery programme	17	7
Established mechanisms for receiving feedback on support provided	14	1
Agreed your Hub’s approach to common questions and created case studies, FAQs or other general information for settings	13	4
Tracked and monitored bespoke advice provided during the programme	13	3

	Activity undertaken	Particularly helpful
Kept a record of data in relation to this objective	13	1
Established a referral mechanism / triage system for referrals to Experts and Mentor programme and the Childminder Mentor programme	12	9
Mapped high-quality support available locally in order to signpost to it	11	4
Other activity	6	6

B6. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

Table presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Six Hubs mentioned 'other' activities that they had undertaken, and these included employing specialist staff, planning networking opportunities with various stakeholder groups, and ensuring information was readily available to settings (one Hub had established a mechanism whereby settings could request specific support and be referred to / visited by relevant specialists).

Hubs' difficulties in achieving this objective included the time pressures associated with becoming a point of contact for bespoke advice (both in terms of staff resourcing issues and the time frame for the Stronger Practice Hubs programme in general). Hubs mentioned that it took time to build trust with settings for them to directly come to them for one-on-one bespoke advice. Further, the networking and training events filled this gap in a more informal way (e.g. by settings asking questions during the events and chatting with others about their experiences).

A commonly mentioned desire, however, was to see both local authorities and DfE taking a more active role in advertising the programme and Hubs' offerings, including more effectively signposting to, and / or creating, centrally managed information sources.

Objective of supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes

As shown in Table 5, all Hubs (18) had undertaken a range of activities aimed at supporting early years providers in accessing evidence-informed programmes. The activities that Hubs found particularly helpful towards achieving this objective were supporting with signposting and promoting programmes to early years settings in their

area (11) and attending monthly meetings between EEF, the programme provider, and the independent evaluator (10).

Table 5. Activities undertaken to work towards the objective of supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes

	Activity undertaken	Particularly helpful
Supported with signposting and promoting programmes to early years settings in the area (e.g. programme highlighted in network events, newsletters and through responses to reactive advice)	18	11
Attended monthly meetings between EEF, programme provider and (if relevant) the independent evaluator	18	10
Selected programmes from EEF's curated menu of programmes at three timepoints during the first year of delivery	18	7
Funded the programme provider's onboarding and delivery of the programmes to early years settings in line with the agreed amount for each programme	18	4
Responded to contingency planning with EEF to ensure all Hub programmes are recruited to	18	2
Mapped local area needs to inform nomination of evidence-informed programmes	14	4
Identified local development projects that could be included on the menu and offered locally by your Hub	13	2
Other activity	9	6

B8. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective? Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

Table presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

Nine Hubs mentioned 'other' activities related to supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes and these were **largely related to recruitment**, such as working in partnership with programme providers to support with the recruitment process, involving teaching Hubs to support with recruitment and providing support to other Hubs to achieve their recruitment targets. There was also a mention of using local needs analysis data and intelligence to support the training packages and the piloting of new programmes.

Recruitment to funded evidence-based programmes

There was sense of achievement from all with the number of quality programmes developed and recruited to during the course of SPH (over 2,000 funded programme places). This was against the backdrop recognition that this component of evidenced-based learning was new to the early years sector, and therefore it was a learning process for everyone involved in the delivery and receipt of these programmes.

That said, Hubs did report feeling **a little “blindsided” by the need to spend so much of the budget and time on funded programmes**. Asked about their satisfaction with the funded evidence-informed programmes that Hubs were recruited to, most felt satisfied (13 Hubs in the Year 2 Survey), although many opted for the more muted category of ‘fairly’ satisfied (9 Hubs) rather than ‘very’ satisfied (4 Hubs). Four Hubs were dissatisfied.

Driving these sentiments was a feeling of insufficient variety among the funded programmes for their area. Hubs’ attitudes were affected by a lack of upfront understanding of how much of their budget would be going to the funded programmes versus the activities they would have preferred to have funded. Further to this, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter, some Hubs did not expect to manage the finance of the professional development. This took time and capacity away from other activities, and some Hubs felt they did not have the financial skills for this type of monetary management. Added to this, recruitment to the programmes was labour-intensive, longer programmes harder to recruit to, and sometimes difficult to convert interest because of the location of the training. Mention was also made of the offer being expensive.

In terms of what Hubs felt could be done differently, suggestions in the Year 2 Survey included more realistic expectations of Hubs throughout the programme (factoring in time pressures, recruitment challenges, and local context).

“There has been nowhere near enough support given for implementation to setting leaders. Due to the time pressures within the programme, the needs to recruit onto programme have been more important than the need to support setting leaders in making best use of the right programmes. There should have been a programme of support from Hubs using mentors and experts, acting as SLEs. Despite calls to the EEF and written communication, the Hubs have been precluded from providing support for implementation. The EEF have published a very good guide on implementation, which is indeed evidence-informed practice, but programmes have been given to settings without enough attention to this.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

A positive element was the opportunities built into the process to allow Hubs to develop programmes. Although this could require significant capacity from the Hubs to deliver, EEF had good feedback from Hubs who took on this challenge.

As noted earlier, Hubs conducted needs-analysis to develop the programme of activities for their local area, and it was felt that there were some gaps in the funded programmes. These gaps, covered in more depth in the following chapter titled Response from the early years sector, included:

- a lack of programmes and resources for working with children with SEND;
- a demand for more tailoring of support for CMs;
- more resources for those working with children under three or babies;
- more child-led learning interactions evidenced (as opposed to practitioner-led); and
- more support with mental health and neurodiversity (for staff and children).

Development of the Evidence Store

The development of the Evidence Store was seen by all as a good legacy outcome of the programme, and as a valuable resource and of benefit to the early years sector. The Evidence Store took time to develop over the course of the programme, and by end of Year 2 it benefitted from having more material on it that could be promoted to settings. That said it was still felt to be in the early stages of development and adoption.

The videos of exemplifications as part of the Evidence Store were viewed as being a particular success and useful for the sector. They reflected the way practitioners would want to engage with the content and made the content more accessible to a time poor audience.

“The Evidence Store is a fantastic resource. The short video clips are a fantastic resource for practitioners to use.”

– Hub, Year 2 survey

One of the key benefits of the SPH programme was the ability to have input from a range of setting types in the development of the Evidence Store material. EEF felt that being able to work with settings and sector organisations to adjust the content and language for the EY sector had been an important part of the process.

That said, it was felt that the store was a little inaccessible in interface and language for many of those working in the early years sector. Hubs reported that they had to provide a lot of support to settings to help them use the Store.

“It needs to be fully aligned and integrated with Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, with familiar and shared language, which would make it easier for practitioners to translate it into practice [...] it is getting traction with graduates, but the majority of the workforce are Level 3 and below, hence can be demotivating rather than empowering for the majority.”

– *Hub, Year 2 survey*

“Some of the evidence and examples are difficult for childminders to transfer to their home learning environments. e.g. quite a lot of the evidence and examples are for older children in relation to 3-5 years old and very limited for 0-2 year olds.”

– *Hub, Year 2 survey*

There was **some scepticism from Hubs about how much the Evidence Store would be used once the programme ended** and they were not able to continue to promote or support in the use of the Store. Two-fifths (41%) of settings in the Year 2 Survey said they had used the Evidence Store on at least one occasion, with repeat usage proving to be high (among those that had used it, 79% had used it on 3 or more occasions and 42% on more than 5 occasions). The incidence of usage was higher for larger sized settings (54% for settings with 100+ children) and those with a relatively high proportion of children with special education needs or disabilities (SEND) (52% for settings where over 20% of children had SEND) or early years pupil premium (EYPP) children (51% for settings where over 20% of children had EYPP). Usage was lower for childminders (30%) and settings in the least deprived IDACI areas (32%). Although usage was lower for childminders, one childminder mentioned how they were now aware of what was on the Evidence Store but had sufficient new resources and materials for their current needs. However they felt that they would reach out to use the Evidence Store if they had future needs, such as having children with more complex needs in their setting.

“I've watched some of the videos on how to use some of the certain things. But I don't go on there that much - purely because I like what I'm doing at the moment and the stuff that they've given me [this referred to new practices and resources that the childminder had been given via the SPH programme] is working really well with the children I've got and I don't need any more breadth at the moment.”

– *Childminder, engaged, Year 2 interview*

Overall experience

Although there were some challenges in the delivery of SPH, overall all parties (NCB, EEF and Hubs) were positive about their experience of being a Hub. All expressed a sense of pride of being involved in the SPH programme and felt that a lot of positive outcomes had been achieved in a short time period. There was a strong recognition that all parties had worked hard to deliver the programme. Also that the level of commitment from all had contributed to the success of the programme and the ability to find solutions when there were operational challenges. Reflecting on their experiences of being a Hub, 11 of the Hubs in the Year 2 Survey said it had been a ‘very’ positive experience, and 7 said it had been a ‘fairly’ positive experience. No Hubs gave a lower rating.

“Stronger Practice Hubs have built trusting and supportive relationships with hundreds of early years practitioners, and this is crucial to ensure that the children are receiving a high level of care and education in their setting.”

– *Hubs, Year 2 Survey*

In the earlier stage of the programme, namely when completing the Year 1 Survey shortly after set-up, Hubs would not necessarily have recommended others to become a Hub. Only 8 Hubs gave positive scores of 8-10 (where 10 was ‘extremely likely to’), and 3 Hubs gave a low score of between 1-4 (where 1 was ‘not at all likely’) (Table 6). This was driven by the frustrations around data management and the reporting requirements as described earlier, plus the insufficient time frames.

Opinions improved over the course of the programme, and although the question was not exactly like-for-like¹³, by the time of the Year 2 Survey (Autumn 2024), Hubs were more positive. Twelve Hubs gave a score of 8-10, and conversely no Hub gave a score of 1-4.

Table 6. Likelihood to recommend becoming a Hub to others (1-10 score)

	Year 1	Year 2
Score of 10 (where 10 is ‘extremely likely to’)	5	8
Score of 8-9	3	4
Score of 5-7	7	6
Score 1-4 (where 1 is ‘not at all likely’)	3	0

¹³ In Year 1, the phrasing was ‘Taking everything into account so far, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to become a Stronger Practice Hub?’. In Year 2, the phrasing was ‘Taking everything into account, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to apply to become a Stronger Practice Hub if the opportunity arose in the future?’

Year 1 Survey G7. Taking everything into account so far, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to become a Stronger Practice Hub? Year 2 D7. Taking everything into account, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to apply to become a Stronger Practice Hub if the opportunity arose. Base: All Hubs (Year 1 and Year 2 Survey) (n=18). Hubs were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 as 'not at all likely' and 10 was 'very likely'.

Table presents the number of Hubs giving each response.

All 18 Hubs cited at least two positive benefits to their own setting of being a Hub, with all reporting that their staff had developed knowledge and skills in supporting others to implement evidence-informed approaches. All but one Hub (17) said their staff had developed their knowledge and skills in evidence-informed approaches, and 16 Hubs said staff had developed more general early years knowledge and skills, and/or that staff felt it had been a rewarding experience for them.

As well as receiving positive press for themselves in the local community, other positive benefits mentioned by Hubs included being part of a wider network of guidance and support and allowing practitioners to learn from other parts of the sector. Also the opportunity to develop better relationships with bodies across the sector (i.e. local authorities, specialist partners) and with settings in their area.

Table 7. Effects of being a SPH on own setting

	Number of Hubs
Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in supporting others to implement evidence-informed approaches	18
Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in evidence-informed approaches	17
Our staff have developed their early years knowledge and skills	16
Our staff have felt it has been a rewarding experience	16
We have received positive press in the local community	9
Our staff have had a larger workload	8
We have seen an increase in the number of young children attending our setting	4
We have had fewer resources for our day to day provision	1
Our staff retention rates have improved	1
Other positive benefit	8

	Number of Hubs
Other negative impact	2

D6. What have the effects of being a Stronger Practice Hub been on your own setting(s)?
Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (n=18).

There was a notable impact on staff workloads within the Hubs. Most Hubs (13) agreed that operating as a Hub had been unexpectedly time-consuming or burdensome (2 disagreed), and around a half (8) said that their staff at their setting had seen increased workloads.

Views of the model in the Early Years sector

One key strength of the programme was that the Hub model appeared to be a right fit to the sector. NCB, EEF and Hubs all felt that the model offered benefits. In the Year 2 Hub survey, 17 Hubs said the model was the right model for the sector (most saying it was 'definitely' the right model), with just 1 Hub saying it was not the right model (Table 8).

Table 8. Whether Hub model is the right model for the EY sector

	Number of Hubs
Yes – definitely	12
Yes – probably	5
No – probably not	1

D2. Thinking more generally, do you think a Hub model, whereby 'strong' EY settings provide support, advice and guidance to other settings, is the right approach for the early years sector or not?
Base: All Hubs (Year 2 Survey) (18). No Hubs said 'No – definitely not'

The Hub who felt it was not the right model referenced the constraints on settings to release staff for training. They felt that any early years model needed to provide in-house training to settings for them to realise the benefits. As reported in the next chapter of this report (Response from the early years sector), Hubs were creative and adaptive in the format that they provided professional development to settings in their area (some online, some face-to-face, some recorded, evening times etc.), but the ability of settings to attend the professional development was still a challenge for many.

“I feel that early years settings are extremely busy and a lot of them are struggling to stay open due to financial challenges as well as being able to recruit staff. I feel that therefore having to remove a staff member would cause additional challenges to an already saturated workforce. The feedback that we have received is that the settings need an in-house model where training can be delivered and modelled in the setting with the children.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

Among the Hubs who felt that the Hub model was the right approach, **reasons centred on the benefits of peer-led support**, with Hubs themselves being working practitioners who understood day-to-day needs of settings. There was some familiarity with a hub model approach, as local authorities used it in the design of their professional support offer. Further, almost all Hubs (17) agreed that their expertise had been valued in the delivery of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme (the other Hub neither agreed nor disagreed).

“We are the people doing this everyday so people respect our ideas and buy into the Hub – we know the sector on the ground which is much more powerful than other people delivering support and training.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

“Peer support works most effectively – including the ability to see practice in person, and to hear from leaders who have made progress and achieved success. The DfE and local authority do not have this position.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

“I think the Hub model has worked really well [...] they do listen, they are passionate, they are absolutely passionate about child care and being there for the children. They go above and beyond.”

– *Childminder, Engaged setting, Year 2 interview*

The ability to build and maintain networks across the region with a variety of providers was also recognised as helping to unite a fractured sector. Significant comments were made from all parties about how the programme model was helping to reach childminders and raise respect for this group of providers. This is covered further in the next chapter of this report (Response from the early years sector).

“The positive impact our work as a Hub has had on the childminder sector in particular is something which must continue. The feedback from them has been overwhelmingly positive and [...] their confidence has developed so much. Before our Hub, they felt forgotten and isolated but now they feel more empowered and valued.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

As a further advantage of the model, it was valued in terms of its ability to ensure the offer responded to local needs. Ultimately there was support for the model as Hubs were receiving feedback from settings that they had benefited from the support they had received.

“It has bought our local early years community together. Our conferences are the first to fill up and the buzz at these events is incredible. At the beginning we had practitioners saying: “finally we are being recognised”; and one practitioner recently said: “you have rekindled my passion for my job.”

– *Hub Year 2 Survey*

Response from the early years sector

This chapter summarises the findings of the evaluation in relation to the response of the sector to the Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme. It covers the level of awareness of the programme in the sector, the forms of engagement, drivers and barriers to engagement and satisfaction from settings in respect of their experience of programme.

Key findings

- Overall, the response of the sector to the SPH programme was very positive. Settings engaged with the range of activities offered by the Hubs, with many doing so on a repeated basis. Engagement also increased over the lifetime of the programme.
- Feedback from settings suggested that most felt the aims of the programme were clear, and they understood how their setting would benefit from engaging with the Hub. There was also very high agreement that the activities that the settings engaged with were relevant (92%), high quality (90%), accessible (87%), and practical / actionable (88%). Hubs and settings felt that the settings were increasingly buying into the evidence-based approach and developing a strong understanding of the principles and benefits of it.
- Some gaps in programme delivery were identified. These were a lack of programmes and resources for working with children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), a lack of tailoring of support for childminders reflecting the uniqueness of their setup, and a lack of programmes and resources for under 2 year olds. Recognising the difficulties of capturing child-led learning interactions (as they are spontaneous), there was a desire for more guidance around these.
- The evidence showed that the majority of the settings have experienced one or more barriers to greater engagement with their local Hub. These centred around timings of the activities not working for setting, geography or logistical challenges, and staff at the settings being too busy to engage.

Awareness and levels of engagement

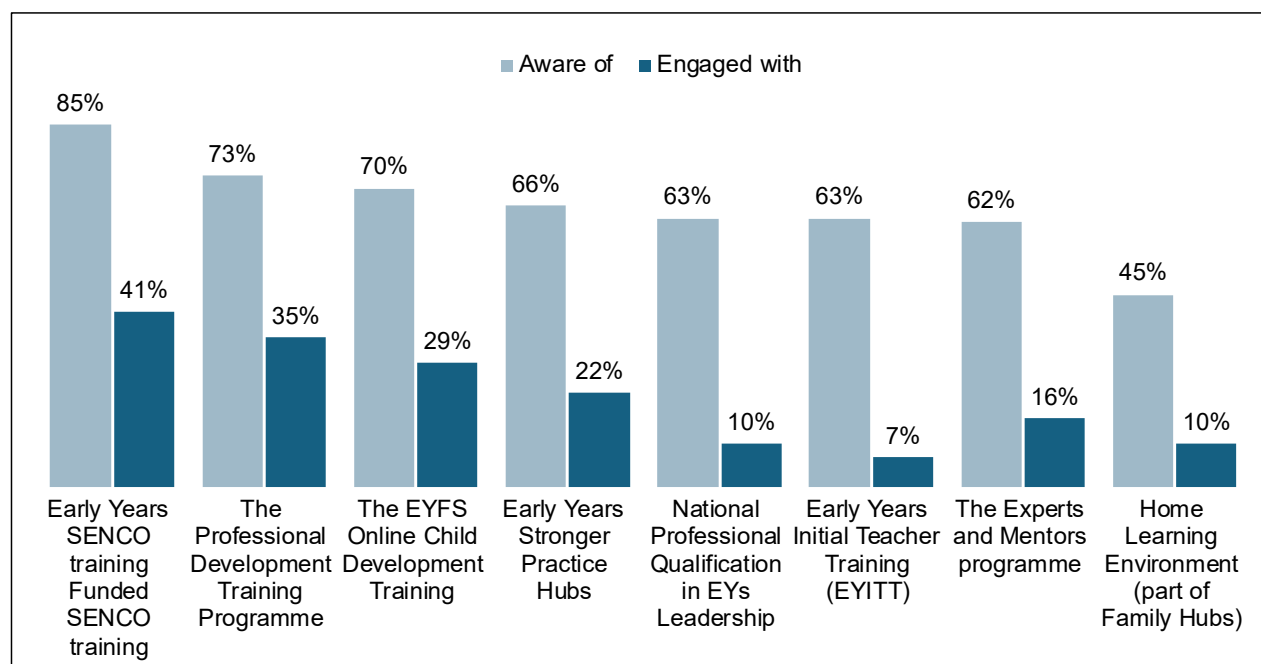
Awareness levels of the SPH programme in the sector appeared to have been relatively high. Data from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers (SCEYP) Pulse Survey in May 2024¹⁴ shows that around two-thirds (66%) of all early years providers in England were aware of the SPH programme. The awareness levels were

¹⁴ [Pulse Surveys of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2024](#)

similar across all setting types, and by settings based in the most deprived and least deprived areas.

Figure 10 shows the levels of sector awareness of the 8 strands of the Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme. It shows that awareness to the SPH programme was relatively high compared with the other strands (fourth most aware of out of the 8 strands), suggesting the communication campaign to raise awareness of the SPH programme has been largely successful.

Figure 10. Awareness and engagement levels of EYER activities



K1. For each strand of the Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) Programme, please indicate whether you were “not aware of” before taking part in the survey, “aware, but not engaged with”, or “engaged with” in some capacity. Description used: Strong EY settings designated as ‘Hubs’ creating networks and providing guidance and support to other settings in their region. Base: All settings completing May SCEYP Pulse survey (n=1,478)

While the level of awareness was relatively high, a substantial proportion of settings were not aware of the SPH programme, suggesting more could have been done to promote the programme nationally. One childminder commented that they were aware of the programme through their involvement in The Experts and Mentors programme, but they noticed that no communications on the SPH was disseminated in their borough, leaving a gap in that area, for example.

Settings heard about the SPH programme through different channels, with the most commonly cited being:

- A direct approach from their local Hub (mostly via email) with an invitation to the launch event;

- Word of mouth from other settings or communications from the local authority; and
- Information seen on social media and through settings' participation in other EYER programme strands (mainly the Experts and Mentors programme).

When providers were asked in the SCEYP Pulse Survey whether they had engaged with the Hub, around one fifth (22%) indicated that they had. Engagement levels with the SPH programme were positive (fourth most engaged activity within the EYER strands), especially considering that the offer in most of the other strands of the programme consisted of fully funded formal structured training and in some cases the award of qualifications. These types of continuous professional development (CPD) usually attract high engagement as they offer tangible benefits. While the SPH programme also offered a range of structured CPD options, it included, in addition, a range of additional support and resources, which appeared to have appealed to the sector beyond the structured CPD. These levels of engagement with the Hubs programme measured in the wider sector-wide SCEYP Pulse Survey were consistent by provider type and by providers based in the most deprived and least deprived areas.

During the lifetime of the programme, Hubs saw an increase in the levels of engagement of settings. Hubs noted that the programme was picking up momentum and as the programme progressed, more and more settings were engaging with the Hubs and signing up for training and programmes. It appeared that Hubs have been successful in making themselves known to settings in their area and were becoming a trusted source of information. This is an encouraging finding in particular when considering that early years settings are often time poor and there were various offers of training and support available in the sector at the same time, 'competing' on the settings availability to engage.

"I feel like we are starting to get recognised and known across the sector. We've put in an awful lot of hard work over the last year and a bit to develop our comms and social media presence, and now we have a really good website [...] we're really starting to gain momentum and starting to be recognised by the sector and seen as useful by the sector."

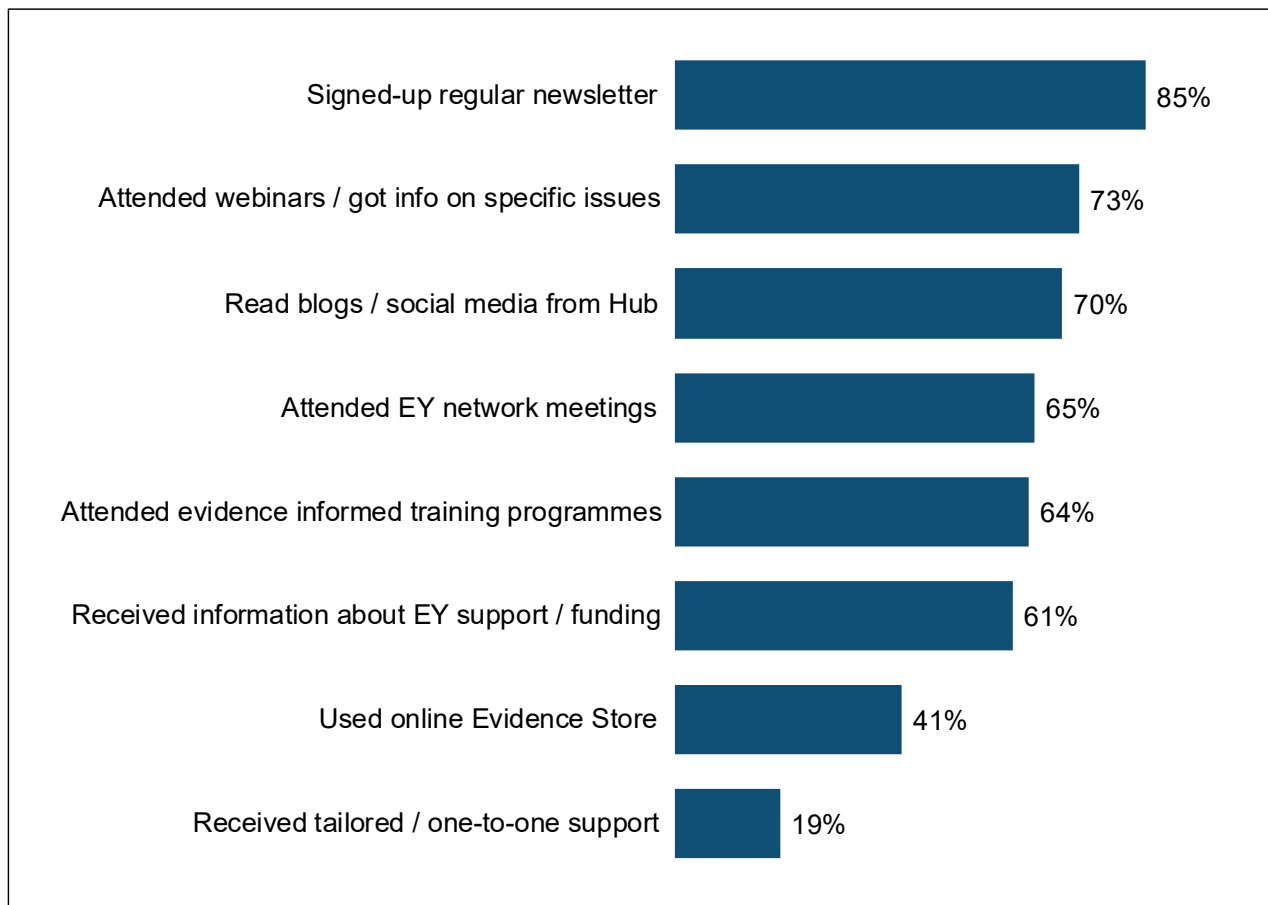
– Hub, Year 1 focus group

Forms of engagement and levels of satisfaction

Settings had engaged with their local Hub in a variety of ways (Figure 11.), with the most common forms of engagements being signing-up to receive regular newsletters (85%), attending Hub webinars or receiving information about specific issues in the early years sector (73%), and reading blogs and social media news from their local Hub (70%).

Although less common, two-in-five (41%) of settings responding to the survey had used the online Evidence Store on at least one occasion, and one-in-five (19%) had received tailored one-to-one support or advice from their Hub about a specific issue.

Figure 11. Forms of engagement had with Hub



S1. Thinking about all of your interactions with your Hub, which of these, if any, have you/your early years setting done or been involved with to-date? Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630). 1% of settings gave an 'other' response.

While subscriptions to newsletters may be perceived as 'lower levels of engagement', feedback from settings and Hubs suggested that settings were opening the emails and clicking on the links, and survey data showed that of those settings who had signed-up to the newsletter 50% were reading them repeatedly (on 5 or more occasions), indicating active engagement with the information and resources shared by the Hubs. The feedback from settings suggested that they found the topics in the newsletter relevant and the resources helpful.

Activities that settings had engaged with were broadly similar by provider type, although SBPs were more likely to have engaged with more of the initiatives (specifically higher for attending a network meeting and using the Evidence Store, 75% and 52% respectively). PVLs were more likely to have received tailored advice or one-to-one support compared with other settings (26%). Settings in the more deprived locations (the

bottom two Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) quintiles) were more likely to engage in a higher number of different Hub initiatives (73% had engaged with 3 or more types of initiatives, compared with 65% of setting based in less deprived areas).¹⁵

Most settings had repeated engagement with Hubs' activities. For example, around two-thirds (68%) of settings who had attended a webinar or received information about a specific issue had done so on 3 or more occasions, and three-fifths (60%) of those who had attended a network meeting had likewise done this on 3 or more occasions. This suggests high levels of satisfaction from the Hubs' offer and an acknowledgement of benefits to the setting and their staff (discussed in further detail below). That said, private, voluntary or independent settings (PVI) were the least likely to engage repeatedly, most likely due to capacity issues being faced with many competing demands on their time. Additional challenges are discussed in detail further below in the 'Barriers to engagement' sub-section below.

Views on the Hubs' offer and activities were broadly positive. The majority of settings agreed that the Stronger Practice Hubs' activities had been relevant to their setting (92%), with a similar proportion agreeing that the activities had been of a high quality (90%), practical or actionable (88%) and accessible (87%).¹⁶

Table 9. Settings' views on Hub activities

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Relevant to your setting	92%	7%	1%
High quality	90%	8%	1%
Practical or actionable	88%	9%	3%
Accessible to your setting	87%	8%	5%

B5. Thinking about the Stronger Practice Hubs' activities that you/ your setting engaged with and/or newsletters, social media and blogs, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they have so far been...?

Base: All settings completing the survey online (Post Survey) (n=359).

The rating of the activities being high quality was particularly strong among settings based in the most deprived Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) areas, with nearly all (99%) of these settings rating the activities as high quality. Settings felt the activities and content were grounded in practical examples, but at the same time offered

¹⁵ The different types of initiatives included in this calculation included: attending webinars, attending network meetings, using Evidence Store, receiving information about funding can access, attending evidence-informed training, receiving tailored or one-to-one support.

¹⁶ The extent to which settings agree with these statements was asked of online respondents only.

sufficient flexibility for settings to input from their own experience and tailor and adapt the new content to align with their setting and own cohort of children.

“It helped me to change my vision and my direction really of [...] instead of going to set classes, we have the freedom. To actually change things daily.”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

“There's so much more problem solving, but it's real-world problems solving rather than us making up a scenario for them to have to solve a problem.”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Hubs and settings commented that the settings were increasingly buying into the evidence-based approach and developing a strong understanding of the principles and benefits of it.

“I don't want to do something just because it's popular [...] I want to do something because we've studied it, and we know that it works and so I really love the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), and I did some work with them on making sure that their site was accessible to different types of people.”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

“I just think to have science backed strategies to help us is really important because there is a lot of conjecture and rumour and stuff posted all over Facebook that childminders and nursery people are looking at that makes them feel like they're not doing enough. That makes them feel like they're not good enough. That sometimes doesn't even make any sense.”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Feedback from the EEF and NCB suggested that **the quality of the offer varied across Hubs, but overall, there had been an improvement in quality in the second year** of the programme with Hubs being better able to explain the benefits of implementing evidence-based approaches.

This is encouraging, because maintaining high-quality levels of provisions is a key factor of success for the programme. Settings were typically time and resource poor, and they needed to know that the activities that were engaging with were worth the investment (i.e. staff time, travel costs and the possible purchase of any new materials or resources) to continue their engagement with the programme and the principles of evidence-based practices it sets out to promote.

While the feedback on the quality, relevance and accessibility of the Hubs offer was overwhelmingly positive, settings and **Hubs did point to a number of gaps in the offer:**

- **A lack of programmes and resources for working with children with SEND.**

Settings that had children with SEND often felt that they would benefit from specific resources and practical tips for working with these children to be able to address their needs. They felt that some of the resources in the Evidence Store or those shared by Hubs were not appropriate for their children with SEND, and that left them unsure how to include those children in the activities.

“Staff [...] that don't really have any experience of working with these children that have high needs, [need support] about how to train them properly, especially within early years [...] training for those members of staff of the areas of development, how to move learning forward to those sort of things I think are really important now.”

– *School Based Provider, Lesser engaged, Year 2 interview*

- **A lack of tailoring of support for childminders.** Most programmes tested were not suitable for childminders. Childminders have a unique setup. They are often just one childminder working with a small group of children of different ages. At one time they could have a baby, a toddler and a preschool age child, all requiring different types of care and activities. As such, childminders were facing unique challenges in delivering structured activities to their children. Childminders commented that they often felt there were no suitable solutions for their unique structure in the offer.

“70% of our Hub were childminders, we had no programmes for childminders, we couldn't offer anything [...] we tailored our own programmes 'although not programmes' to meet needs of childminders”.

– *Hub, Year 1 focus group*

- **A lack of programmes and resources for under 2 year olds.** The majority of the content on offer from the Hubs and the Evidence Store tended to be for the older age groups (2 years-old and above). A particular gap was around working with babies, which childminders and PVIs especially would have benefited from.

There was also a desire for more child-led learning interactions. There was recognition that it was difficult to capture and film child-led interactions spontaneously, but equally these were more typical of how interactions occur with children in settings on a day-to-day basis.

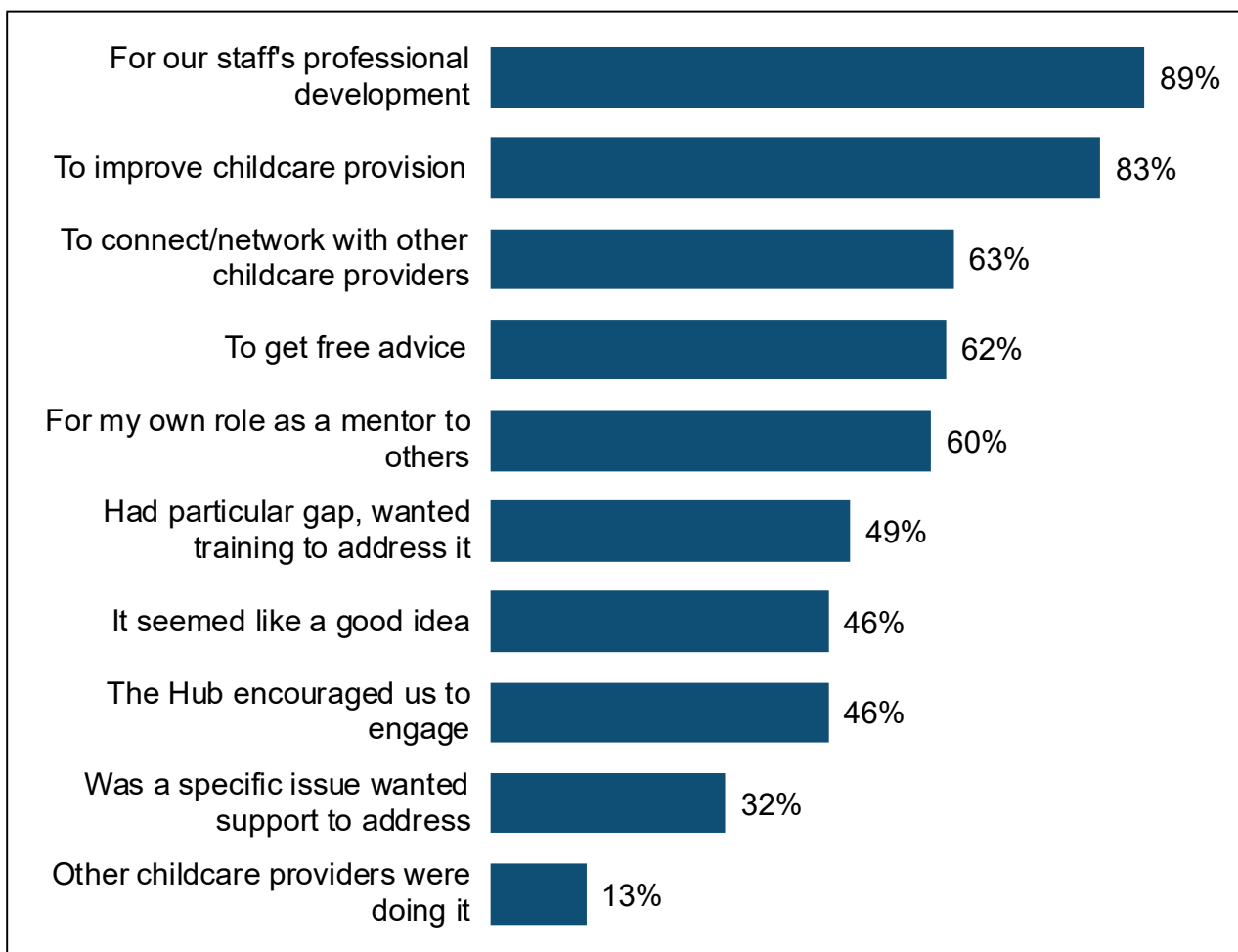
“I understand videos are easier to make in a controlled adult focused environment but does not then give a clear picture of typical interactions with children.”

Drivers of engagement

There appeared to be great appetite for settings to gain access to the funded training and professional content and support on offer. The programme seemed to fill a gap in the sector around professional development opportunities. This was particularly relevant to PVIs and childminders, who often have less capacity to engage with continuing professional development (CPD) compared with maintained settings, due to their size and staff ratios.

Settings were most likely to have engaged with their Hub’s activities for their staff’s professional development, with the majority (89%) citing this as a reason for engagement. This was followed by engaging to improve childcare provision (83%), to connect or network with other providers (63%), to get free advice (62%), and for the respondent’s own role as a mentor to others (60%).

Figure 12 Reasons for engaging with Hub activities



Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630). Responses above 1% shown.

Childminders were more likely to have engaged with Hub activities because other childcare providers were doing so (17% of CMs gave this as a reason, compared with 12% of PVIIs and 10% of SBPs). Because of the nature of their setting, it was recognised by various groups participating in the evaluation that childminders could feel isolated and unable to benefit from the various CPD opportunities available to the sector. Hubs reported that for many it was the first time that they had access to a learning forum with other childminders, where they could share ideas and learn best practice from each other.

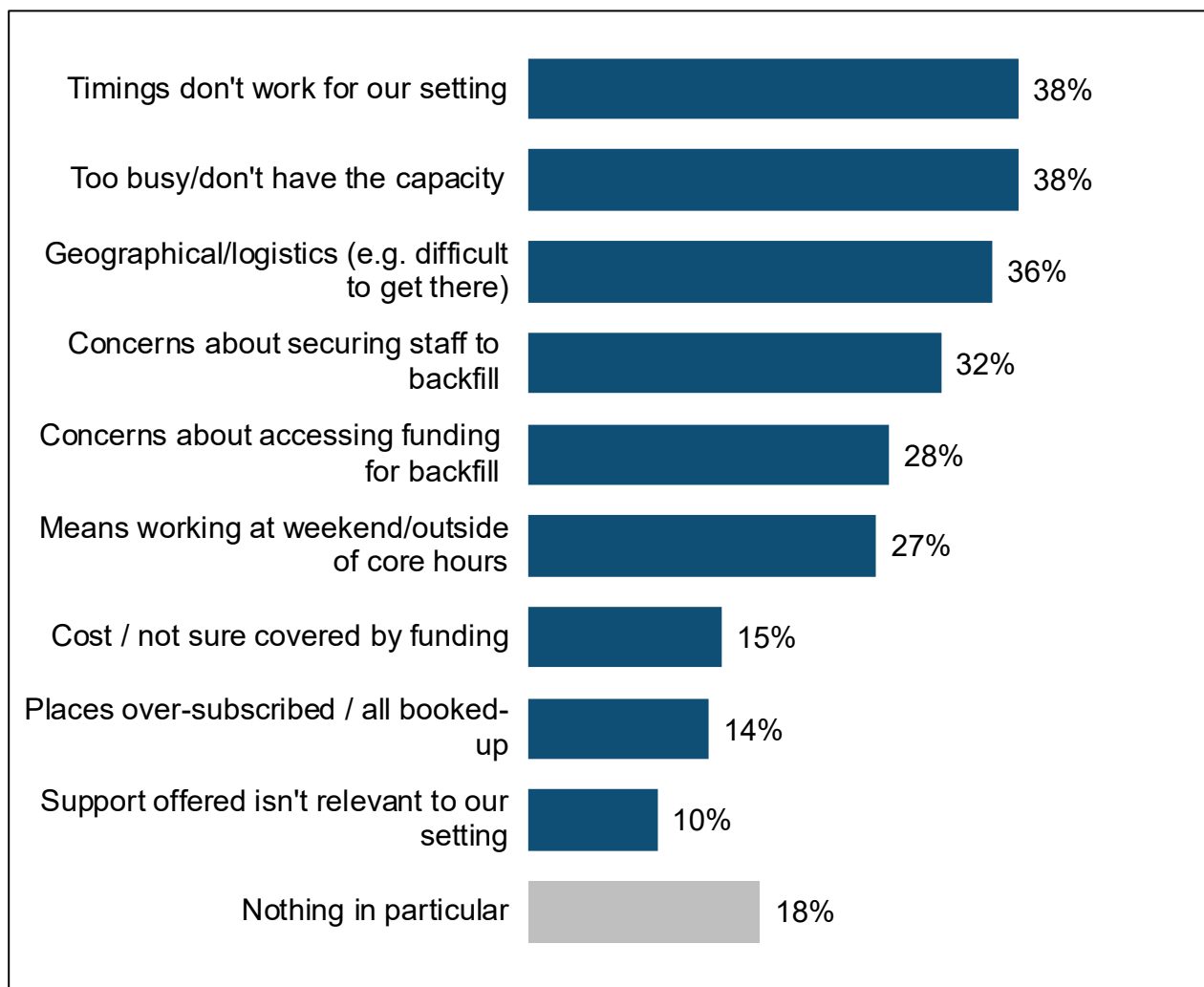
“...so it was nice to have someone because in our local authority we don't have a network of childminders. We don't have a lot of support and by going to these meetings and seeing other local authorities, I could see what kind of support they were receiving [and provide feedback to their own local authority].”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Barriers to engagement

Early years settings faced a number of challenges and barriers to engaging, or engaging more, with the Hubs (Figure 13). The most common reasons cited were timings not working for the setting (38%), being too busy / not having capacity (38%), and geography or logistics (36%).

Figure 13. Barriers to greater engagement with local Hub



B6. What, if anything, has prevented you from engaging with your local Stronger Practice hub more than you have done so far? Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630). Answers of 2% or lower are not shown.

Around a third of settings (32%) cited concerns about securing staff to backfill in order to maintain staff ratios, while just under three-in-ten reported concerns about accessing funding for backfill to maintain staff ratios (28%). If sessions happened during the workday, settings were required to backfill the staff member that were away. For many settings this posed a financial burden (as they needed to hire supply staff) or logistical issues as they were trying to reorganise their staff for the day to cover any absences (plus mentions were also made that it was difficult to find backfill staff).

“They really want to get CPD and they really want the support, but getting people out of the setting itself is the biggest barrier to them at the moment. They just don’t have enough people to cover.”

– Hub, Year 2 Interview

For childminders, going to sessions during working hours meant not working that day, and for many that was not an option. To mitigate this, sessions were offered in the afternoon or on weekends, but this meant long days for staff or missing their time of rest, which not everyone was willing to do. Some providers set up ‘bring your child’ sessions, mainly for childminders, but it was still distracting to practitioners. Others offered recorded sessions, but this meant training was less interactive and this felt less effective to practitioners. The barriers of the ability to attend settings because of the need to backfill was more prevalent for SBPs, PVIIs and settings based in more deprived areas, whereas CMs were more likely say the timings do not work for their setting (Table 10).

Table 10. Reasons for not engaging more with Hub activities by provider type and deprivation area

	Total	SBPs	PVIs	CMs	More deprived	Less deprived
Base	(630)	(167)	(237)	(200)	(237)	(210)
Timings don't work for our setting	38%	30%	42%	45%*	36%	40%
Too busy / don't have the capacity	38%	42%	51%*	17%	44%*	36%
Geographical/logistics (e.g. difficult to get there)	36%	33%	36%	34%	38%	37%
Concerns about securing staff to backfill	32%	45%*	45%*	4%	41%*	24%
Concerns about accessing funding for backfill	28%	42%*	37%*	2%	34%*	24%
Means working weekend / outside of core hours	27%	26%	32%*	22%	27%	26%
Cost / not sure covered by funding	15%	18%	21%*	5%	17%	16%
Places over-subscribed / all booked-up	14%	12%	16%	13%	14%	16%
Support offered isn't relevant to our setting	10%	12%	9%	7%	8%	11%
Nothing in particular	18%	15%	14%	25%*	16%	20%

B6. What, if anything, has prevented you / your setting from engaging with your local Stronger Practice Hub more than you have done so far? Base: All settings (Post Survey). Answers for the total of 2% or lower are not shown. * indicates a figure statistically significantly higher than the average at the 95% confidence level.

A second key barrier to engagement was the geographical distance between the Hubs / the location of training sessions and the settings. This issue increased as the reach of the Hubs expanded in the second year of the programme to engage settings in more remote areas. For many of the settings, attending sessions in-person required long travel time and high costs, which not many were able or willing to invest. Hubs and CPD providers tried to mitigate this barrier through a number of means and, in some cases, training sessions were moved online. However, not all training sessions worked well online and in interviews, many settings said they preferred to have sessions in-person. This provided them with an opportunity to meet other practitioners, network and form working relationships. In addition, some settings did not have sufficiently strong or stable internet connections to join online, and some (especially childminders) did not have access to a computer and were logging into the sessions on their mobile phone.

“It was like a program and they were going to give us lots of support and everything was going to be online, but they turned me down because I was too far.”

– *Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

“I saw it was a small [centre linked] to a stronger Hub and started looking at that. I was like, ‘Oh my God this is amazing. This is what I want to do’. Unfortunately, it's just too far away from me to go over and utilise the centre.”

– *Childminder, Lesser Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Communications around the programme could have been more effective to promote higher engagement. One setting commented that they noticed they received fewer newsletters than they had earlier in the programme, and another felt that while the SPH website gave good details of professional development, networking opportunities and teaching resources that were available for practitioners, settings were still required to seek further information themselves, and this was not always possible due to limited free time. They thought local authorities, in particular, could do more to advertise what was available to settings.

“I don't think it's really advertised as much. I know that it is mentioned in our family information service now and again, but I don't think they put it in there too often and I don't know why, because obviously there is lots of resources on the site and it is easily accessible for the online.”

– *Childminder, Lesser Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Indicators of impact and outcomes

This chapter focuses on the impact of the Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme upon settings. The chapter looks at the changes settings made to their practice following participation in Hub activities; any benefits to their children; and the impact on staff skills. The chapter also explores the potential legacy of the programme.

Key findings

- A high proportion of settings in the Post Survey (three-quarters, 74%) reported they had changed their practice following participation in the SPH programme.
- The more engagement a setting had with the programme (measured by participation in different types of activity), the more likely they were to say they had made practice changes, though causality cannot be proved. The proportion making practice changes rose to 88% for settings who engaged with 4 or more types of activity.
- Settings that had made changes to their practices had most commonly introduced new practices around supporting communication and language development (85% of those that had made changes). Settings generally agreed that making the changes to their practice was easy.
- Most settings participating in the programme and completing the Post Survey reported that the programme had had a positive impact on their children; 78% felt the communication and language development of the children in their setting had improved, 73% that the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) had improved, 62% that school readiness had improved, and 58% that early mathematics development had improved. With the exception of PSED, settings in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure) were more likely than average to report that these aspects had seen an improvement.
- The majority of practice leaders felt the SPH programme had had benefits for their staff, with four-in-five saying it had improved staff skills (82% agreed) or staff practice (81%).
- In terms of actual measures of change in the confidence, knowledge and skills of staff working in the early years sector, the Baseline and Post Surveys picked-up some positive shifts in measures, with a greater number of measures recording a change when the data was filtered on settings in the more deprived areas (7 of the 21 confidence, knowledge and skill areas measured showed an increase in the proportion who 'agreed strongly').
- There was optimism that the programme will create some legacy. Most settings making practice changes intended for them to be permanent (92%), and most said they would continue to engage with other local settings to share best practice (87%).

Changes to practice

A high proportion of settings in the Post Survey (three-quarters, 74%) reported they had changed their practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. However, settings were less likely to agree that they had had enough time to build changes into their practice (65%). Of those settings that had not made changes, around half reported that they planned to make some changes in the future (49%). As a combination, therefore, nearly 9 in 10 settings (87%) responding to the post survey had or planned to make changes to their practice following participation in the SPH programme.

Table 11. Changes to practice as a result of the SPH programme

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
Have changed practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme	74%	6%	1%
Have had enough time to build changes into practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme	65%	9%	2%

C4. Now please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that as a childminder / an early years setting you...? 'Neither agree nor disagree' responses not shown. Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630).

There was no significant difference in the incidence of making practice changes that had been implemented at the time of the Post Survey by provider type (77% schools-based providers (SBPs), 72% private, voluntary or independent providers (PVIs), 77% childminders (CMs)). This suggests that the activities and professional development was relevant and actionable across all provider types. That said, there were some differences in terms of the nature of the practice. Those more likely to have made changes to their practice compared with the average were settings with zero children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) (83% vs. 74%) and larger practices with more than 100 children aged under five (also 83%).

The incidence of making changes to practice was similar when looking at settings in both deprived and less deprived areas. While the data indicated some small differences, these were of small magnitude and varied according to the measure of deprivation used. There was no difference in the incidence of making practice changes using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measure of deprivation (76% in more deprived areas had made changes, 77% in less deprived areas).¹⁷ Settings in more deprived IDACI quintiles were more likely to say they 'strongly' agreed that they had made changes to their practice (34% compared with 29% on average). In contrast,

¹⁷ These categories combine the two most deprived quintiles and the two least deprived quintiles.

settings located in less deprived areas according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measure were slightly more likely to have made practice changes when compared with the average (79% vs. 74%). It is fair to conclude, therefore, that a high proportion of practices, whether based in deprived areas or not, had made practice changes.

The level of engagement with the SPH programme had a notable positive impact on whether settings had made changes to their practice. Settings that had engaged with 4 or more different types of Hub activities¹⁸ were most likely to have made changes (88%) and the likelihood decreased as engagement decreased, with 83% of those engaging with 3 or more types of activities having made changes and 80% of those having engaged with 2 or more types of activities. Among those that had engaged with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Evidence Store at least once, the proportion making changes was high at 83%¹⁹.

Table 12. Settings' views on Hub activities

Number of different types of activities engaged in	Proportion agreeing they have made changes to practice
One activity type only	51%
2+ activity types	80%
3+ activity types	83%
4+ activity types	88%
Used Evidence Store	83%

C4_2. Extent to which agree practice has changed following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme? Base: All settings completing the survey online (Post Survey) (n=359).

Among those engaging with just one Hub activity, the proportion saying they had made changes to their practice fell to just 51%. Other settings less likely to have made changes to their practice compared with the average following participation in the SPH programme were those that had been in operation for the longest period of time (more than 40 years) (61% vs. 74%).

¹⁸ The activities referenced here include those beyond simply signing up to the regular newsletter from Hubs or reading blogs or social media posts. Activities could include attending webinars hosted by Hubs, attending early years network meetings, using the EEF Evidence Store, receiving information from Hubs about support or funding available, attending evidence-informed training programmes funded by Hubs, or receiving tailored or one-to-one support from Hubs about specific issues.

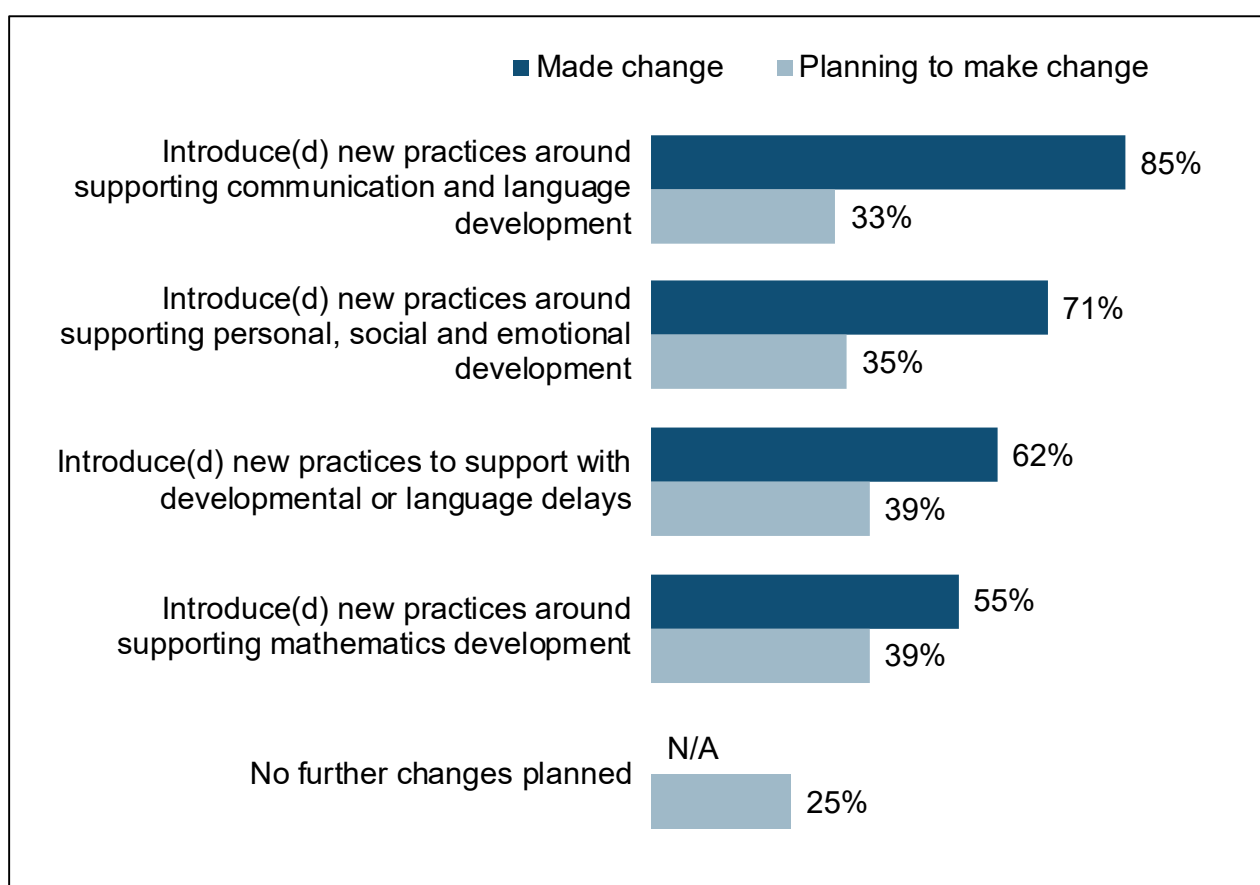
¹⁹ Please note that base sizes become too low to report on the incidence of making practice changes by the number of times the Evidence Store has been used.

Types of changes

Most settings that had made changes to their practices reported introducing new practices on communication and language development (85%) or around supporting personal, social and emotional development (PSED) (71%). Just under two-thirds (62%) had introduced practices to support with developmental or language delays. Just over half (55%) had introduced new practices around mathematics development (this was a topic that was rolled-out later in the programme).

However, for these two areas of practice with lower rates of reported changes so far, the proportion of settings reporting planned changes in future was slightly higher (than for communication and language and PSED). Just under four-in-ten settings that had made changes were planning to introduce further new practices around supporting mathematics development (39%) and developmental or language delays (also 39%). Just over a third were planning to make further changes related to personal, social and emotional development (35%), while a similar proportion planned to make further changes related supporting communication and language development. A quarter (25%) did not plan to make any further changes to their practice.

Figure 14. Changes that settings have made, or plan to make, as a result of participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme



C6. You said that you had implemented changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. Which of these changes have you made? C6a. What other, if any, changes have you planned but have not yet implemented? Base: All settings that had made changes as a result of participating in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme (Post Survey) (n=468). Responses selected by fewer than 5% not shown.

There was a fair amount of variation by provider type in the types of changes made. Among those that had made changes, childminders were more likely than other provider types to have introduced practices related to both communication and language development (92% vs. 85% on average) and mathematics development (72% vs. 55%). PVIs were less likely to have introduced new practices relating to communication and language development (76% vs. 85% on average), while SBPs were less likely to have made changes related to mathematics development (42% vs. 55%).

Table 13. Changes to practice as a result of the SPH programme

	Total	SBPs	PVIs	CMs
Introduce(d) new practices around supporting communication and language development	85%	85%	76%*	92%*
Introduce(d) new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development	71%	65%	69%	76%
Introduce(d) new practices to support with developmental or language delays	62%	61%	66%	59%
Introduce(d) new practices around supporting mathematics development	55%	42%*	50%	72%*

C6. You said that you had implemented changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. Which of these changes have you made? Base: All settings that had made changes as a result of participating in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme (Post Survey) (n=468, SBPs=126, PVIs=173, CMs=151). Responses selected by fewer than 5% not shown. * indicates a figure statistically significantly different from the average at the 95% confidence level.

There was also a relationship between other demographic factors and the types of changes settings reported introducing. Settings that had zero children with SEND were least likely to have introduced new practices related to developmental and language delays (45% vs. 62% on average) and most likely to have made changes around supporting mathematics development (66% vs. 55%).

When looking at deprivation levels, those in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure) were most likely to have made changes relating to both communication and

language development (93% vs. 75% of those in less deprived areas) and mathematics development (62% vs. 50%).²⁰

Ease of making changes

Settings generally agreed that making changes to their practice was easy. Around two-thirds of settings (65%) that had made changes related to supporting mathematics development felt implementing them had been easy, with just 5% saying it had been difficult (30% said it had been neither easy nor difficult).²¹ In terms of settings making other changes, around six-in-ten felt it had been easy to implement them, with a minority of settings disagreeing, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14 Ease of making changes to practice

	Easy	Neither/nor	Difficult
New practices supporting mathematics development	65%	30%	5%
New practices supporting personal, social and emotional development	62%	34%	4%
New practices to support with developmental or language delays	61%	34%	5%
New practices supporting communication and language development	58%	38%	4%

C7. How easy or difficult has it been, or will it be, to implement these changes? Base: All settings that had made changes in each area (Post Survey) (asked in online survey only) (Mathematics n=130, PSED n=173, Developmental or language delays n=140, Communication and language n=221).

Child outcomes

Impact of engagement with Hub activities on children's development areas

When thinking about the impact engagement with Hub activities had already had on the children in their setting, around eight-in-ten (78%) settings responding to the Post Survey felt the communication and language development of the children in their setting had improved. Just under three quarters (73%) felt the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) of children had improved, 62% felt the school readiness of children had improved, and 58% felt the early mathematics development had improved. In all

²⁰ 'More deprived' combines those settings located in areas ranked in the bottom two IDACI quintiles, while 'less deprived' combines those in the bottom two.

²¹ These questions were asked in the online survey only, and not the CATI survey, and are on a slightly lower base size, although the base sizes are still at least n=130.

cases, either no settings, or a very small minority, felt that these elements had worsened when considering the children in their setting²².

Table 15. Whether engagement with Hub activities has improved certain practices within settings

	Improved	Worsened	Don't know / Not applicable
The communication and language development of the children in your setting	78%	0%	8%
The personal, social and emotional development) of the children in your setting	73%	1%	8%
The school readiness of the children in your setting	62%	1%	12%
The early mathematics development of the children in your setting	58%	0%	13%

D1. To what extent, if at all, would you say your setting's engagement with the initiatives organised, signposted or run by your local Stronger Practice Hub or any changes in practices that you have introduced as a result made a difference to the following? 'Neither improved nor worsened' responses not shown.

Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630).

Settings in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure) were more likely to report that the communication and language development (84% vs. 78% average), school readiness (67% vs. 62%) and early mathematics development of children in their setting (63% vs. 58%) had improved following engagement with Hub activities.

When looking at provider types, SBPs were less likely than PVIs and childminders to feel that the early mathematics development of the children in their setting (49% vs. 58% average) and that the school readiness of children (56% vs. 62%) had improved. PVIs were less likely to agree that the communication and language development of the children in their setting (72% vs. 78%) had improved, while childminders were more likely to report that the early mathematics development of the children had improved (71% vs. 58%).

²² No data is available to explain why 1% felt they had worsened.

Table 16. Changes to practice as a result of the SPH programme

	Total	SBPs	PVIs	CMs
Improved communication and language development	78%	81%	72%*	81%
Improved personal, social and emotional development	73%	73%	74%	75%
Improved school readiness	62%	56%*	65%	68%
Improved mathematics development	58%	49%*	55%	71%*

D1. To what extent, if at all, would you say your setting's engagement with the initiatives organised, signposted or run by your local Stronger Practice Hub or any changes in practices that you have introduced as a result made a difference to the following? Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630). * indicates a figure statistically significantly different from the average at the 95% confidence level.

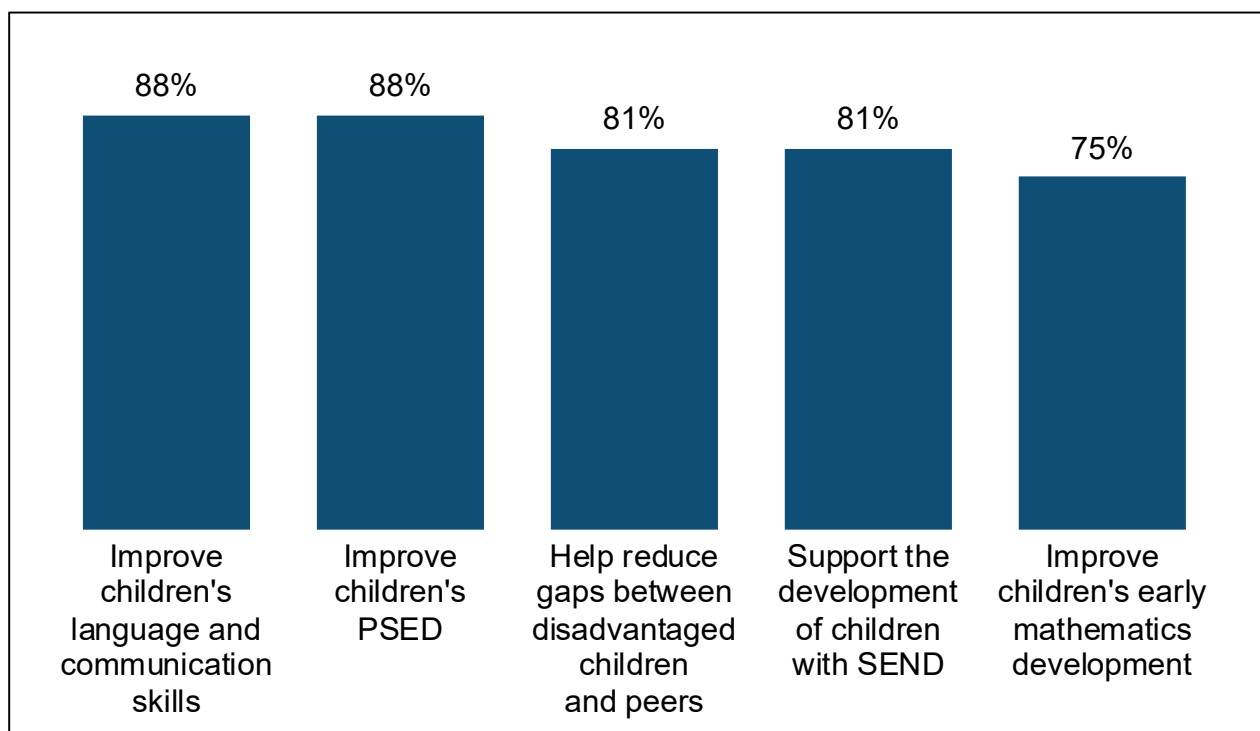
Settings that had zero children with SEND were more likely to indicate that changes they had introduced after engaging with SPH initiatives improved the early mathematics development of the children in their setting when compared with the average (67% vs. 58%).

Impact of changes to practice on specific early year practice gaps

When thinking about the current and future impact of changes made as a result of participation in the SPH programme, settings were mostly confident that those **changes would have a positive impact on various elements of children's development.**

Around nine-in-ten settings (88%) that had made, or were planning to make, changes to their practice felt that they had improved, or would improve, children's language and communication skills and PSED. Around eight-in-ten (81%) felt that the changes would reduce the gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers and would support the development of children with SEND. Three quarters (75%) felt the changes would improve children's early mathematics development.

Figure 15. Proportion of settings that agree changes made after participation in the SPH programme have had, or will have, various positive impacts on children

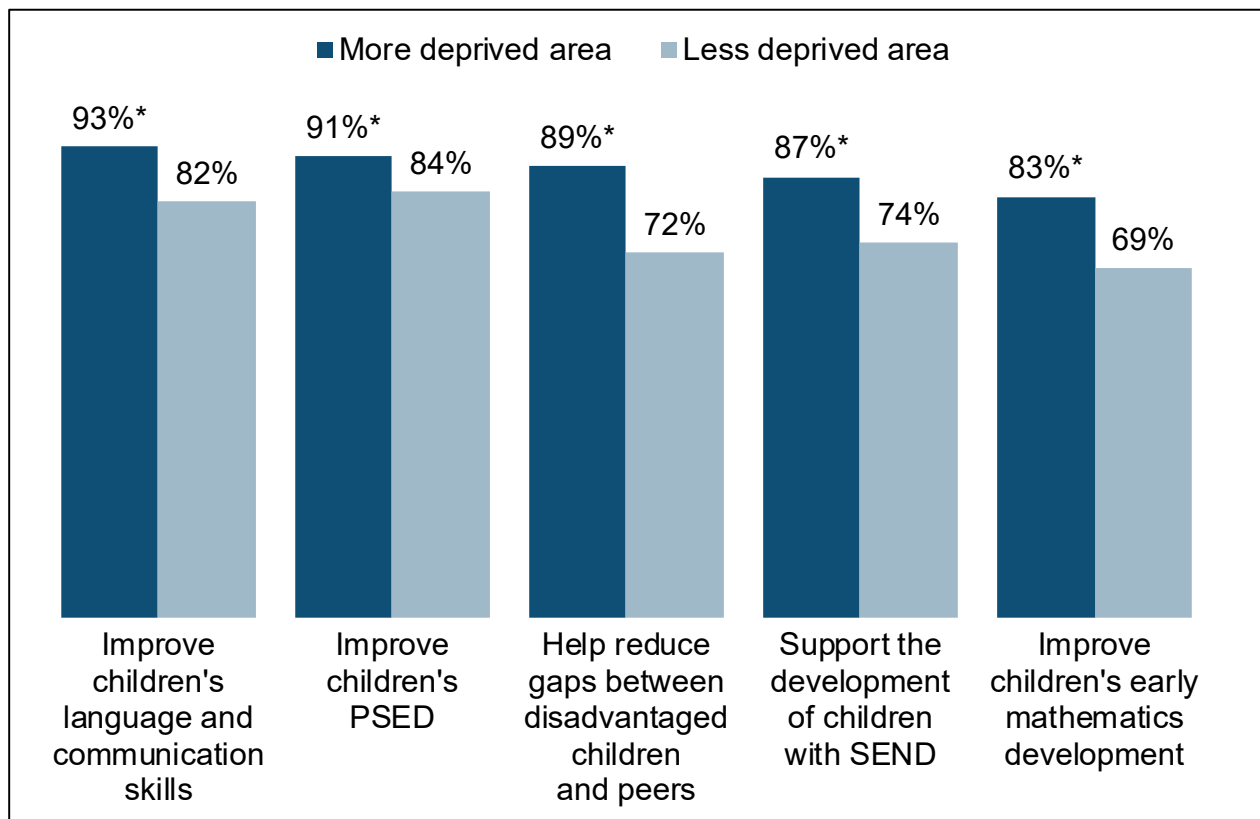


C5. And to what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following. Base: All settings who had, or were planning to make, changes as a result of participating in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme (Post Survey) (n=550).

Childminders were most likely to feel that changes had improved, or would improve, children's language and communication skills (95% vs. 88% average) and mathematics development (87% vs. 75%). They were least likely, however, to indicate that changes had supported, or would support, the development of children with SEND (76% vs. 81%). PVIs were least likely to report that changes had improved, or would improve, children's language and communication skills (81% vs. 88% average) and early mathematics development (69% vs. 75%).

Settings located in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure) and who had made, or were planning to make, changes were notably more likely to agree that the changes would have positive impacts on children for each of the measure than those in less deprived areas, as shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16 Proportion of settings that agree changes made after participation in the SPH programme have had, or will have, various positive impacts on children by settings in more and less deprived IDACI areas



C5. And to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following. Base: All settings who had, or were planning to make, changes as a result of participating in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme (Post Survey). (Settings in more deprived areas n=215, Settings in less deprived areas n=184). * indicates a figure statistically significantly different at the 95% confidence level.

Settings that had zero children with SEND were most likely to feel that changes had improved, or would improve, children's early mathematics development (85% vs. 75% average). The same group were least likely to indicate that changes had led, or would lead, to helping reduce gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers (70% vs. 81%).

As noted earlier, increased engagement with Hub activities generally led to increased likelihood to agree that the various elements of children's development would be improved by the changes made. This was **most apparent when looking at whether changes had reduced, or would reduce, gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers** (87% of those that had engaged with four or more initiatives vs. 81% average) and whether they had improved, or would improve, early mathematics development (82% vs. 75%).

Examples of changes made in settings

Participation in the SPH programme led to a number of settings reporting that they had had positive training experiences which made an impact on their staff and children.

Example: Making use of outdoor play and improving motor skills

One setting learned how to safely take children to climb trees and use simple tools like saws that helped them learn physical and fine motor skills, while incorporating numerical and language learning, and also benefitting from fresh air and being calmed by a natural environment.

“I mean, not only did he teach us the skills to teach the children, but, you know, just the benefits of it from fine motor skills to children. It was phenomenal.”

– *Setting, PVI, Year 2 interview*

Example: Teaching about risky play and creating boundaries

Another setting spoke about the benefits of a session around ‘risky play’ and using puppets to teach children about boundaries and interacting safely but also to encourage them that if they fall, they can get up again.

“We had a keynote speaker all about the importance of risky play and how to set up your environment outside or use the woods in different ways. She was brilliant.”

– *Setting, Childminder, Year 2 interview*

Example: Happy reading encouraged literacy and provided resources

A pair of childminders enjoyed a Happy Reading programme, which provided reading materials and simple guides to help instruct how to encourage reading with children. These resources could also be shared with families and used like a library.

“Our families have loved it. It's not only just the books in the bag, they also come with instructions on how to focus on the story.”

– *Setting, Childminder, Year 2 interview*

Example: Resources to reinforce changes in communication and language

Another childminder talked about how the physical resources provided by their Hub (both at an individual level and group level) really supported the more formal training. They received a set of 10 communication and language cards which

provided QR codes to allow them to individually watch webinars of good practice. Their 'stay and play' childminder network also received a group resource pack which meant that everyone had access to what was needed to role-model the training within their network. Individually they have taken turns to lead on the different card activities at their network, recognising that not everyone has time to read everything or watch all the videos.

"They also gave us a resource pack that was not just for individual childminders but was for the group. So on the one we've got that was for language there was different songs on it where you do a beat. And there were sticks, and there were scarves. Just so that all the children have got it and we all do it and we all know the songs now. But the children listening and doing it, they've really come on, it's all workable, the things they set do work."

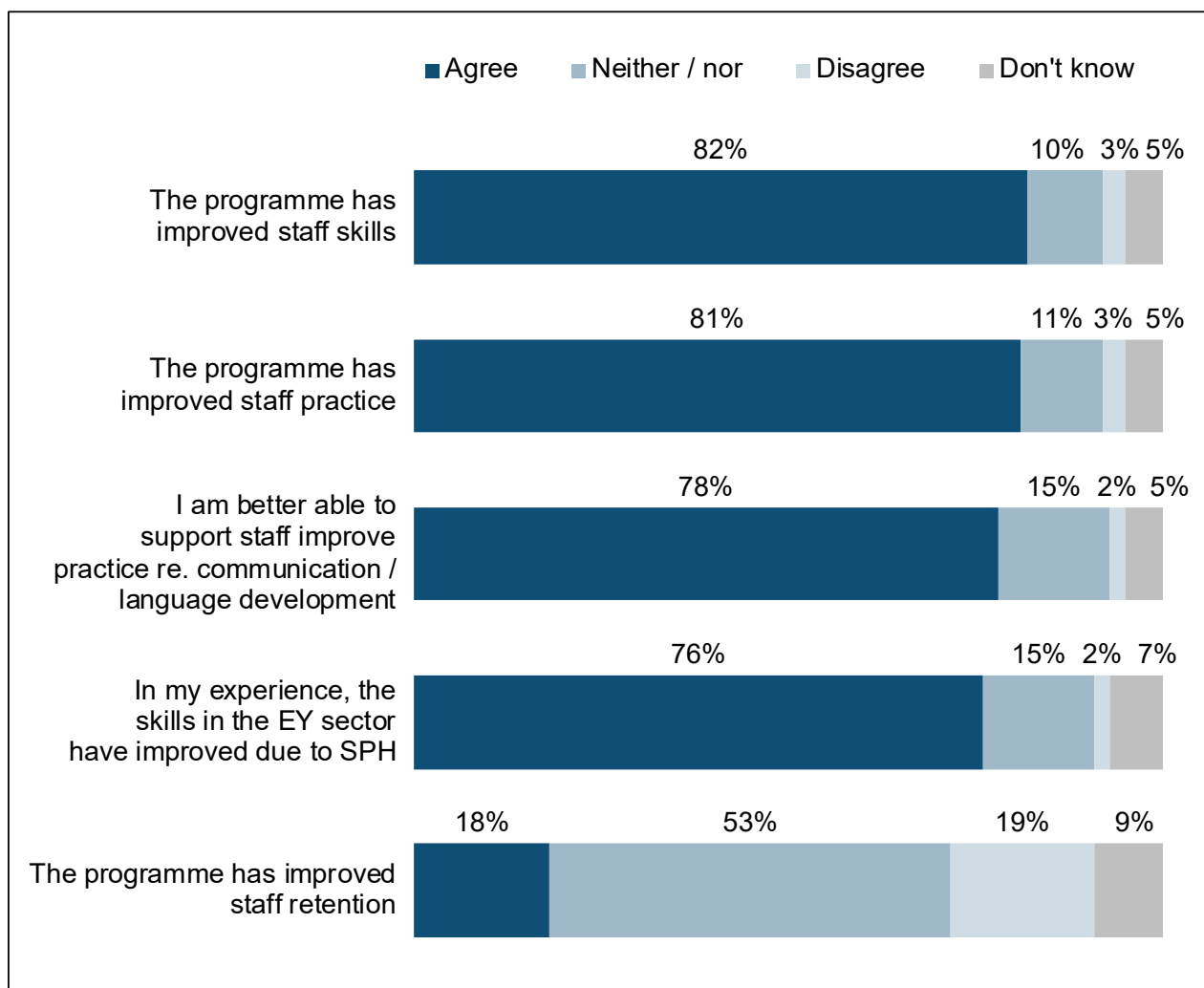
– *Setting, Childminder, Engaged, Year 2 interview*

Staff outcomes

Benefits to staff

Both Hubs and settings were mostly positive when reflecting on the impact that participation in SPH programme activities had had on practitioners in the sector. The majority of practice leaders agreed that the programme had improved staff skills (82%), improved staff practice (81%), ensured they as leaders were better able to support staff to improve practices related to communication and language development (78%), and that, generally, the skills in the early years sector had improved due to the SPH programme (76%). They did not feel, however, that the programme had led to an improvement in staff retention within the sector, with just 18% agreeing this was the case. In the qualitative research, this was recognised as a systemic challenge within the sector, and not a direct outcome that the SPH programme by itself would address.

Figure 17. Proportion of settings that agree changes made after participation in the SPH programme will have various positive impacts on children



C8. As a practice leader, to what extent do you agree or disagree that...? D2. Since your engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme began to what extent do you agree or disagree that...? Base: All practice leaders (Post Survey) (n=355).

While still in the majority, settings that had been in operation for the longest period of time (more than 40 years) were generally less likely to agree that the programme has improved staff practice. This was particularly notable when looking at whether skills in the early years sector had improved due to SPH (63% agreed vs. 76% average) and whether they were better able to support staff improve practices related to communication and language development (68% vs. 78%).

Across all measures, likelihood of agreement increased in line with the number of activities that settings had engaged with, with those engaging with 4 or more being most likely to agree with each measure. This was most notable when looking at whether skills in the early years sector had improved due to SPH (87% of those engaging with 4 or more types of activities agreed vs. 76% average).

Hubs too felt that the programme had made a positive impact on staff, particularly among childminders. Qualitative data indicated that Hubs felt a greater awareness of evidence-informed practices was emerging among settings, with settings becoming more particular about their practices and the changes they were implementing.

“The positive impact our work as a Hub has had on the childminder sector in particular is something which must continue. The feedback from them has been overwhelmingly positive and [...] their confidence has developed so much. Before our Hub, they felt forgotten and isolated but now they feel more empowered and valued.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

This sense of a growing confidence and feeling of empowerment in the sector was also reflected in qualitative interviews with settings, who reported increased confidence in taking risks and trying new activities. They also noted improved confidence when it came to approaching parents and working with other professionals involved in early years provision (e.g. speech and language therapists).

Networking among settings in regional areas was also reported to have improved throughout the duration of the SPH programme. While networks were initially relying on the input of Hubs to facilitate them, qualitative feedback suggested these networks were gaining momentum and beginning to function independently of the Hubs.

“It’s the first time in my 16 years of childminding that I have really felt valued as a practitioner and valued for the knowledge that I have to give to other practitioners and to share with each other.”

– *Setting, Childminder, Year 2 interview*

Impact on staff confidence, knowledge and skills

The Baseline and Post surveys among settings engaging with the programme included 21 measures of practitioners’ confidence, knowledge and skills area, with the aim of the evaluation to measure whether there was an uplift in these aspects.

Comparisons between the two surveys signalled some small but positive shifts in practitioner skill levels, with greater changes recorded for settings based in the more deprived areas (based on an IDACI classification). Practitioners completing both the Baseline and Post surveys recorded notable improvements in their confidence in interpreting evidence and in applying evidence-informed approaches.

Confidence

When comparing settings’ levels of agreement in the Baseline and Post surveys relating to their confidence in various skills and competencies linked to child development, there

was little notable change. Of note, however, the baseline skills measures were high (typically around 80-90% agreeing with the statements) meaning it would be harder to see shift changes.

Among settings that completed both surveys (i.e. the longitudinal group), however, it was apparent that there were some positive changes between the Baseline Survey and Post Survey measures. Naturally, by the time of the Post Survey, practitioners would have been working in their profession for a longer period and it would be expected that they would have built up more confidence, skills and knowledge. There was no counterfactual survey to measure the extent to which these changes would have happened without the SPH programme. That said, the findings do present a **positive picture of change, and this was particularly noticeable when looking at settings' confidence interpreting evidence and applying evidence-informed approaches**, which was a measure that specifically relates to the objective of the SPH programme. This measure saw a 13% net increase in those saying their confidence had improved.

A full breakdown of the change in settings' confidence levels between the Baseline Survey and Post Survey is shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Settings' level of agreement that they feel confident in various skills and competencies, Baseline Survey vs. Post Survey, and longitudinal nets²³

Confidence	Baseline	Post	Longitudinal net ²⁴
Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 0-2 year olds	67%	66%	+5%
Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 2-4 year olds	95%	94%	+11%
Confident leading appropriate activities for children with developmental or language delays	88%	89%	+11%
Confident in supporting children with their early language and communication development [^]	94%	93%	+4%

²³ Level of agreement is derived by combining the proportions indicating that they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement.

²⁴ The 'Longitudinal net' score refers to the proportion of those who completed both the Baseline and Post surveys that indicated that their confidence, knowledge or skill levels had changed. The score is calculated by subtracting the proportion indicating lower levels of confidence in the Post Survey compared with the Baseline Survey (those whose confidence worsened) from the proportion indicating higher levels of confidence (those whose confidence improved). Statistical significance testing on the longitudinal net scores has not been calculated as it is the same respondents completing both surveys.

Confidence	Baseline	Post	Longitudinal net ²⁴
Confident in supporting children with their personal, social and emotional development [^]	93%	93%	+2%
Confident in supporting children with their early mathematics development [^]	87%	86%	+6%
Confident interpreting evidence and applying evidence-informed approaches [^]	76%	76%	+13%
Confident implementing the reformed Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) [^]	91%	91%	+8%
Confident in supporting children's learning and development following the COVID-19 pandemic	88%	91%	+11%

C1. On a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that you are...? Base: All settings in the Baseline Survey (n=533); Settings completing the Baseline Survey online (n=436); All settings completing the Post Survey (n=630); Settings completing the Post Survey online (n=359); Settings completing both surveys (n=190); Settings completing both surveys online (n=112). [^] indicates that this statement was only asked of online respondents.

Comparing a higher strength of agreement with the confidence statement, i.e. those who 'strongly agreed' they had the required confidence skill, improvements in the confidence metrics were recorded in 2 areas from the Baseline to the Post Survey:

- Confident leading appropriate activities for 2-4 year olds (increased from 54% who strongly agreed in the Baseline to 62% in the Post Survey).
- Confident in supporting children's learning and development following the COVID-19 pandemic (increased from 40% to 49%).

Among those settings located in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure), there were also notable year-on-year changes when looking at the proportions 'strongly agreeing' with statements. For these settings the proportion who strongly agreed that that they were confident in the follow areas increased from the Baseline to the Post Survey:

- Confident leading appropriate activities for 2-4 year olds (increased from 52% to 66%).
- Confident in supporting children's learning and development following the COVID-19 pandemic (increased from 42% to 56%).

Knowledge

As when looking at measures of staff confidence, there were no discernible differences when looking at the proportions agreeing they felt knowledgeable about various elements of children's development between those completing the Baseline and Post survey. However, there were positive signals for the 'longitudinal net' scores based on individuals completing both surveys. Most notably among these practitioners, a clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early language and communication development saw a 7% net increase in those saying their knowledge had improved.

Table 18. Settings' level of agreement that they feel knowledgeable about various elements of children's development, Baseline Survey vs. Post Survey, and longitudinal nets

Knowledge	Baseline	Post	Longitudinal net
A good understanding of how babies and children learn and develop	91%	91%	+5%
A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early language and communication development	88%	91%	+7%
A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's PSED	88%	90%	+5%
A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early mathematics development [^]	82%	83%	+5%

C2. And on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that you have...? Base: All settings in the Baseline Survey (n=533); Settings completing the Baseline Survey online (n=436); All settings in the Post Survey (n=630); Settings completing the Post Survey online (n=359); Settings completing both surveys (n=190); Settings completing both surveys online (n=112). [^] indicates that this statement was only asked of online respondents.

Based on those who gave a higher strength of agreement that they had the knowledge area, i.e. those who 'strongly agreed' with the metric, the comparison of findings between the Baseline and Post Survey found an improvement in 2 knowledge areas. These were:

- A good understanding of how babies and children learn and develop (increased from 47% who strongly agreed in the Baseline to 53% in the Post Survey).
- A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's PSED (increased from 36% to 43%).

Further to this, among those settings located in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure), there were also some notable time trend changes when looking at the proportions 'strongly agreeing' with statements. For these settings, the proportion who strongly agreed that they had knowledge in the following areas increased from the Baseline to the Post Survey:

- A good understanding of how babies and children learn and develop (increased from 41% to 55%).
- A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's PSED (increased from 33% to 50%).
- A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early language and communication development (increased from 36% to 48%).

Skills

When looking at measures of staff skills, two measures saw significant increases in the Post Survey compared with the Baseline Survey (from already high benchmarks). Settings were more likely in the Post Survey to report that staff knew how to identify when a child requires additional support (96% Post Survey vs. 92% Baseline Survey) and how to identify when a child is showing signs of developmental delay (95% vs. 91%).

Among those settings that completed both surveys, identifying when a child requires one-to-one support saw the largest net increase in those saying their knowledge had improved, with a 12% net improvement. This was followed by identifying when a child requires additional support which saw a 9% net increase among this group.

Table 19. Settings' level of agreement that they have various skills related to children's development, the Baseline Survey vs. Post Survey, and longitudinal nets

Skills	Baseline	Post	Longitudinal net
Identifying when a child requires additional support	92%	96%*	+9%
Identifying when a child would benefit from specialist support^	90%	93%	+6%
Identifying when a child requires one-to-one support^	85%	89%	+12%
Identifying when a child requires support with their early language and communication development^	91%	94%	0%
Identifying when a child requires support with their personal, social and emotional development^	89%	92%	+2%

Skills	Baseline	Post	Longitudinal net
Identifying when a child requires support with their early mathematics development [^]	86%	86%	+6%
Identifying when a child is showing signs of developmental delay	91%	95%*	+3%

C3. And on the same scale, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that you are confident in identifying when a child...? Base: All settings in the Baseline Survey (n=533); Settings completing the Baseline Survey online (n=436); All settings in the Post Survey (n=630); Settings completing the Post Survey online (n=359); Settings completing both surveys (n=190); Settings completing both surveys online (n=114). [^] indicates that this statement was only asked of online respondents. * indicates a statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level.

Based on those who 'strongly agreed' that they had each of the skill areas, there was an increase in one of the metrics between the Baseline Survey and the Post Survey. This was in respect of being to identify when a child was showing developmental delays, with an increase from 50% who agreed strongly on this metric in the Baseline to 56% in the Post Survey.

Among those settings located in more deprived areas (based on the IDACI measure), there were likewise some time-trend changes when looking at the proportions 'strongly agreeing' with statements related to staff skills. The proportion in this group who strongly agreed that they were confident identifying the following areas increased from the Baselines to the Post Survey:

- Confident identifying when a child requires additional support (increased from 52% to 66%).
- Confident identifying that a child is showing signs of developmental delay (increased from 51% to 63%).

Summary: Indicators of outcomes by deprivation or SEND

Findings for settings based in higher deprivation area

A high proportion of settings who had engaged with the SPH programme made practice changes, with this of **equally high parity between settings based in the more deprived areas** (76% of settings based in the most deprived or deprived quintiles) **and the least deprived areas** (77% of settings based in the less or least deprived quintiles).

Settings in more deprived areas, however, introduced a greater number of changes, and recorded a higher incidence of making a practice change to communication and language development (93% of settings in deprived areas who had

made changes to their practice vs. 75% of their counterparts in less deprived areas) and mathematics development (62% vs. 50%).

Settings in more deprived areas were also more likely to report positive outcomes for their children. A higher proportion reported that the following aspects had improved following engagement with Hub activities, compared to the average:

- Communication and language development (84% vs. 78%).
- School readiness (67% vs. 62%).
- Early mathematics development of children in their setting (63% vs. 58%).

Likewise settings based in deprived areas who had or were planning to make practice changes were more likely to agree that the changes would improve the following areas compared to their counterparts in less deprived areas:

- Children's language and communication skills (93% vs. 82%).
- Children's PSED (91% vs. 84%).
- The gap between disadvantaged children and their peers (89% vs. 72%).
- The development of children with SEND (87% vs. 74%).
- Children's early mathematics development (83% vs. 69%).

The surveys also found a positive shifts in practitioner skill levels for settings based in deprived areas. For practitioners based in the more deprived areas and using a comparison of those who 'strongly agreed' they had the skill level, 7 out of the 21 skills tested in the research showed a positive increase between the Baseline and Post Survey time points. The greatest increase was for having a 'clear understanding of evidenced informed PSED. This recorded an increase of 17 percentage points in the proportion who 'strongly' agreed they had knowledge of this area between the Baseline survey (33%) and the Post Survey (50%).

Findings for settings with higher levels of children with SEND

Settings who did not have any children with SEND were the group most likely to make changes to their practice following participation in the SPH programme (83%, compared with 74% of settings with 1-20% of children with SEND and 75% of settings with over 20% of children with SEND). Of note, however, a very high proportion of settings without any children with SEND (84%) were childminders, and it is likely the type of provider driving this change rather than a relationship with the profile of children.

Settings without any children with SEND were more likely to have made changes around supporting mathematics development (66% vs. 55%), and were less likely to

have introduced new practices related to developmental and language delays (45% vs. 62% on average). Related to this they were more likely to indicate that changes they had introduced after engaging with SPH initiatives improved the early mathematics development of the children in their setting when compared with the average (67% vs. 58%).

For settings with children with SEND, the types of practice changes introduced were similar regardless of the proportion of their children with SEND. The most common practice change introduced was around communication and language development practices (85% of settings with 1-20% of children with SEND, 89% of settings with 20%+ children with SEND, based on those making practice changes).

Anticipated legacy

Regarding the continuation of practices beyond the end of the programme, just over half of Hubs (11) indicated that they would continue to run activities set-up through Hubs' initiatives, although this was not a definite for all Hubs (5 Hubs said they definitely will, 6 Hubs that they probably will, 4 that they would not be, and 3 were unsure).

Of the Hubs that said activities would continue, the most commonly cited activities to be continued were the organisation / running of networking events and the continued promotion of the Evidence Store (noted by 9 Hubs each).

In terms of network activities created through the programme, **fewer than half of Hubs (7) felt that these networks activities would continue without their involvement or SPH programme funding.** Nine Hubs said they would not be continuing, with 6 saying they would probably not and 3 saying definitely not.

When asked to think about any unintended positive consequences of the Hubs programme, more than half highlighted the positive relationships that had been built. These working relationships included those with local authorities, other Hubs, the settings they had worked with, external agencies and specialist partners, and the early years community as a whole.

Qualitative findings indicated that Hubs and settings wanted to see the SPH programme continue (and as reported in the chapter titled Implementation of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme, most Hubs would recommend other early years settings to apply to become a Stronger Practice Hub if the opportunity arose in the future). They felt the reputation of the programme was growing, and that it would be a shame to lose the momentum gained over the last few years. Several Hubs were keen to stress the importance of the programme to childminders.

“Stronger Practice Hubs have built trusting and supportive relationships with hundreds of early years practitioners and this is crucial to ensure that the children are receiving a high level of care and education in their setting.”

– *Hub, Year 2 Survey*

Hubs indicated that there were some challenges around the embedding of evidence-based practices that needed continued support. Primarily, this was driven by the recognition that it takes time to introduce a new approach and for settings to adjust their practice. This is particularly true within the context that evidence-based practice is more academic in its nature (and is therefore harder to implement with staff who do not have an academic background). Some Hubs also felt that it was something that was perhaps inherent in the practice of settings and that in time, as their confidence grew, they would be in a position to embrace the evidence-informed practice and recognise it in what they did. Positively EEF intends to continue to build the Evidence Store away from the SPH branding, so this resource will still be available to the sector.

While there was optimism that some of the impacts may last, Hubs generally believed that without the structure of the programme and, crucially, the funding, networks and access to further training will not be sustained. Part of the perceived risk of this was that removing the programme will revoke the confidence that settings had developed. Hubs felt that for too long the sector had relied on the goodwill of people and their willingness to put in extra hours, but this willingness across settings was now being eroded or was not found in new practitioners to the sector. Overall, most Hubs (17 out of the 18 Hubs) ‘strongly’ disagreed that the project timetable was sufficiently long to have a lasting impact on the sector.

“As soon as you take away the money and the funding, it won’t continue other than on goodwill, and goodwill only lasts for so long.”

– *Hub, Year 2 focus group*

Among settings, there was evidence that the changes made in setting’s practices will have some longevity. The vast majority (91%) of settings expected the changes made would be permanent, while high proportions also agreed that they would continue to engage in activities that they took part in as part of the programme (87%) or continue to engage with other local settings to ensure that best practice was shared (84%). One area to note, however, was slightly lower agreement (77%) that new staff working at their setting will be trained in the practice changes that had been made.

Table 20. Settings' views on the impact of their engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

	Base	Agree	Disagree	Don't know/ Not applicable
We expect that the changes made to our practice will be permanent changes	551	91%	0%	1%
Our setting will continue engaging in activities that we took part in as part of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme	630	87%	2%	4%
We will continue to engage with other local settings to ensure that best practice is shared	630	84%	3%	5%
New staff working at the setting will be trained in the practice changes we have made	551	77%	<0.5%	20%

E1. Thinking about the impacts of your engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, to what extent do you agree or disagree that...? 'Neither agree nor disagree' responses not shown.

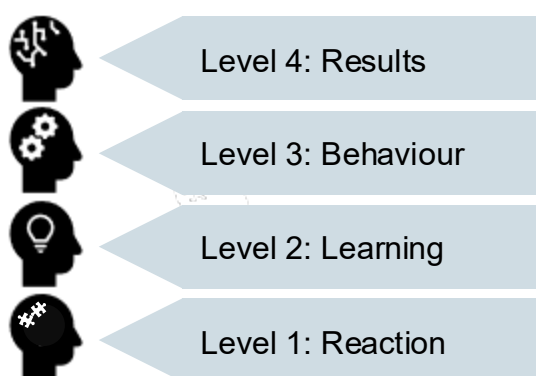
Base: All settings (Post Survey) (n=630); All settings that had made changes or planned to make changes to their practice (Post Survey) (n=551).

Conclusions

The Stronger Practice Hubs (SPH) programme was an ambitious programme aimed at generating change, with the challenge of setting up and delivering in a short space of time. Nevertheless, **some strong achievements have been realised**.

Generating behaviour change is challenging, and the Kirkpatrick Model²⁵ is a recognised tool for that sets out 4 levels of change: Level 1: Reaction (e.g. going to SPH events); Level 2: Learning (e.g. increased awareness of evidence-based practice); Level 3: Behaviour (e.g. behaviour change or testimonies of increased confidence); and Level 4: Results (e.g. longer-term outcomes such sustained practice changes or continued use of the Evidence Store).

Figure 18. Summary Kirkpatrick Model



Using this model, the evaluation findings suggest that change at Level 3 (Behaviour) was achieved during this programme. A high proportion of settings (74%) who engaged with the programme and responded to the Post Settings Survey agreed they had changed their practice as a result of the programme.

A focus of the SPH programme was on reaching settings who were working with children from more deprived backgrounds, and this was realised to some extent. Management information (MI) data showed that networks reached into settings from areas of deprivation, with 43% of settings in the network membership coming from areas that were in the lowest two quintiles of the IDACI deprivation classification. Furthermore, the Post Survey found that settings based in deprived locations were more likely to engage with a higher number of different types of Hub initiatives.

In terms of making actual practice changes, the overall proportion of settings in deprived areas making changes was similar to that recorded for settings in less deprived areas, but **settings in deprived areas had introduced practice change in a greater number**

²⁵ [Kirkpatrick Partners, LLC. What is The Kirkpatrick Model? / Kirkpatrick](#)

of areas, specifically recording a higher incidence of making practice change for communication and language development, and for mathematics development.

There was an indication that the SPH programme had a positive outcome for children. Most settings completing the Post Survey reported that the programme had had a positive impact on children: 78% felt the communication and language development of the children in their setting had improved, 73% that the personal, social and emotional development (PSED) had improved, 62% that school readiness had improved, and 58% that early mathematics development had improved. Settings in deprived areas were more likely than average to report improvement in 3 of these 4 areas, namely communication and language development, school readiness and early mathematics development.

Although skills for individuals working in the sector would be expected to improve to some extent over the time period of the programme, and there was no counterfactual measure to test this, **findings signal some small positive shifts in skill levels amongst practitioners.** Again this was more evident for staff working in settings in deprived areas. Lead practitioners at settings agreed that engagement with SPH programme activities had made a difference to their staff skills, and this was echoed in the qualitative interviews. Feedback was positive about the quality level of the training and materials delivered through the programme, and the reach of the programme to childminders. Many settings engaged with the activities on multiple occasions which would help reinforce behaviour, including the Evidence Store.

Overall, the evaluation indicated an appetite for funded professional development in the sector and networking across settings. The majority of settings engaged with activities for their staff's professional development, with similar proportions engaging to improve childcare provision. The evaluation, however, did find that settings experienced barriers to greater engagement with their local Hub. This was despite Hubs being very creative in the different formats of activities to make them as accessible as possible. Barriers centred on the timings of activities, staff being too busy, geographical or logistical challenges, and securing staff to backfill. Being too busy and concerns around securing backfill for staff were particular issues for settings based in more deprived areas, indicating an area that needs to be considered in any future programme design.

The evaluation found support for, and the suitability of, the Hub model as a way to improve professional practice in the early years sector; a model that was peer-led, responsive to local needs, and inclusive of different types of early years providers. With the continued challenges that the early years sector is facing, the evaluation suggests that the Hub model (or similar) should be considered as an option to continue to support the sector, to ensure evidence-informed practice continues to be highly promoted, and to ensure that any change in behaviours is sustained.

The experiences of those involved in delivering the programme was, however, challenging at times. There were good working relationships and a commitment to success for the programme. However, the short time frame meant the programme had overlaps at the design, set-up and delivery stages. More generally, the programme financial management and monitoring requirements caused difficulties and Hubs felt they were disproportionate to the size and nature of the programme (taking capacity away from delivery).

Programme delivery required good working relationships between a portfolio of different agents, not only the Department for Education (DfE), the National Children's Bureau (NCB), the Education and Endowment Foundation (EEF) and the Hubs, but also within the Hub partnerships, and with other bodies such as the Experts and Mentors programme and local authorities. The evaluation found that existing relationships (or experience of programmes working with DfE) was a key enabler to the programme, particularly given the speed of implementation. The evaluation also identified significant benefits to having different provider types (schools-based providers (SBPs), private, voluntary or independent settings (PVI) and childminders (CMs) working together as a Hub, bringing the voice of all provider types to the design of materials developed for the programme.

The working relationship with local authorities proved to be an area that could really help accelerate the success of the SPH programme (e.g. through joint promotion of activities), or could hinder success and consume capacity. There was also a desire for Hubs to benefit more from shared learnings with other Hubs, especially those Hubs working in the same regions.

Some gaps in programme delivery were identified. These were a lack of programmes and resources for working with children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), a lack of tailoring of support for childminders reflecting the uniqueness of their setup, and a lack of programmes and resources for under 2 year olds. While recognising the difficulties of capturing child-led learning interactions (as they are spontaneous), there was a desire for more guidance around these.

Overall, the evaluation identified several areas where the design or implementation of a similar type of Hub programme could be improved. Ideally, any similar programme would be given a longer timeframe, thereby recognising that it takes time to build awareness and reputation as a quality Hub, to build active working networks, and to develop high quality evidence-based materials. Otherwise, main themes for improvement included:

- **Upfront planning, and discussions with parties that Hubs would need to liaise with,** particularly ensuring that local authorities lend support to the programme.

- **More collaborative process** for the measurement of key performance indicators (KPIs) and monitoring requirements to engender full buy-in and efficiency to the process.
- **Reducing and streamlining reporting requests** and aligning budget to the academic rather than fiscal year (or providing 'financial skills' training where there are skill-set gaps, or ensuring this capacity is built into the Hub make-up).
- **Generating a learning community** of Hubs to improve learning and co-ordination across regions and to minimise any duplication of effort (while retaining the tailoring of materials to local needs).
- Consideration of **location and / or number of Hubs in each region**, or use of more satellite locations, to reduce distance between the Hubs and the settings they are working with, and / or more alignment with local authorities in the region.
- Consideration of how to **support staff to be freed-up** to attend the professional workforce training, either with greater in-house models or backfill support.

Appendices

Appendix A: Profiles of survey respondents

Settings Baseline Survey

Table A-21. Profile of settings completing the Baseline Survey

Provider Type (Summary)	Base (n)	%
Schools-based providers	119	22%
Private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group-based setting	197	37%
Childminder	189	35%
Other	28	5%
Region (Summary)	Base (n)	%
East Midlands	83	16%
East of England	84	16%
London	35	7%
North East	51	10%
North West	44	8%
South East	40	8%
South West	77	14%
West Midlands	63	12%
Yorkshire and the Humber	56	11%
IDACI quintile	Base (n)	%
Least deprived	72	16%
Less deprived	80	12%
Average	83	16%
More deprived	66	15%
Most deprived	87	14%

Unknown	145	27%
Size of setting (number of children under 5 registered)	Base (n)	%
1 to 25	230	43%
26 to 50	90	17%
51 to 100	134	25%
101 or more	55	10%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	24	5%
Length of time working as a CM / in operation	Base (n)	%
1 to 20 years	297	56%
21 to 40 years	127	24%
41 or more years	45	8%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	64	12%
Programme initiatives done / involved with	Base (n)	%
Signed-up to receive a regular newsletter from your local Hub	447	84%
Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector	359	67%
Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub	313	59%
Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub	305	57%
Attended one or more evidence informed training programmes being funded through your hub	270	51%
Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access	261	49%
Used the online Evidence Store (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation)	148	28%
Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed	83	16%
Other	32	6%
Total	533	100%

Settings Post Survey

Table A-22. Profile of settings completing the Post Survey

Provider Type (Summary)	Base (n)	%
Schools-based providers	167	27%
Private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group-based setting	237	38%
Childminder	200	32%
Other	26	4%
Region (Summary)	Base (n)	%
East Midlands	91	14%
East of England	104	17%
London	71	11%
North East	56	9%
North West	41	7%
South East	54	9%
South West	73	12%
West Midlands	81	13%
Yorkshire and the Humber	59	9%
IDACI quintile	Base (n)	%
Least deprived	105	17%
Less deprived	105	17%
Average	105	17%
More deprived	109	17%
Most deprived	128	20%
Unknown	78	12%
Whether completed Baseline survey	Base (n)	%
Yes	190	30%

No	440	70%
Size of setting (number of children under 5 registered)	Base (n)	%
1 to 25	252	40%
26 to 50	130	21%
51 to 100	132	21%
101 or more	92	15%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	24	4%
Length of time working as a CM / in operation	Base (n)	%
1 to 20 years	317	50%
21 to 40 years	167	27%
41 or more years	64	10%
Don't know / Prefer not to say	82	13%
Programme initiatives done / involved with	Base (n)	%
Signed-up to receive a regular newsletter from your local Hub	535	85%
Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector	464	74%
Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub	439	70%
Attended one or more evidence informed training programmes being funded through your hub	411	65%
Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub	405	64%
Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access	392	62%
Used the online Evidence Store (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation)	240	38%
Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed help with	138	22%
Other	5	1%
Total	630	100%

Weighting of Settings Surveys

Both the Baseline and Post Settings surveys were weighted using the same approach. For the weighting, the sample files provided by the Hubs were used to represent for the population profile, as Hubs had been asked to provide all contact details of settings they had ‘actively engaged’ with. From December 2023, Hubs also provided contact details for settings who had signed-up to the newsletters but had otherwise not taken part in any other activities. The sample files were received on a monthly basis and cleaned prior to fieldwork to remove any duplicates. The total cleaned population of settings was loaded and used for fieldwork.

A two-stage weighting process was used for the analysis of the settings findings. All weighting was based on the sample information provided by the Hubs. During the course of the survey, some details about settings were checked (e.g. the type of setting) and it is information collected through the survey that is used for the reporting of any sub-analysis findings in this report (e.g. any differences between School Based Providers (SBPs), Private, Voluntary and Independent (PVI) providers or Childminders).

For the weighting of the achieved datasets, the data was first adjusted so that 90% of responses were based on ‘engaged’ settings and 10% on ‘newsletter only’ sample. For the ‘engaged’ settings, a further layer of weighting was applied by Hub region and provider type to ensure these profiles were in-line with the sample populations. No further weighting was applied to the newsletter only sample, as the sample size for this group was low.

Qualitative interviews and group discussions

NCB and EEF interviews and group discussions

Activity	Method and number
Year 1 interviews	4 online interviews with NCB 1 in-person group with EEF (3 attendees) Held: 3 rd Apr 2023 – 17 th Apr 2023
Year 1 groups	2 online groups: 1 x NCB & 1 x EEF Held: 22 nd Jan 2024 – 29 th Jan 2024
Year 2 interviews	6 online interviews: 3 x NCB / 3 x EEF Held: 17 th Jul 2024 – 7 th Aug 2024
Year 2 groups	2 online groups: 1 x NCB & 1 x EEF Held: 26 th Nov 2024 – 11 th Dec 2024

Hub interviews and group discussions

Activity	Method and number
Year 1 interviews	6 online interviews (5 x maintained nurseries, 1 x nursery attached to a school) Held: 31 st Aug 2023 – 15 th Sept 2023
Year 1 groups	2 online groups: Group 1: 5 Hubs (1 x nursery attached to a school, 2 x maintained nurseries, 2 x preschool nursery and reception) Group 2: 6 Hubs (2 x nurseries attached to a school, 3 x maintained nurseries, 1 x preschool nursery and reception) Held: 16 th February 2024
Y2 interviews	7 online interviews (5 x maintained nurseries, 1 x nursery attached to a school, 1 x preschool nursery and reception) Held: 22 nd Oct 2024 – 30 th Oct 2024
Y2 groups	2 online groups: Group 1: 3 Hubs (3 x maintained nurseries) Group 2: 6 Hubs (1 x nursery attached to a school, 5 x maintained nurseries) Held: 9th Dec 2024 – 11th Dec 2024

Setting interviews

Activity	Method and number
Year 1 interviews	6 online interviews (2 x childminders, 2 x nursery classes in a primary school, 1 x reception class in a primary school, 1 x private, voluntary or independent nursery). Included spread of interviews across geographical regions, and levels of deprivation. Held: 9 th Oct 2023 – 27 th Oct 2023
Year 2 interviews	6 online interviews (1 x childminder, 1 x nursery classes in a primary school, 2 x reception class in a primary school, 2 x private, voluntary or independent nursery). Included spread of interviews across geographical regions, and levels of deprivation. Some interviews conducted with settings interviewed in Year 1. Held: 18 th Apr – 21 st May 2024
Year 2 higher engaged setting interviews	6 online interviews (5 x childminders, 1 x private, voluntary or independent nursery). Included spread of interviews across geographical regions, and levels of deprivation. Held: 23 rd Oct 2024 – 18 th Feb 2025

Activity	Method and number
Year 2 lesser engaged setting interviews	4 online interviews (2 x childminder, 1 x nursery classes in a primary school, 1 x private, voluntary or independent nursery). Included spread of interviews across geographical regions. Held: 23 rd Oct 2024 – 10 th Feb 2025

Appendix B: Theory of Change

Inputs / Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<p>Hubs / local level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 across England (2 per region) to focus on early years settings with higher disadvantage – disseminate Evidence Store Provide reactive advice and triage for funded bespoke support Create localised networks of early years settings to share best practice Work with local authorities to disseminate offer <p>Programme budget:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately £20 million <p>Evaluation partner (EEF):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps choose hubs Supports the delivery partner and hubs to understand the Evidence Store and translate evidence into practice 	<p>Hubs / local level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hubs assess local needs and create and initiate delivery plans Hubs create their own CPD programmes to offer to local settings EEF produce a menu of programmes which are offered to Hubs <p>Practitioner / Provider level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Become aware of hubs and understand their purpose. Begin to engage by attending organised activities / events, submitting requests via the advice service, and/or taking up offers of recommended support. Engaged begin sharing resources with other staff at their setting Identify hubs as a reputable source of advice and support and stop turning towards less trusted sources 	<p>Hubs / local level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers have more opportunities to connect with each other in local areas near Hubs Improvements in practice in local areas near Hubs <p>Practitioner / Provider level (short term):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners/providers engage with the Hubs and their offer, and perceive the advice and support received as useful Practitioners understand the importance of evidence-based practice and are motivated to make evidence-based improvements to their practice Practitioners have greater understanding and confidence in how to support early learning and development, and how to use evidence to inform practice 	<p>Hubs / local level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved networks and support among local EY providers Reduction in the disadvantage gap for children in local areas with access to Hubs Understanding if this model can have wider positive effects in the sector and area beyond covid recovery <p>Practitioner / Provider level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EY providers/practitioners feel more supported, and have access to an ongoing network of other providers they can and do reach out to (e.g. especially childminders feeling less isolated) Perceive themselves as part of an established network where they share and receive best practice Perceive their evidence-based changes have improved child outcomes

Inputs / Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<p>Delivery partner (NCB):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selects 18 hubs against a robust set of criteria (e.g. Ofsted rating, demonstratable evidence of supporting other settings, understanding of the child development evidence base) Promotes the Evidence Store Oversees / quality assures hubs Facilitates best practice sharing between hubs and DfE <p>HM Government / DfE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design programme Set up contracts Grant management Facilitating relationships Central point of contact Provide guidance Input into Hub selection criteria Quality Assurance 	<p>HM Government / Central:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrated appetite for this scheme and capacity and willingness to deliver from hubs Comms on scheme promoting scheme and money being put into sector Evidence store is created Evaluators are commissioned to assess effectiveness of EEF programmes 	<p>Practitioner / Provider level (medium term):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practitioners/providers use evidence store to improve practice Practitioners and providers report adopting the evidence-based improvements in their practice Practitioners feedback to hubs and other settings in their local network the strategies they used to implement and sustain the evidence-based changes Leaders have greater confidence in supporting their staff to make evidence-based improvements to their practice <p>Child level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children receive more evidence-based interventions (delivery of EEF evidenced interventions) <p>HM Government / Central level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidencing action on covid recovery and effects of pandemic on sector – reducing pressure on DfE Ability to show a plan that can actually work to reduce negative impact of COVID-19 	<p>Child level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved quality of care for children due to increase in evidence-based practice Improved outcomes for children in settings implementing more evidence-based practice Improved outcomes for more disadvantaged children <p>HM Government / Central:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand whether initiatives like this can work in EY sector Understand whether the process and model is effective or how it can be improved Understand if hubs have capacity to deliver the programme Findings from EEF programme evaluations inform future programmes offered <p>Economy level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved recovery from the effect of the pandemic, meaning better long-term outcomes for children

Appendix C: Management information data

Table C-1. Activity across the programme (MI Information collected by NCB)

Number of...	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Total
Newsletters sent	15	24	79	42	48	50	59	55	317
Settings in HOME area received a newsletter	2,350	4,457	4,548	8,867	13,863	14,316	17,304	18,553	84,258
Settings in HOME opened a newsletter	1,252	2,129	2,627	4,629	7,208	8,177	9,381	10,406	45,809
Blogs posted	6	16	22	30	52	38	55	65	284
Events held	36	44	87	187	294	147	72	93	960
Individual attendees at events (total all events)	1,743	592	999	2,401	4,153	2,483	850	1,857	15,078
Webinars held	11	24	27	74	129	138	98	122	623
Individual attendees at webinars (total all webinars)	969	586	513	1,503	1,920	2,019	1,435	1,990	10,935
Social media posts	496	1,357	1,192	1,980	2,847	2,333	1,722	1,982	13,909
Instances of 'other' activity [^]	89	136	47	45	67	52	36	83	555
Settings in network membership - cumulative	3,960	4,586	5,049	7,480	9,344	7,252	7,915	8,821	8,821
Settings in network membership in areas deprivation	951	1,550	2,062	2,730	3,672	2,990	3,443	3,794	3,794
Network activities	45	98	75	294	339	318	249	313	1,731
Queries received (mailbox & other means)	464	2,356	1,217	2,199	3,662	2,856	1,767	2,421	16,942
Referrals (total of all programmes) ²⁶	1,300	202	397	1,396	29,474	2,029	432	699	34,718
Settings recruited to funded programmes - cumulative	73	680	1,191	1,361	1,664	2,113	2,370	2,353	2,341

Q1 Nov 22-Mar 23, Q2 Apr-June 23, Q3 July-Sept 23, Q4 Oct-Dec 23, Q5 Jan-Mar 24, Q6 Apr-Jun 24, Q7 Jul-Sept 24, Q8 Oct-Dec 24. [^]Includes meetings, briefings, visits to settings.

²⁶ The high number of referrals in Q5 was due to Hubs reporting newsletter promotion of programmes as referrals to Hub programmes themselves. It was subsequently clarified that one-on-one conversations constituted referrals, not mass promotion via newsletters, which saw referrals return to pre-Q5 levels.

Appendix D: Surveys

Hubs Year 1 Survey

Online landing Page

ASK ALL

Welcome to the Stronger Practice Hubs Evaluation survey.

This evaluation has been commissioned by the Department for Education to understand how the programme has been implemented. This survey is an important part of the evaluation and will explore various aspects of your experience as a Stronger Practice Hub, including the application and set up process, the activities you are undertaking to engage local settings and your relationship with other organisations involved.

If your hub is made-up of a partnership of settings, this survey should be completed by the LEAD setting on behalf of all the settings within your partnership.

This is your opportunity to share your experiences and learnings and contribute to shaping the programme for the future. Your feedback is vital to helping the DfE determine the success of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, to understand how improvements can be made and to help inform other early years interventions in the future. It is therefore important that you provide full, considered responses and that you are honest and open with your views.

We anticipate that the survey will take about around 45 minutes to complete, depending on your answers. If needed, you can pause the survey at any point and return to it.

DROP DOWN: Helpful information before completing:

- To navigate the survey, please use the 'Next' and 'Continue' buttons. If you wish to pause the survey, click the pause button and close the survey. Do not worry if you accidentally close the survey as your responses are automatically saved. You can return to the survey any time by following the survey link provided.
- We will follow up with another, similar survey, in around a year's time, which will explore your setting's experiences having been delivering the programme for over a year.
- Any information provided will be kept confidential and no individuals nor settings will be named in any reporting.
- This evaluation is being conducted by IFF Research, an independent market research company, on behalf of the Department for Education. Our work adheres to the Market Research Society's code of conduct.

• If you have any questions about the research, or issues completing the survey please contact the IFF Stronger Practice Hubs Team on 020 7250 3035 or email SPHEvaluation@iffresearch.com.

• If you would like to confirm the validity of this request, please contact sarah.mcloughlin@education.gov.uk

Click Next to begin the survey

A – About your setting

The first few questions will ask some information about your setting to help provide some context.

ASK ALL

A1. Is your Stronger Practice Hub your setting only or is it a partnership with other early years settings?

SINGLECODE.

1. Our setting only
2. A partnership with other early years settings

ASK ALL

A2. Which one of the following best describes your early years setting?

SINGLECODE.

1. Nursery class attached to school
2. Reception class in primary school
3. Maintained nursery school
4. Private, voluntary or independent nursery (operating in non-domestic premises)
5. Childminder
6. Registered day care within a Children's / Family centre
7. Other type of early years setting (please specify)

IF PARTNERSHIP (A1=2)

A3. What other types of early years settings make-up your hub partnership?

SINGLE CODE PER COLUMN.

Columns: Partner one/ two/ three/ four

1. Nursery class attached to school
2. Reception class in primary school
3. Maintained nursery school
4. Private, voluntary or independent nursery (operating in non-domestic premises)
5. Childminder
6. Registered day care within a Children's / Family centre
6. Other type of early years setting (please specify)

ASK ALL

A4. Roughly how many staff work across this Stronger Practice Hub?

If your hub is a partnership, please include the number of staff across all settings in the partnership.

Please include both full-time and part-time employees on your payroll and working owners, but exclude outside contractors, apprentices and agency staff.

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-99.

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

A5. And could you please tell us roughly how many children under the age of 5 you have registered with this Stronger Practice Hub?

Again, if your hub is a partnership, please include the number of children across all settings in the partnership.

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-999.

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

A6. For how long has your early years setting been in operation?

Please provide answer in number of years. An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number of years.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-999.

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

A7. Is your setting part of a larger organisation or chain of settings?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

B – Motivations for applying to be a Hub

The next few questions will cover your reasons for choosing to become a Stronger Practice Hub.

DS: SHOW B1 ON SAME SCREEN AS SECTION INTRO

ASK ALL

B1. To what extent were the following reasons for choosing to apply to be a hub?

MULTI CODE. DS TO RANDOMISE RESPONSES.

It is important to do what we can to help early years post-COVID recovery:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

To help build a strong learning community in the local area:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Good opportunity to improve our reputation in the early years sector:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Good opportunity to develop the skills and capabilities of our staff:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Good opportunity to break down barriers between different types of early years settings:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Felt it would help our business' revenue over the longer term:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Would make us a more attractive setting to work for (for current and/or potential staff):

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Wanted to ensure we kept up to date with new developments and best practice:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Would help us to stay ahead of the competition in the early years sector:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

To ensure early years providers in our area benefit from the money being invested in the Early Years Education Recovery programme (run by DfE):

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

To ensure our setting fully benefits from the money being invested in the Early Years Education Recovery programme (run by DfE):

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

Other, please specify:

1. A key reason
2. Part of the reason
3. Not a reason
4. Don't know

ASK IF SELECTED MULTIPLE OPTIONS AS 'A KEY REASON' AT B1

B2. If you had to select one reason from this list, what was the top reason for choosing to apply to be a hub?

SINGLECODE.

1. PULL THROUGH CODES SELECTED AT B2_ 'A KEY REASON' INCLUDING OTHER CODE IF SELECTED

X. Don't know

C – Application and set up

In this section we'll be asking for feedback on your experience of the application process, the process of setting up as a hub and the process for developing a delivery plan.

If you are in a partnership hub with other early years settings, please take that into consideration with your responses.

ASK ALL

C1. Generally speaking, how easy or difficult were the following processes ...?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C1_1. the application process

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

C2_2. the process of setting up as a hub

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult

6. Don't know

C1_3. the process for developing a delivery plan

1. Very easy

2. Moderately easy

3. Neither easy nor difficult

4. Moderately difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't know

ASK ALL

C2. Focusing first on the application process for becoming a hub, what aspects worked well and what could have been done differently or improved?

DS: SHOW C3 AND C4 (ALL OPEN TEXT BOXES) ON SAME SCREEN

C3. What aspects worked well?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What worked well?

WRITE IN.

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

C4. What aspects could be done differently or improved?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What could be done differently or improved?

WRITE IN.

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C5. During the application process, how easy or difficult was it to demonstrate your setting's ability to do each of the following...?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

DS: SHOW EXTRA INFORMATION AS DROP DOWN/HOVER BUTTON

C5_1. Use of evidence: *Be able to understand and reflect on evidence from research and exemplify evidence-informed practice.*

1. Very easy
2. Fairly easy
3. Not very easy
4. Not at all easy
5. Don't know

C5_2. Sharing excellent practice: *Be able to demonstrate excellent practice underpinned by the reformed EYFS (2021) and an ability to support others to improve practice, including practice beyond your own setting.*

1. Very easy
2. Fairly easy
3. Not very easy
4. Not at all easy
5. Don't know

C5_3. Networks and partnerships: *Proven ability to build strong local networks, working with, understanding and supporting the local early years sector.*

1. Very easy
2. Fairly easy
3. Not very easy

4. Not at all easy

5. Don't know

C5_4. Capacity: *Be able to demonstrate you have the people and systems in place to operate as a hub.*

1. Very easy

2. Fairly easy

3. Not very easy

4. Not at all easy

5. Don't know

ASK IF GIVE NEGATIVE RESPONSE AT C5 (C5_X=3/4)

PULL THROUGH RESPONSES AT C6 AND SHOW ALL OPEN-TEXT BOXES ON SAME SCREEN

C6. Why was it not easy to demonstrate your setting's ability?

[RESPONSE AT C6]

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C7. After you were selected as a Stronger Practice Hub, what were the key enablers in the process of setting-up your hub?

Examples of enablers might include having support from the NCB or your existing relationships with partner settings.

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C8. Which of the following aspects, if any, were particular challenges of setting-up as a hub?

MULTICODE. RANDOMISE RESPONSES.

1. The time period available from recruitment to set-up
2. Knowing what to put in our engagement plan
3. The need to recruit or reallocate staff to this programme
4. The time availability of staff
5. Staff absences e.g. due to the holiday period / COVID outbreaks
6. Poor or difficult relationships with my Local Authority
7. Finding out about profile and needs of settings in my local area
8. Connecting with other settings in our partnership
9. The contracts and paperwork involved
10. Other (specify)
11. Don't know
12. None of these

ASK ALL

C9. Turning to the process of developing a delivery plan for your Stronger Practice Hub, overall how appropriate do you feel the local objectives and KPIs that are or have been agreed are to your setting(s)?

SINGLE CODE

1. Very appropriate
2. Fairly appropriate
3. Not very appropriate
4. Not at all appropriate
5. Don't know

ASK ALL

C10 Please tell us about your experience of developing a delivery plan. In particular:

- **How were the content was determined**
- **Who was involved in the discussions**
- **Whether you thought there was anything missing from the plan**
- **Whether you would like the process to be run differently**

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C11. What one thing would it have been helpful to have known at the outset of the programme?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

DS: SHOW ON SEPARATE SCREEN.

In this section, we are going to ask about the activities that hubs will be undertaking to meet their objectives. We will be asking your views on which activities will be most successful in achieving your objectives, as well as the successes and challenges you may have experienced. Please think of all of your hub's objectives in general but as a reminder, these are the specific objectives in focus:

- **Proactively share information and advice on evidence-based approaches**
- **Establish local networks of early years providers and organisations**
- **Act as a point of contact for bespoke advice, and signposting to other funded support**
- **Support early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes**

D – Stronger Practice Hub Objectives

ASK ALL

D1. We have outlined some activities that will contribute towards you meeting your Stronger Practice Hub's objectives. Please indicate the progress, if any, that you have made for each activity.

You can add any activities your hub has undertaken that aren't listed here in the 'any other activities' option at the bottom of the list.

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

FOR EACH STATEMENT:

1. Delivered/started delivery
2. Done some preparation but not yet started delivery
3. Not started planning, but intend to
4. Not relevant/not planning activity
5. Don't Know

D1_1. Established contact with local networks of early years providers

D1_2. Established contact with local bodies (e.g. Local Authority, Areas Leads, other hubs such as English, Maths, Family and Teaching School hubs, and Experts and Mentors in Local Authority)

D1_3. Organised meetings/events with members of the local network (e.g. networking events, drop-in sessions, one-to-one support)

D1_4. Established communication channels for engaging with EY settings, (e.g. newsletter platform and mailing list, advice line/email address etc)

D1_5. Implemented a system for monitoring engagement and receiving feedback

D1_6. Agreed your hub's approach to common questions and created case studies, FAQs and other general information for settings

D1_7. Made referrals to other strands of the DfE EY recovery programme

D1_8. Established a referral system / triage system to receive referrals from experts and mentors

D1_9. Mapped local area needs to inform nomination of evidence-informed programmes

- D1_10. Selected programmes from the EEF's curated menu of programmes**
- D1_11. Disseminated knowledge highlighting evidence-informed practice via blogs, newsletters, links to resources etc)**
- D1_12. Signposted or shared evidence-informed practice through social media channels**
- D1_13. Developed resources (e.g. blogs, videos, tools) that exemplify evidence-informed practice**
- D1_14. Engaged with programme providers to support with recruitment of settings to programmes**
- D1_15. Supported with signposting and promoting programmes to EY settings in the area (e.g. programme highlighted in network events, newsletters and through responses to reactive advice)**
- D1_16. Engaged with local bodies to support with recruitment of settings to programmes.**
- D1_17. Prioritised communication and publicity of advice and support to settings in most disadvantaged areas.**
- D1_18. Mapped out the availability of local services and support that can be signposted to settings.**
- D1_19. Established a system for measuring and reporting on take up of programmes and feedback from settings.**
- D1_20. Any other activities? Please specify**

ASK ALL

D2. What activity or activities that you are currently running, or plan to run, do you think will be most successful in helping your hub achieve your Stronger Practice Hub's objectives, and why? Where your response refers to a specific objective, please indicate the objective.

Activity that will be most successful

WRITE IN.

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

ASK ALL

D3. It is very early in the programme. However, thinking about the work that has gone into the delivering the objectives' so far, what do you think have been the main successes and the main challenges? Again, where your response refers to a specific objective, please indicate the objective.

DS: SHOW OPEN-TEXT BOXES ON SAME SCREEN

Main successes:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Main challenges:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

E – Recording and sharing data

ASK ALL

E1. One of the activities for each of your hub's objectives is to 'record and share data with the NCB'. How much progress have you made on this so far?

SINGLECODE.

1. Delivered / started delivering
2. Done some preparation but not yet started delivery
3. Not started planning, but intend to
4. Not relevant/not planning activity
5. Don't know

ASK ALL

E2. What have been the main successes and challenges of recording and sharing data with the NCB?

DS: SHOW OPEN-TEXT BOXES ON SAME SCREEN

Main successes:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Main challenges:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F – Working with partners

We'd like to understand your experience so far of working with the National Children's Bureau (which we will refer to as the NCB) and the Education Endowment Foundation (which we will refer to as the EEF).

This is your opportunity to provide information that will inform recommendations to improve the programme so please be open and frank in your answers. We want to understand what is working well and where changes can be made to the programme going forward. As a reminder, IFF Research is an independent third-party organisation. The information you provide is confidential and we will not name any individuals nor settings in any of our reporting.

Please click [here](#) for further information on the NCB's role.

The NCB is the appointed delivery partner for the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. It's main responsibilities are to:

- **Lead the recruitment and selection process for the programme**
- **Lead the relationship with hubs. This includes providing general oversight and quality assurance as well as supporting hubs with day to day queries and concerns**
- **Work with hubs to develop a project plan and to set local objectives**
- **Collect Management Information (MI) from hubs**

Please click [here](#) for further information on the EEF's role.

The EEF is the appointed evidence partner for the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. It's main responsibilities are to:

- **Develop a 'framework' (Early Years Evidence Store) over two years that summarises the evidence around teaching, learning and professional development in the early years**
- **Support hubs to contribute to and develop their own exemplification materials linked with the 'framework' to illustrate evidence-informed practice**
- **Contribute to The NCB's programme of professional development for hubs to support with understanding the 'framework' and how to support with translating evidence into practice**
- **Support hubs with providing settings in their area with access to professional development programmes by facilitating availability of providers, checking programmes are evidence-informed and providing opportunities for hubs to identify programmes**

ASK ALL

F1. Firstly, thinking about the NCB. Based on your experience so far, how would you rate the following...?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

F1_1. Information provided in respect of the set-up, administration and running of the Hubs programme

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Fairly good
4. Neither good nor poor
5. Fairly poor
6. Very poor
7. Terrible
8. Don't Know

F1_2. Resources provided to help your hub develop and roll-out the hubs programme to early years settings in your area

1. Excellent

2. Very good
3. Fairly good
4. Neither good nor poor
5. Fairly poor
6. Very poor
7. Terrible
8. Don't Know

F1_3. Support provided for any queries or difficulties that have arisen with the hubs programme

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Fairly good
4. Neither good nor poor
5. Fairly poor
6. Very poor
7. Terrible
8. Don't Know

F1_4. Overall working relationship

1. Excellent
2. Very good
3. Fairly good
4. Neither good nor poor
5. Fairly poor
6. Very poor
7. Terrible
8. Don't Know

ASK ALL

Thinking about the information, resources, support and working relationship with the NCB, what has worked well and what could be done differently or improved?

F2. Firstly, what aspects have worked well?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What works well?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F3. What aspects could be done differently or improved?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What could be done differently or improved?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

F4. To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

F4_1. Feedback from the NCB has helped us to provide better support to early years settings

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

F4_2. We have a collaborative working relationship with the NCB

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

F4_3. The NCB have been responsive to any queries and concerns

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

F4_4. We have the right level of input from the NCB for our needs

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

F4_5. The NCB are always available if we have queries or concerns

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

F5. How helpful or unhelpful have each of the following types of support from the NCB been?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

F5_1. Help to develop the project plan

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_2. Help to develop local targets and KPIs

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_3. Information about the funding of initiatives

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_4. Information about the Quality Assurance (QA) framework

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful
5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_5. Information about good practice experience from other hubs

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not at all helpful

5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_6. Meetings and activities to help you network with/collaborate with other hubs

1. Very helpful

2. Fairly helpful

3. Not very helpful

4. Not at all helpful

5. Don't Know / Not applicable

F5_7. The NCB's programme of Continuous Professional Development webinars

1. Very helpful

2. Fairly helpful

3. Not very helpful

4. Not at all helpful

5. Don't Know / Not applicable

ASK ALL

F6. Now thinking about the EEF, to what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

F6_1. Feedback from the EEF has helped us to provide better support to early years settings

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Not applicable

7. Don't know

F6_2. We have a collaborative working relationship with the EEF

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Not applicable
- 7. Don't know

F6_3. The EEF have been responsive to any queries and concerns

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Not applicable
- 7. Don't know

F6_4. We have the right level of input from the EEF for our needs

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Not applicable
- 7. Don't know

F6_5. The EEF are always available if we have queries or concerns

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Not applicable
- 7. Don't know

F6_6. The EEF has helped us to better understand and delivery evidence informed practice

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Not applicable
7. Don't know

ASK ALL

F7. As part of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, they have created the Early Years Evidence Store [DS: INCLUDE A HYPERLINK TO EARLY YEARS EVIDENCE STORE | EEF (EDUCATIONENDOWMENTFOUNDATION.ORG.UK)]. This is an online resource to help hubs and early years settings understand the evidence behind approaches for teaching and learning in the early years and suggests ways for implementing them in practice.

To what extent, if at all, has your hub used this resource to-date?

SINGLE CODE

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. Hardly at all
4. Not at all
5. Not heard about the Evidence Store
6. Don't know

ASK IF HAS USED EVIDENCE STORE (F7 =1-3)

F8. And overall, how satisfied are you that the information and resources available to you through the Evidence Store support you in your role as a Stronger Practice Hub?

SINGLE CODE

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied not dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

6. Don't know

ASK IF HAS USED EVIDENCE STORE (F7 ⇐ 1-3)

DS: PUT ON I12 AND I13 ON SAME SCREEN

Please tell us what is good about the Evidence Store, and what could be improved going forward to better support you in your role as a hub?

F9. What aspects are good/work well?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What is good/works well?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F10. What aspects could be improved?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What could be improved?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

F11. Has your hub...?

MULTI CODE.

Worked with the EEF to contribute to exemplification materials for the Evidence Store (videos, written examples, case studies) or linked dissemination resources (e.g. blogs, tools)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Received support to develop your own exemplification materials for the Evidence Store (videos, written examples, case studies) or linked dissemination resources (e.g. blogs, tools)?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK IF WORKED WITH EEF TO CONTRIBUTE MATERIALS OR DEVELOP OWN MATERIALS FOR THE EVIDENCE STORE (F11=1-2)

F12. And overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with this collaboration with the EEF when you...?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

IF F11=1: Worked with the EEF to contribute to exemplification materials for the Evidence Store (videos, written examples, case studies) or linked dissemination resources (e.g. blogs, tools)?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't Know

IF F11=2: Received support to develop your own exemplification materials for the Evidence Store (videos, written examples, case studies) or linked dissemination resources (e.g. blogs, tools)?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't Know

ASK IF WORKED WITH EEF TO CONTRIBUTE MATERIALS OR DEVELOP OWN MATERIALS FOR THE EVIDENCE STORE (F11=1-2)

F13. What aspects would you say were good and/or supported you well?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What is good/support you well?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK IF WORKED WITH EEF TO CONTRIBUTE MATERIALS OR DEVELOP OWN MATERIALS FOR THE EVIDENCE STORE (F11=1-2)

F14. What aspects could be improved?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What could be improved?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

F15. As part of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme hubs are required to provide settings in their area with funded access to professional development programmes to support with take up of evidence-informed approaches that could promote education recovery. To support hubs with this aim, the EEF facilitated a process for programme providers to be included as part of the initiative to support hubs with having evidence-informed programmes available to them.

Overall, how satisfied are you with the programmes that your hub has been matched with to fund for your area?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied not dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know

ASK ALL

Please could you tell us what you feel is good about the programmes you have been matched with and what you think could be improved, either in terms of the programmes themselves or future opportunities to select and nominate programmes, and why this is?

We are particularly interested to hear how the programmes compared to your expectations, and how these could be used to best meet needs in your local area.

DS: PLEASE PUT F15 AND F16 ON THE SAME SCREEN

F16. What aspects are good?

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What aspects are good?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F17. What aspects could be improved?

If there are aspects you would like to see changed, please tell us what these are

WRITE IN FOR EACH ASPECT MENTIONED.

What aspects could be improved?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

Why do you say that?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

F18. Have you worked with any of the following organisations so far to deliver the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

F18_1. The Department for Education

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

F18_2. Your Local Authority

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

F18_3. One or more other Stronger Practice Hubs

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

F18_4. The Maths Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No

5. Don't Know

F18_5. The English Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent

2. Yes, to some extent

3. Yes, but hardly at all

4. No

5. Don't Know

F18_6. The Teaching School Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent

2. Yes, to some extent

3. Yes, but hardly at all

4. No

5. Don't Know

F18_7. The Experts and Mentors programme

1. Yes, to a great extent

2. Yes, to some extent

3. Yes, but hardly at all

4. No

5. Don't Know

F18_8. Any other organisation / body (Please specify)

1. Yes, to a great extent

2. Yes, to some extent

3. Yes, but hardly at all

4. No

5. Don't Know

ASK IF WORKED WITH ANOTHER STRONGER PRACTICE HUB (F18_3=1-3)

F19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: "Networking with other Stronger Practice Hubs has been valuable for our hub?"

SINGLE CODE.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

ASK IF A PARTNERSHIP HUB (A1=2)

F20. Now thinking about the early years settings that make up your Stronger Practice Hub. Have the settings in your partnership worked together in other programmes in the past , or is this a new partnership?

SINGLE CODE.

1. All settings have worked together in the past
2. Some of the settings have worked together in the past but some relationships are new
3. This is a totally new partnership
4. Don't know

ASK IF PARTNERSHIP HUB (A1=2)

Please tell us the strengths of your partnership, and what challenges you have faced working together.

DS: SHOW F22 AND F23 ON SAME SCREEN.

F21. Strengths

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F22. Challenges

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

G - Overall reflections

We are near the end of the survey. Thank you for the feedback you have given so far. We just have a few questions to understand how you feel the programme has gone overall.

ASK ALL

G1 To what extent do you agree or disagree that...?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

G1_1. The implementation of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been largely in line with the project timescales

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G1_2. Aspects of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme have been unexpectedly burdensome or time-consuming

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G1_3. The delivery timescales within the past financial year gave us enough time to spend the grant funding we were allocated

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

IF DISAGREE THAT PROJECT IN LINE WITH TIMESCALES (G1_1=4-5)

G2. What has caused delays and how have you navigated them?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

IF AGREE THAT ASPECTS HAVE BEEN BURDENSOME (G1_2=1-2)

G3. What aspects have been unexpectedly burdensome or time-consuming and how have you navigated these issues?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK IF DISAGREE THAT HAD ENOUGH TIME TO SPEND GRANT MONEY OR DON'T KNOW (G1_3=4-6)

G4. What do you think could have been done differently to ensure that there was sufficient time to spend the grant funding?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

G5. Recognising that it is early days in the programme, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

G5_1. So far, the delivery of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been a success.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G5_2. Early Years settings in my area are showing a good level of interest in the activities and support that will be provided by us through the Stronger Practice Hubs programme.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G5_3. The process of implementing the Stronger Practice Hubs programme at our setting has largely been in line with our expectations

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G5_4. We are confident that our hub's plans will particularly reach and benefit disadvantaged children

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G5_5. Your expertise in the early years sector has been valued in the delivery of this programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

G5_6. The project timeframe is sufficient for Stronger Practice Hubs to have a lasting impact on the early years sector

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

G6. What have the effects of being a Stronger Practice Hub been on your own setting(s)?

MULTICODE.

1. We have received positive press in the local community
2. We have seen an increase in the number of young children attending our setting
3. Our staff have developed their early years knowledge and skills
4. Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in evidence-informed approaches
5. Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in supporting others to implement evidence-informed approaches
6. Our staff have felt it has been a rewarding experience
7. We have had fewer resources for our day to day provision
8. Our staff have had a larger workload
9. Our children group sizes have had to increase
10. Other positive benefit (specify)
11. Other negative impact (specify)
12. Don't know/too early to say

ASK ALL

G7. Taking everything into account so far, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to become a Stronger Practice Hub? Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means you would definitely not recommend becoming a hub to others, and ten means you would definitely recommend if asked.

SINGLECODE.

1 – Not at all likely

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10 – Extremely likely

11- Don't know

ASK ALL

G8. Please use the space below for any additional comments you would like to make about your setting's experience as a Stronger Practice Hub.

WRITE IN.

1. No other comments

ASK ALL

G9. And finally, please use the space below for any specific comments you have for the Department for Education in relation to the Stronger Practice Hubs or wider Early Years Recovery programme.

WRITE IN.

1. No other comments

H – Thank and close

ASK ALL

We are now at the end of the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

H1. Would you be willing for us to call you back if we need to clarify any of the information you have provided today?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK IF HAPPY TO BE RECONTACTED (H1=1)

H2. Please can you confirm your contact details? These details will only be used to make contact about clarifying the information you have provided, if necessary.]

Name

Job title

Setting name

Email address

Phone number

ASK ALL

H3. Thanks again for your time today. The information you have provided will be used only for the purposes of this evaluation. Data collected through these surveys will only be shared with the organisation appointed to evaluate the full Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme, which the Stronger Practice Hubs is a component of. The report, and data supplied, will be completely anonymised and none of your responses will be attributed to your organisation.

Just to confirm, we'll be keeping your responses to the interview for analysis purposes and if you'd like a copy of your data, to change your data, for your data to be deleted or to lodge a complaint, then please follow the process outlined on our webpage

<http://www.iffresearch.com/gdpr>

Hubs Year 2 Survey

Online landing page

Welcome to the Year 2 Stronger Practice Hubs Evaluation survey. This evaluation has been commissioned by the Department for Education to understand how the Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been implemented, and how staff and leaders in early years (EY) settings have responded to the offer of advice and support from a local Hub. The evaluation will draw out examples of successful implementation and identify barriers to the adoption of best practice in EY settings.

Thank you for all your help with the evaluation to-date – it is much appreciated. Through this survey we'd like to find out about your Hub's experiences of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme now that it has been running for a while. We want to hear what you think has worked well, and also what has not worked so well. This is your opportunity for you to share your experiences and contribute to future policy in this area.

Please be honest and open with your views – the more feedback you can give us in the open questions in this survey, the more we can report back to DfE.

If your Hub is made-up of a partnership of settings, this survey should be completed by the lead setting on behalf of all the settings within your partnership.

We anticipate that the survey will take about around 30 minutes to complete, depending on your answers. If needed, you can pause the survey at any point and return to it.

DROP DOWN: Helpful information before completing:

- To navigate the survey, please use the 'Next' and 'Continue' buttons. If you wish to pause the survey, click the pause button and close the survey. Do not worry if you accidentally close the survey as your responses are automatically saved. You can return to the survey any time by following the survey link provided.
- Any information provided will be kept confidential and no individuals nor settings will be named in any reporting.
- This evaluation is being conducted by IFF Research, an independent market research company, on behalf of the Department for Education. Our work adheres to the Market Research Society's code of conduct.
- If you have any questions about the research, or issues completing the survey please contact the IFF Stronger Practice Hubs Team on 020 7250 3035 or email SPHEvaluation@iffresearch.com.
- If you would like to confirm the validity of this request, please contact sanjeeta.abram@education.gov.uk

Click Next to begin the survey

A - Experience of being a Hub

ASK ALL

With the first few questions, we'll be asking for feedback on your experience of being a Hub.

With your responses, please take into consideration your partnership with other EY settings.

A1. Overall, how do you rate your experience of being a Hub?

SINGLE CODE

1. Very positive
2. Fairly positive
3. Neither positive nor negative
4. Fairly negative
5. Very negative
6. Don't know

ASK ALL

A2. Generally speaking, how easy or difficult have you found the following aspects of operating as a Hub?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

A2_1. The day-to-day administrative tasks

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A2_2. The reporting requirements

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult

- 4. Moderately difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't know

A2_3. Meeting the programme objective of proactively sharing information and advice on evidence-based approaches

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Moderately easy
- 3. Neither easy nor difficult
- 4. Moderately difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't know

A2_4. Meeting the programme objective of establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Moderately easy
- 3. Neither easy nor difficult
- 4. Moderately difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't know

A2_5. Meeting the programme objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice, and signposting to other funded support

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Moderately easy
- 3. Neither easy nor difficult
- 4. Moderately difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't know

A2_6. Meeting the objective of supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Moderately easy

3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A2_7. Effectively managing the allocated grant funding

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A2_8. Supporting the programme evaluation

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

ASK ALL

A3. And how easy or difficult have you found the following aspects of developing and operating an effective Hub?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

A3_1. Working with NCB to produce a Delivery Plan with clear activities and KPIs

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A3_2. Maintaining a Hub team with adequate staffing levels to ensure effective delivery to achieve the programme objectives

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A3_3. Developing an understanding amongst Hub staff of evidence-informed practice and how to embed change in other settings

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A3_4. Ensuring appropriate financial management including providing forecasts and actuals to NCB and DfE as required.

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't know

A3_5. Constructively engaging with and working effectively with NCB, DfE, EEF and evaluation partners.

1. Very easy
2. Moderately easy
3. Neither easy nor difficult
4. Moderately difficult
5. Very difficult

6. Don't know

A3_6. Establishing project and financial management tools and mechanisms to plan and monitor delivery progress and budgets.

1. Very easy

2. Moderately easy

3. Neither easy nor difficult

4. Moderately difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't know

B - Stronger Practice Hub Objectives

DS: SHOW ON SEPARATE SCREEN.

We are now going to ask about the objectives that Hubs are working towards.

As a reminder, these are the programme objectives:

- **Proactively share information and advice on evidence-based approaches**
- **Establish local networks of early years providers and organisations**
- **Act as a point of contact for bespoke advice, and signposting to other funded support**
- **Support early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes**

ASK ALL

B1. How successful would you say your Hub has been in achieving the programme objectives compared to what you initially intended?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

B1_1. Proactively sharing information and advice on evidence-informed approaches throughout your Hub's local area, for example, through newsletters, blogs, events, network webinars and social media.

1. Very successful

2. Fairly successful

3. Not very successful

4. Not at all successful

5. Don't Know

B1_2. Establishing local networks of EY providers and organisations (including childminders) to support effective evidence-informed early years practice and knowledge sharing.

1. Very successful

2. Fairly successful

3. Not very successful

4. Not at all successful

5. Don't Know

B1_3. Acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice, and signposting/referring to other funded support.

1. Very successful

2. Fairly successful

3. Not very successful

4. Not at all successful

5. Don't Know

B1_4. Supporting EY providers to access evidence-informed programmes, working with the EEF.

1. Very successful

2. Fairly successful

3. Not very successful

4. Not at all successful

5. Don't Know

DS: RANDOMISE ORDER THAT B2/B3, B4/B5, B6/B7 & B8/B9 ARE SHOWN IN (SHOW THESE IN PAIRS)

QUESTION PAIR (FOR ROTATION)/ OBJECTIVE TEXT SUB TO SHOW BEFORE ROTATION

B2/B3- sharing information and advice of evidence-informed approaches

B4/B5- establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations

B6/B7- acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice

B8/B9- supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes

IF FIRST ROTATION: **We'd now like to find out what activities have helped your Hub work towards each of the programme objectives, and what could have been done differently.**

Thinking first about the objective of [INSERT OBJECTIVE – PUT IN BOLD AND STAND-OUT COLOUR]

IF SECOND/THIRD/FOURTH ROTATION: **Thinking now about [INSERT OBJECTIVE – PUT IN BOLD AND STAND-OUT COLOUR]**

ASK ALL (SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS INTRODUCTION TEXT)

B2. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective?

Please select all that apply in the first column (and use the 'other' option if needed), and select up to three of the most helpful aspects in the second column.

MULTICODE FIRST COLUMN, MULTICODE UP TO 3 SECOND COLUMN – RANDOMISE ORDER OF STATEMENTS. ANSWER IN SECOND COLUMN CAN ONLY BE SELECTED IF ALSO SELECTED IN FIRST COLUMN.

COLUMN 1: **Activity undertaken**

COLUMN 2: **Particularly helpful**

Objective of sharing information and advice of evidence-informed approaches:

1. Designed engagement plans with targets to inform delivery planning.
2. Had an initial launch of the Hub to local settings and childminders
3. Established a newsletter platform and mailing list to grow membership
4. Collected regular feedback on the needs/wants of local settings regarding content and channels
5. Produced blogs highlighting evidence-informed practice
6. Actively used social media to encourage engagement amongst settings in content/resources and to grow membership
7. Collected and recorded data in relation to this objective
8. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
9. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
10. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]

11. Don't know [ANCHOR – SINGLE CODE]

ASK ALL (SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS INTRODUCTION TEXT)

B3. What could have been done differently or what additional support could have been provided to help you with the objective of sharing information and advice of evidence-informed approaches with settings in your area?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL (SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS INTRODUCTION TEXT)

B4. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective?

Please select all that apply in the first column (and use the 'other' option if needed), and select up to three of the most helpful aspects in the second column.

MULTICODE FIRST COLUMN, MULTICODE UP TO 3 SECOND COLUMN MULTICODE (UP TO 3) – RANDOMISE ORDER OF STATEMENTS. ANSWER IN SECOND COLUMN CAN ONLY BE SELECTED IF ALSO SELECTED IN FIRST COLUMN.

Column 1: **Activity undertaken**

Column 2: **Particularly helpful**

Objective of establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations

1. Created an engagement plan to inform delivery planning for how your Hub will establish and grow its network.
2. Offered a mix of both virtual and face-to-face network meetings for network members.
3. Ensured network meetings are scheduled to run with regularity but with varied timing for participants
4. Gathered and shared intelligence with NCB on key themes, topics and questions arising via your network, to help inform the overall Hubs programme.
5. Created working relationship with: Local Authority, Area Leads, other Hubs such as English, Maths, Family and Teaching School Hubs, and Experts and Mentors in local authority.
6. Established a network tracking system to monitor engagement and feedback
7. Collected and kept a record of data in relation to this objective

8. Utilised existing networks (e.g. Local Authority networks) to share evidence informed approaches
9. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
10. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
11. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
12. Don't know [ANCHOR – SINGLE CODE]

ASK ALL

B5. What could have been done differently or what additional support could have been provided to help you with the objective of establishing local networks of early years providers and organisations?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL (SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS INTRODUCTION TEXT)

B6. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective?

Please select all that apply in the first column (and use the 'other' option if needed), and select up to three of the most helpful aspects in the second column.

MULTICODE FIRST COLUMN, MULTICODE UP TO 3 SECOND COLUMN MULTICODE (UP TO 3) – RANDOMISE ORDER OF STATEMENTS. ANSWER IN SECOND COLUMN CAN ONLY BE SELECTED IF ALSO SELECTED IN FIRST COLUMN.

Column 1: Activity undertaken

Column 2: Particularly helpful

Objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice

1. Created and published a Hub advice line/email address to local settings and childminders
2. Tracked and monitored bespoke advice provided during the programme
3. Agreed your Hub's approach to common questions and created case studies, FAQs or other general information for settings
4. Mapped high-quality support available locally in order to signpost to it
5. Made referrals to other strands of the DfE EY recovery programme.

6. Established referral mechanism / triage system for referrals to Experts and Mentor programme and the Childminder Mentor programme
7. Established mechanisms for receiving feedback on support provided
8. Kept a record of data in relation to this objective
9. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
10. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
11. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
12. Don't know [ANCHOR – SINGLE CODE]

ASK ALL

B7. What could have been done differently or what additional support could have been provided to help you with the objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL (SHOW ON SAME PAGE AS INTRODUCTION TEXT)

B8. What activities have you undertaken to work towards this objective, and what has been particularly helpful in respect of delivering to this objective?

Please select all that apply in the first column (and use the 'other' option if needed), and select up to three of the most helpful aspects in the second column.

MULTICODE FIRST COLUMN, MULTICODE UP TO 3 SECOND COLUMN MULTICODE (UP TO 3) – RANDOMISE ORDER OF STATEMENTS. ANSWER IN SECOND COLUMN CAN ONLY BE SELECTED IF ALSO SELECTED IN FIRST COLUMN.

Column 1: **Activity undertaken**

Column 2: **Particularly helpful**

Objective of supporting early years providers to access evidence-informed programmes:

1. Mapped local area needs to inform nomination of evidence-informed programmes
2. Selected programmes from EEF's curated menu of programmes at three timepoints during the first year of delivery

3. Identified local development projects that could be included on the menu and offered locally by your Hub
4. Funded the programme provider's onboarding and delivery of the programmes to EY settings in line with the agreed amount for each programme
5. Supported with signposting and promoting programmes to EY settings in the area (e.g. programme highlighted in network events, newsletters and through responses to reactive advice)
6. Attended monthly meetings between EEF, programme provider and (if relevant) the independent evaluator
7. Responded to contingency planning with EEF to ensure all Hub programmes are recruited to
8. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
9. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
10. Other activity, please specify [ANCHOR]
11. Don't know [ANCHOR – SINGLE CODE]

ASK ALL

B9. What could have been done differently or what additional support could have been provided to help you with the objective of acting as a point of contact for bespoke advice on evidence-informed practice?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

C - Working with partners

We'd like to understand your continued experience of working with NCB and the EEF.

We want to understand what is working well and where changes can be made. As a reminder, IFF Research is an independent third-party organisation. The information you provide is confidential and we will not name any individuals nor settings in any of our reporting.

ASK ALL

C1. To what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

C1_1. Feedback from the NCB has helped us to provide better support to early years settings

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C1_2. We have a collaborative working relationship with the NCB

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C1_3. The NCB have been responsive to any queries and concerns

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C1_4. We have the right level of input from the NCB for our needs

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C1_6. NCB has kept us informed and provided feedback in a timely manner

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

C2. Now thinking about the EEF, to what extent do you agree, or disagree, with each of the statements below?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

C2_1. Feedback from the EEF has helped us to provide better support to early years settings

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C2_2. We have a collaborative working relationship with the EEF

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C2_3. The EEF have been responsive to any queries and concerns

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C2_4. We have the right level of input from the EEF for our needs

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C2_6. The EEF has helped us to better understand and deliver evidence informed practice

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

C3. As part of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, EEF have created the Early Years Evidence Store [DS: INCLUDE A HYPERLINK TO EARLY YEARS EVIDENCE STORE | EEF (EDUCATIONENDOWMENTFOUNDATION.ORG.UK)]. This is an online resource to help Hubs and EY settings understand the evidence behind approaches for teaching and learning in the early years and suggests ways for implementing them in practice.

To what extent, if at all, are you using the Early Years Evidence Store as part of your operations as a Hub?

SINGLE CODE

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. Hardly at all
4. Not at all
5. Not heard about the Evidence Store
6. Don't know

ASK IF HAS USED EVIDENCE STORE (C3 ⇐ 1-3)

DS: PLEASE SHOW C4 AND C4A ON SAME SCREEN

C4. Please tell us what is good about the Evidence Store.

What aspects are good/work well?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

C4A. Why do you say that?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

ASK IF HAS USED EVIDENCE STORE (C3 ⇐ 1-3)

DS: PLEASE SHOW C5 AND C5A ON SAME SCREEN

C5. What about the Evidence Store could be improved going forward to better support you in your role as a hub?

What could be improved?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

C5A. Why do you say that?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C6. As part of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, Hubs are matched with a selection of funded evidence-informed programmes which they can promote or signpost to settings in their area.

Overall, how satisfied are you with the programmes that your Hub was matched with to fund for your area?

SINGLE CODE

1. Very satisfied

2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied not dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. Don't know

ASK ALL

Please could you tell us what you feel is good about the programmes you have been matched with and what you think could be improved, either in terms of the programmes themselves or future opportunities to select and nominate programmes, and why this is?

We are particularly interested to hear how the programmes compared to your expectations, and how these could be used to best meet needs in your local area.

DS: PLEASE SHOW C7 AND C7A ON SAME SCREEN

C7. What aspects are good?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

C7A. Why do you say that?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

Please could you tell us what you feel is good about the programmes you have been matched with and what you think could be improved, either in terms of the programmes themselves or future opportunities to select and nominate programmes, and why this is?

We are particularly interested to hear how the programmes compared to your expectations, and how these could be used to best meet needs in your local area.

C8. What aspects could be improved?

If there are aspects you would like to see changed or any topics that you think should be covered, please tell us what these are

DS: PLEASE SHOW C8 AND C8A ON SAME SCREEN

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

C8A. Why do you say that?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

C9. Have you worked with any of the following organisations so far to deliver the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

C9_1. The Department for Education

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_2. Your Local Authority

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_3. One or more other Stronger Practice Hubs

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_4. The Maths Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_5. The English Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_6. The Teaching School Hubs programme

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_7. The Experts and Mentors programme

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_8. Research schools or academic bodies

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

C9_9. Any other organisation / body (Please specify)

1. Yes, to a great extent
2. Yes, to some extent
3. Yes, but hardly at all
4. No
5. Don't Know

ASK IF A PARTNERSHIP HUB—PULL DATA FROM PRE-SURVEY (A1 IN PRE-SURVEY = 2)

Thinking about your partnership with the other early years settings that make up your Hub, please tell us the strengths of your partnership and what challenges you have faced working together.

DS: SHOW C13 AND C14 ON SAME SCREEN.

C10. Strengths

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

C11. Challenges

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

D - Overall reflections

ASK ALL

D1. Thank you for the feedback you have given so far. We now have a few questions to understand how you feel the programme has gone overall and what you might think will happen next.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that...?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW. DS TO RANDOMISE

D1_1 The delivery of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been a success.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

D1_2 EY settings in my area are showing a good level of interest in the activities and support that will be provided by us through the Stronger Practice Hubs programme.

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

D1_3 The process of running the Stronger Practice Hubs programme at our setting has largely been in line with our expectations

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

D1_4 We are confident that our Hub's plans are reaching and benefiting disadvantaged children

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

D1_5 Our expertise in the early years sector has been valued in the delivery of this programme

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

D1_6 The project timeframe is sufficient for Stronger Practice Hubs to have a lasting impact on the early years sector

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

D1_7 Aspects of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme have been unexpectedly burdensome or time-consuming

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

D1_8 The delivery timescales within the past financial year gave us enough time to spend the grant funding we were allocated

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

D2. Thinking more generally, do you think a Hub model, whereby 'strong' EY settings provide support, advice and guidance to other settings, is the right approach for the early years sector or not?

SINGLE CODE

1. Yes – definitely
2. Yes – probably
3. No – probably not
4. No – definitely not
5. Don't know

IF THINK RIGHT MODEL [D2=1-2]

D3 Why do you think it is the right approach for the early years sector?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

IF DON'T THINK RIGHT MODEL [D2=3-4]

D4. Why don't you think it is the right approach for the early years sector and what do you think would work better?

DS: SHOW D4 AND D5 ON SAME SCREEN.

Why is it not the right approach?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK ALL

D6. What have the effects of being a Stronger Practice Hub been on your own setting(s)?

MULTICODE – RANDOMISE

1. We have received positive press in the local community
2. We have seen an increase in the number of young children attending our setting
3. Our staff have developed their early years knowledge and skills
4. Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in evidence-informed approaches
5. Our staff have developed their knowledge and skills in supporting others to implement evidence-informed approaches
6. Our staff have felt it has been a rewarding experience

7. We have had fewer resources for our day to day provision
8. Our staff have had a larger workload
9. Our children group sizes have had to increase
10. Our staff retention rates have improved
11. Other positive benefit (specify)
12. Other negative impact (specify)
13. None / Don't know

ASK ALL

D7. Taking everything into account, how likely would you be to recommend other early years settings to apply to become a Stronger Practice Hub if the opportunity arose in the future?

Please answer on a scale of one to ten, where one means you would definitely not recommend becoming a hub to others, and ten means you would definitely recommend if asked.

SINGLECODE.

- 1 – Not at all likely
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 – Extremely likely
- 11 – Don't know

ASK ALL

D8. Do you think you would continue to run any of the activities that you have set-up through the Stronger Practice Hub programme once funding ends?

SINGLE CODE

1. Yes – definitely will
2. Yes – probably will
3. No – probably not
4. No – definitely not
5. Don't know

IF LIKELY TO CONTINUE ACTIVITIES [D8=1-2]

D9. What activities do you think you would be likely to continue with?

MULTI CODE. DS TO RANDOMISE

1. Will organise / run networking events
2. Will continue to promote use of Evidence Store
3. Will continue to promote ourselves as a point of contact for support and advice to other settings
4. Will continue to actively signpost to evidence-informed practices
5. Will continue to create and share newsletters and blogs about evidence-informed practice
6. Will continue to work with EEF to contribute to exemplification of materials for the Evidence Store if the opportunity is available
7. Will continue to develop own exemplification materials to share with other settings
8. Other (please specify)
9. Don't know / too soon to say

ASK ALL

D10. Do you think all or some the network activities created through the programme would continue without your Hub's involvement or the Stronger Practice Hubs funding?

SINGLE CODE

1. Yes – all will definitely continue
2. Yes – some will definitely continue
3. No - They probably will not continue
4. No - They definitely will not continue
5. Don't know

6. Not applicable (have not established any 'new' networks)

ASK ALL

What, if any, are the unintended positive or negative consequences of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme?

DS: SHOW D11 AND D12 ON THE SAME SCREEN

D11. Positive unintended consequences

WRITE IN.

1. None
2. Don't know

D12. Negative unintended consequences

WRITE IN.

1. None
2. Don't know

ASK ALL

D13. And finally, please use the space below for any specific comments you have for the Department for Education in relation to the Stronger Practice Hubs or wider Early Years Recovery programme. We're especially keen to hear if you have any comments on what else you think needs to be in place to address challenges in the early years sector or to have the biggest impact on children.

WRITE IN.

1. No other comments

E - Thank and close

ASK ALL

We are now at the end of the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

E1. Would you be willing for us to call you back if we need to clarify any of the information you have provided today?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

ASK IF HAPPY TO BE RECONTACTED (E1=1)

E2. Please can you confirm your contact details? These details will only be used to make contact about clarifying the information you have provided, if necessary.

Name

Job title

Setting name

Email address

Phone number

ASK ALL

E3. Thanks again for your time today. The information you have provided will be used only for the purposes of this evaluation. Data collected through these surveys will only be shared with the DfE and the organisation appointed to evaluate the full Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme, which the Stronger Practice Hubs is a component of. The report, and data supplied, will be completely anonymised and none of your responses will be attributed to your organisation.

Just to confirm, we'll be keeping your responses to the interview for analysis purposes and if you'd like a copy of your data, to change your data, for your data to be deleted or to lodge a complaint, then please follow the process outlined on our webpage

<http://www.iffresearch.com/gdpr>

Settings Baseline Survey

From sample:

PROVIDER TYPE

1. Nursery class attached to school
2. Reception class in primary school
3. Maintained nursery school
4. Private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group-based setting
5. Childminder
6. Registered day care within a Children's Centre/Family Centre
7. Other, please specify

A1Dum DUMMY VARIABLE, DO NOT ASK

1. Childminder- Provider type = 5
2. Else- Provider type \neq 5

Landing Page

ASK ALL

Welcome to the Stronger Practice Hubs survey.

This survey has been commissioned by the Department for Education to understand how the programme has been implemented. As a childminder or an early years setting who has had engagement with your local Stronger Practice Hub we would love to hear about your experience.

Your feedback is vital to helping the DfE determine the success of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme and to understand how improvements can be made.

The survey will take about around 15 minutes to complete, depending on your answers. If needed, you can pause the survey at any point and return to it.

DROP DOWN: Helpful information before completing:

- To navigate the survey, please use the 'Next' and 'Continue' buttons. If you wish to pause the survey, click the pause button and close the survey. Do not worry if you accidentally close the survey as your responses are automatically saved. You can return to the survey at any time by following the survey link provided.
- We will follow up with another, similar survey, in around a year's time, which will explore your setting's experiences after the hubs have been on the ground for over a year.
- Any information provided will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. No one will be able to identify you from our reports. Anonymised data from the survey will be shared with the DfE, NCB and the overarching Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) evaluation partner only.
- Your contact details were provided to us by your local Stronger Practice Hub. For further information on how these details were obtained and how your data will be used please click [here](#) to view the DfE Stronger Practice Hubs Privacy Notice
- This evaluation is being conducted by IFF Research, an independent market research company, on behalf of the Department for Education. Our work adheres to the Market Research Society's code of conduct.
- If you have any questions about the research, or issues completing the survey please contact the IFF Stronger Practice Hubs Team on 020 7250 3035 or email SPHEvaluation@iffresearch.com.
- If you would like to confirm the validity of this request, please contact Sanjeeta Abram at the Department for Education at sanjeeta.abram@education.gov.uk

Click Next to begin the survey

S - Screener

ASK ALL

S1. Stronger Practice Hubs across the country are running a number of initiatives intended to support the early years sector. To begin with, please can you tell us which of these, if any, have you/your early years setting done or been involved with to-date?

MULTICODE

DS: RANDOMISE CODES 1-9

1. Signed-up to receive a regular newsletter from your local Hub

2. Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub
3. Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector
4. Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub
5. Used the online Evidence Store portal (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation) (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: This is a place where you can access information and support on putting evidence-informed approaches into practice.
6. Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access
7. Attended one or more evidence informed training programmes being funded through your hub
8. Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed help with
9. Other (please specify)
10. Don't know- MAKE EXCLUSIVE
11. None of these- MAKE EXCLUSIVE
12. Prefer not to say- MAKE EXCLUSIVE

S1Dum ENGAGED

1. Yes [IF S1=2-9] - Continue ('Engaged group')
2. No [IF S1=10-12] - Screen out and display this message: "Thank you for your interest in taking part in the Stronger Practice Hubs evaluation. We are only looking to talk to those who have actively engaged with the programme at present."
3. Received paper only: [IF S=1] AND [S1≠2-12] - Continue ('Newspaper only group')

IF NOT A CHILDMINDER (A1DUM=2)

S2. Can we just confirm that you are able to answer questions about your setting's engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

SINGLECODE.

1. Yes, I am able to answer these questions – CONTINUE
2. No, someone else is better placed to answer these questions – GO TO S2A

ASK IF SOMEONE ELSE IS BEST PERSON (S2=2)

S2B. Please can you provide the contact details of the person at your setting who is best placed to answer questions about the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

DS: SEND EMAIL INVITE TO EMAIL ADDRESS PROVIDED AND THANK AND CLOSE

Name

Job title

Email address

Phone number

ASK IF 'NEWSLETTER ONLY GROUP' (S1DUM=3)

S3. Can you tell us roughly when you first engaged with the Hub?

(DS: ONLY SHOW DATES PRIOR TO SAMPLE ENGAGEMENT MONTH)

1. May-23
2. Jun-23
3. Jul-23
4. Aug-23
5. Sep-23
6. Oct-23
7. Nov-23
8. Dec-23
9. Jan-24
10. Feb-24

- 11. Mar-24
- 12. Apr-24
- 13. Don't know

A - About your setting

The first few questions will ask some information about your setting to help provide us with some context to your answers.

ASK IF HAS PROVTYPE=1

A1. The information that we hold tells us that your setting is a [INSERT PROVIDER TYPE FROM SAMPLE]. Is this correct?

SINGLECODE.

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Don't know

IF SETTING TYPE ON SAMPLE NOT CORRECT (A1=2-3) OR IF HAS PROVTYPE=2

A2. Which one of the following best describes your early years setting?

SINGLECODE.

- 1. Nursery class attached to school
- 2. Reception class in primary school
- 3. Maintained nursery school
- 4. Private, voluntary or independent nursery (operating in non-domestic premises)
- 5. Childminder
- 6. Registered day care within a Children's / Family centre
- 7. Other type of early years setting (please specify)

DS: IF ROUTED TO A2, RESPONSE AT THIS QUESTION NEEDS TO UPDATE PROVIDER TYPE AND A1DUM VARIABLES

ASK IF NOT A CHILDMINDER SETTING (A1DUM=2)

A3. Which of the following best describes your job role?

SINGLECODE.

1. Headteacher
2. EYFS lead
3. Manager
4. Deputy manager
5. Room/Team Leader
6. Teacher
7. Nursery/Early Years Practitioner
8. Nursery/Early Years Assistant
9. Other (please specify)
10. Prefer not to say

ASK IF NOT A CHILDMINDER SETTING (A1DUM=2)

A4. Roughly how many staff work at your setting? Please include both full-time and part-time employees on your payroll and working owners, but exclude outside contractors, apprentices and agency staff.

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK IF A CHILDMINDER (A1DUM=1)

A5. How many, if any, registered childminders and/or childminding assistants do you regularly work with at the address at which you normally childmind? If you do not work with anyone else, please enter '0'

WRITE IN. ALLOW 0-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

A6. And could you please tell us roughly how many children under the age of 5 [IF NOT CHILDMINDER - A1DUM=2: are currently registered at your setting; IF CHILDMINDER – A1DUM=1: do you regularly childmind?

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

IF NO REGION ON SAMPLE (HASREGION=2)

A7. Finally, can you tell us which region your setting is located in?

1. North East
2. North West
3. Yorkshire and the Humber
4. East Midlands
5. West Midlands
6. East of England
7. London
8. South East
9. South West

10. Don't know

11. Prefer not to say

B - Engaging with Stronger Practice Hubs

ASK ALL

B1. How did you first hear who your local Stronger Practice Hub settings were?

MULTICODE.

DS: RANDOMISE CODES 1-8.

1. Invited to launch event
2. Email
3. Word of mouth
4. Advertisement in a flyer or newsletter
5. Social media post
6. We applied to be part of a Stronger Practice Hub ourselves
7. Saw a list of settings who were part of a Stronger Practice Hub
8. Contacted directly by a Stronger Practice Hub
9. Other (please specify)
10. Don't know

ASK ALL

B2. Thinking about what you know about your local Stronger Practice Hub, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

B2_1. [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] feel well informed about the aims of the Stronger Practice Hub

1. Strongly agree

- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 5. Disagree
- 6. Strongly disagree
- 7. Don't Know

B2_2. It is clear how [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: our early years setting] will benefit from interacting with a Stronger Practice Hub

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 5. Disagree
- 6. Strongly disagree
- 7. Don't Know

B2_3. It is clear how to access the support offered by the Stronger Practice Hub

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 5. Disagree
- 6. Strongly disagree
- 7. Don't Know

ASK ALL

B3. How frequently [IF CHILDMINDER: have you; IF ELSE: has your setting] engaged with each of the following to-date?

SINGLECODE

DS: ONLY SHOW RESPONSES SELECTED AT S1

B3_1 Read/reviewed the regular newsletter from your local Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_2 Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_3 [IF S1 = 3] Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_4 [IF S1 = 4] Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_5 [IF S1 = 5] Used the online Evidence Store portal (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation)

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_6 [IF S1 = 6] Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: Please mark as 'once' if you have received information on multiple occasions about the same specific support or funding.)

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_7 [IF S1 = 7] Attended one or more of the evidence-informed / training programmes being funded through your Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_8 [IF S1 = 8] Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed help with (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: Please mark as 'once' if you have received support/advice on multiple occasions about the same specific issue.)

1. Once
2. Twice

3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B3_9 [IF S1=9, PULL THROUGH RESPONSE]

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

ASK ENGAGED SETTINGS, AND NEWSPAPER ONLY HAVE READ IT. IF [S1DUM=1] OR [S1DUM=3 AND B3_1=1-4]

B4. Which of the following best describes the reason(s) why [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] engaged with [IF 1 CODE SELECTED AT S1: this activity?; IF >1 CODE SELECTED AT S1: these activities?]

MULTICODE.

DS: RANDOMISE ORDER OF CODES 1-9

1. It seemed like a good idea
2. To improve [IF CHILDMINDER: my; IF ELSE: our] childcare provision
3. Other childcare providers were doing it
4. There was a specific issue that [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] wanted support to address
5. To connect/network with other childcare providers
6. To get free advice
7. [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] had identified a particular gap and [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] wanted training to address it
8. The Hub encouraged [IF CHILDMINDER: me; IF ELSE: us] to engage
9. For [IF CHILDMINDER: my; IF ELSE: our staff's] professional development

10. Other (please specify)

11. Don't know

12. None of these

B5. [IF 1 CODE SELECTED AT S1]: Thinking about when [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] [INSERT S1 CODE – NOTE TO DS NEEDS TO BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE S1 and S2 “received and read the local Hub newsletter(s) / read the social media and blogs from your local Hub], to what extent do you agree or disagree that it has so far been...?

[IF >1 CODE SELECTED AT S1]: Thinking about the Stronger Practice Hubs' activities that [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] engaged with and/or newsletters, social media and blogs, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they have so far been...?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

B5_1 Relevant to [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting]

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

B5_2 Accessible to [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting]

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

B5_3 Practical / actionable

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

B5_4 High quality

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

B6. What, if anything, has prevented [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] from engaging with your local Stronger Practice hub more than you have done so far?

MULTICODE

DS: ROTATE CODES 1-7

1. Too busy/don't have the capacity
2. Concerns about accessing funding for backfill to maintain staff ratios
3. Support offered isn't relevant to our setting
4. Timings don't work for our setting
5. Geographical/logistics
6. Costs too much money / not sure it will be covered by funding

- 7. Means working at weekend/outside of core hours
- 8. Other (please specify)
- 9. Nothing in particular
- 10. Don't know
- 11. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

B7. Please could you tell us whether there are any types of support that [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] would have liked to have been offered but weren't available through the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

WRITE IN

- 1. Don't know

C - Assessing your setting's competencies

SHOW TO ALL (ON SEPARATE PAGE)

In this next section, we ask a range of questions about your assessment of your setting's skills and competencies. If there is more than one person working at your setting then please answer about how you perceive staff at your setting feel on the whole, rather than about your individual skills and competencies.

As a reminder, your responses are completely anonymous and [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] will not be assessed based on your answers to these questions.

ASK ALL

CONFIDENCE

C1. On a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting], you are:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C1_1 Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 0-2 year olds

- 1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_2 Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 2-4 year olds

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_3 Confident leading appropriate activities for children with developmental or language delays

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_4 Confident in supporting children with their early language and communication development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_5 Confident in supporting children with their personal, social and emotional development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_6 Confident in supporting children with their early mathematics development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_7 Confident interpreting evidence and applying evidence based approaches

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree

- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

C1_8 Confident implementing the reformed Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

C1_9 Confident in supporting children's learning and development following the COVID-19 pandemic

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

ASK ALL

KNOWLEDGE

C2. And on a scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’, to what extent do you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting], you have:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C2_1 A good understanding of how babies and children learn and develop

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C2_2 A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children’s early language and communication development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C2_3 A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children’s personal, social and emotional development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C2_4 A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early mathematics development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK ALL

SKILLS

C3. And on the same scale, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that [IF CHILDMINDER: you are; IF ELSE: your setting is] confident in identifying when a child...?

Please remember your responses are completely anonymous and [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] will not be assessed based on your answers to these questions.

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C3_1 Requires additional support

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_2 Would benefit from specialist support

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_3 Requires one-to-one support

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_4 Requires support with their early language and communication development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_5 Requires support with their personal, social and emotional development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C3_6 Requires support with their early mathematics development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C3_7 Is showing signs of developmental delay

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

PRACTICE

C4. Now please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting]:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C4_1 [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] lead activities that include areas of the EYFS

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ONLY ASK ENGAGED SETTINGS ([S1DUM=1], AND NEWSPAPER ONLY WHO HAVE READ IT [S1DUM=3 AND B3_1=1-4].

C4_2 [IF CHILDMINDER: I have or am planning to improve my practice based on my participation in the Stronger Practice hubs programme to date; IF ELSE: We have or are planning to change our practice based on our participation in the Stronger Practice hubs programme to date / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] have improved our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK IF HAVE OR PLANNING TO MAKE CHANGES (C4_2=1-2)

C5. And to what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following:

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

C5_1 The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I have or am planning to make to my; IF ELSE: we have or are planning to make to our] practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's language and communication skills. / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's language and communication skills.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_2 The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I have or am planning to make to my; IF ELSE: we have or are planning to make to our] practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's personal, social and emotional development. / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's personal, social and emotional development.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_3 The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I have or am planning to make to my; IF ELSE: we have or are planning to make to our] practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's early mathematics development. / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's early mathematics development.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK IF HAS IMPLEMENTED CHANGES TO PRACTICE (C4_2 = 1 OR 2)

C6. You said you have or are planning to implement changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. What are those changes? / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY]: You said that you had implemented changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. What have these changes been?

MULTICODE

1. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting communication and language development
2. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development
3. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting mathematics development
4. Introduce(d) new practices to support with developmental or language delays
5. Other (please specify)
6. Don't know

ASK IF MENTIONED CHANGES MADE (C6 = 1-5)

C7. And how easy or difficult has it been, or will it be, to implement these changes?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C7_1 [IF C6=1]: Introduce new practices around supporting communication and language development

1. Very easy
2. Easy
3. Neither difficult nor easy
4. Difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't Know

C7_2 [IF C6=2]: Introduce new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development

1. Very easy

2. Easy

3. Neither difficult nor easy

4. Difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't Know

C7_3 [IF C6=3]: Introduce new practices around supporting mathematics development

1. Very easy

2. Easy

3. Neither difficult nor easy

4. Difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't Know

C7_4 [IF C6=4]: Introduce new practices to support with developmental or language delays

1. Very easy

2. Easy

3. Neither difficult nor easy

4. Difficult

5. Very difficult

6. Don't Know

C7_5 [IF C6=5]: PULL THROUGH RESPONSE

1. Very easy
2. Easy
3. Neither difficult nor easy
4. Difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't Know

ASK IF A PRACTICE LEADER (A3 = 1-4)

C8. And now thinking specifically about yourself as a practice leader, to what extent do you agree or disagree that...

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C8_1 In my experience, the skills in the early years sector will improve due to the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

/ [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] In my experience, the skills in the early years sector have improved due to the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C8_3 [DS: INCLUDE THIS CODE IN POST SURVEY ONLY] Following advice and support from my local Stronger Practice Hub, I am better able to support my staff to improve their practice regarding children's communication and language development (follow-up only)

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know

F - Engagement with other EYER strands

ASK ALL

F1. The Stronger Practice Hubs programme is part of a wider range of initiatives within the wider Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme. Which of these other EYER programmes [IF CHILDMINDER: have you; IF ELSE: has your early years setting] been part of, if any?

MULTICODE

DS: RANDOMISE ORDER OF 1-9

1. The Experts and Mentors programme [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Delivering support and coaching for leaders, mentoring for practitioners and whole setting support for early years settings most in need
2. The EYFS online child development training [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Offers a module-based training programme to upskill staff and improve their knowledge of child development
3. The Professional Development Training Programme [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Providing early years practitioners with training on communication and language, early maths and personal, social and emotional development.
4. Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Designed for reception-age children needing additional support with their speech and language development and early literacy skills
5. National professional qualification in early years leadership (NPQEYL) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Helps early years leaders develop their skills in managing and leading high-quality early years education.
6. Home Learning Environment (part of the Family Hubs work) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funding local authorities to train practitioners to support parents in talking, playing and reading more with their children, both in and around the home, to help improve cognitive skills and future attainment

7. Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funded graduate-level specialist training leading to early years teacher status. Designed for those who wish to specialise in working with babies and young children, from birth to 5 years

8. Early Years SENCO training [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funded SENCO training to help identify and support children with additional needs.

9. Level 3 qualifications reviews [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: The review will improve the quality and rigour of the level 3 early years criteria, through public consultation and engagement with the sector and other stakeholders such as awarding organisations, and analysis of new and available data.

10. None of these

11. Don't know

G - About your setting (cont...)

ASK ALL

We are near the end of the survey. Thank you for your responses so far. We just have a few more questions about your setting to help with analysis.

G1. How long [IF CHILDMINDER: have you been working as a childminder?; IF ELSE: has your early years setting been in operation for?]

Please provide answer in number of years. An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number of years.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-200

1. Don't know

2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL (DS: SHOW IN BOTH PRE AND POST SURVEY)

G2. And now thinking about yourself. Do you want to stay working in the early years sector?

SINGLECODE

1. Yes

2. No
3. Don't know

ASK ALL (DS: SHOW IN BOTH PRE AND POST SURVEY)

G3. And how likely are you to leave the early years sector in the next 12 months?

SINGLECODE

1. I already have a job offer for a new role
2. I'm very likely to leave
3. I'm fairly likely to leave
4. I'm not very likely to leave
5. I'm not at all likely to leave
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

G4. [IF CHILDMINDER: Are you; IF ELSE: Is your early years setting] a standalone setting or a part of a larger organisation?

SINGLECODE

1. A standalone setting
2. Part of a larger organisation

ASK ALL

G5. What is the postcode of the main site of your setting?

ADD IF NECESSARY: We are asking this so that we can match the data to broader contextual data about the kind of area your setting is located in.

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

H - Close

ASK ALL

We are now at the end of the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

H1. Would you be willing for us to call you back if we need to clarify any of the information you have provided today?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ASK ALL

H2. We are planning to carry out some follow up interviews to further explore your experience with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. These interviews are scheduled to take place in Spring 2024. They will be done over the phone or by video call and will last around 45 minutes to an hour. As a thank you for your time, we would offer [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting]a £30 payment.

Would you be happy to be recontacted about taking part closer to the time? Please note that saying yes now does not mean that you or anyone at your school are obliged to take part when contacted.

1. Yes
2. No

IF AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED (H1=1 OR H2=1)

H3. That's great. Please can you confirm the best contact details to contact you? These details will only be used to make contact about [IF H2=1: participating in follow-up interviews; IF H2=2: clarifying the information you have provided, if necessary.]

Name:

Job title:

Email address:

Phone number:

H4. Thanks again for your time today. We will be in touch again in six months' time with a similar survey to this one which will allow us to measure any changes in your experience, practices and opinions from today.

The information you have provided will be used only for the purposes of this evaluation. Data collected through these surveys will only be shared with the organisation appointed to evaluate the full Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme, which the Stronger Practice Hubs is a component of. The report, and data supplied, will be completely anonymised and none of your responses will be attributed to your organisation.

Just to confirm, we'll be keeping your responses to the survey for analysis purposes and if you'd like a copy of your data, to change your data, for your data to be deleted or to lodge a complaint, then please follow the process outlined on our webpage <http://www.iffresearch.com/gdpr>

Settings Post Survey

From sample:

DS: IF A1=1 IN PRE-SURVEY, TAKE FROM SAMPLE; IF A1=2/3 OR ROUTED TO A2 IN PRE-SURVEY, TAKE FROM A2; IF DID NOT COMPLETE PRE-SURVEY, TAKE FROM SAMPLE.

PROVIDER TYPE

1. Nursery class attached to school
2. Reception class in primary school
3. Maintained nursery school
4. Private, voluntary or independent (PVI) group-based setting
5. Childminder
6. Registered day care within a Children's Centre/Family Centre
7. Other, please specify

A1Dum DUMMY VARIABLE, DO NOT ASK

1. Childminder- Provider type = 5
2. Else- Provider type \neq 5

Landing Page

ASK ALL

Thank you for your help with this survey, which has been commissioned by the Department for Education to understand how the Stronger Practice Hub programme has been implemented. We want to hear about your experience as a childminder or an early years settings who has had some engagement with your local Stronger Practice Hub..

Your feedback is vital to help the Department for Education to determine the success of the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, whether it has made a difference to the early years sectors and to understand how improvements could be made.

The survey will take around 20 minutes to complete, depending on your answers. If needed, you can pause the survey at any point and return to it.

DROP DOWN: Helpful information before completing:

- To navigate the survey, please use the 'Next' and 'Continue' buttons. If you wish to pause the survey, click the pause button and close the survey. Do not worry if you accidentally close the survey as your responses are automatically saved. You can return to the survey at any time by following the survey link provided.
- Any information provided will be kept confidential and reported anonymously. No one will be able to identify you from our reports. Anonymised data from the survey will be shared with the DfE, NCB and the overarching Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) evaluation partner only.
- Your contact details were provided to us by your local Stronger Practice Hub. For further information on how these details were obtained and how your data will be used please click [here](#) to view the DfE Stronger Practice Hubs Privacy Notice
- This evaluation is being conducted by IFF Research, an independent market research company, on behalf of the Department for Education. Our work adheres to the Market Research Society's code of conduct.
- If you have any questions about the research, or issues completing the survey please contact the IFF Stronger Practice Hubs Team on 020 7250 3035 or email SPHEvaluation@iffresearch.com.
- If you would like to confirm the validity of this request, please contact Sanjeeta Abram at the Department for Education at sanjeeta.abram@education.gov.uk

Click Next to begin the survey

S - Screener

ASK ALL

S1. Stronger Practice Hubs across the country are running a number of initiatives intended to support the early years sector. To begin with, please can you tell us which of these, if any, have you/your early years setting done or been involved with to-date?

MULTICODE

DS: RANDOMISE CODES 1-9

1. Signed-up to receive a regular newsletter from your local Hub
2. Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub
3. Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector
4. Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub
5. Used the online Evidence Store portal (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation) (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: This is a place where you can access information and support on putting evidence-informed approaches into practice.
6. Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access
7. Attended one or more evidence informed training programmes being funded through your hub
8. Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed help with
9. Other (please specify)
10. Don't know- MAKE EXCLUSIVE
11. None of these- MAKE EXCLUSIVE
12. Prefer not to say- MAKE EXCLUSIVE

S1Dum ENGAGED

1. Yes [IF S1=2-9] - Continue ('Engaged group')
2. No [IF S1=10-12] - Screen out and display this message: "Thank you for your interest in taking part in the Stronger Practice Hubs evaluation. We are only looking to talk to those who have actively engaged with the programme at present."
3. Received paper only: [IF S=1] AND [S1≠2-12] - Continue ('Newspaper only group')

IF NOT A CHILDMINDER (A1DUM=2)

S2. Can we just confirm that you are able to answer questions about your setting's engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

SINGLECODE.

1. Yes, I am able to answer these questions – CONTINUE
2. No, someone else is better placed to answer these questions – GO TO S2A

ASK IF SOMEONE ELSE IS BEST PERSON (S2=2)

S2B. Please can you provide the contact details of the person at your setting who is best placed to answer questions about the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

DS: SEND EMAIL INVITE TO EMAIL ADDRESS PROVIDED AND THANK AND CLOSE.
WRITE CONTACT PROVIDED INTO SAMPLE.

Name

Job title

Email address

Phone number

A - About your setting

The first few questions will ask some information about your setting to help provide us with some context to your answers.

ASK IF HAS PROVTYPE=1

A1. The information that we hold tells us that your setting is a [INSERT PROVIDER TYPE FROM SAMPLE]. Is this correct?

SINGLECODE.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

IF SETTING TYPE ON SAMPLE NOT CORRECT (A1=2-3) OR IF HAS PROVTYPE=2

A2. Which one of the following best describes your early years setting?

SINGLECODE.

1. Nursery class attached to school
2. Reception class in primary school
3. Maintained nursery school
4. Private, voluntary or independent nursery (operating in non-domestic premises)
5. Childminder
6. Registered day care within a Children's / Family centre
7. Other type of early years setting (please specify)

DS: IF ROUTED TO A2, RESPONSE AT THIS QUESTION NEEDS TO UPDATE PROVIDER TYPE AND A1DUM VARIABLES

ASK IF NOT A CHILDMINDER SETTING (A1DUM=2)

A3. Which of the following best describes your job role?

SINGLECODE.

1. Headteacher/Deputy Head
2. EYFS lead
3. Manager/ Owner
4. Deputy manager
5. Room/Team Leader
6. Teacher
7. Nursery/Early Years Practitioner
8. Nursery/Early Years Assistant
11. Local Authority Officer
12. SENCO Lead
9. Other (please specify)
10. Prefer not to say

ASK IF NOT A CHILDMINDER SETTING (A1DUM=2)

A4. Roughly how many staff work at your setting? Please include both full-time and part-time employees on your payroll and working owners, but exclude outside contractors, apprentices and agency staff.

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK IF A CHILDMINDER (A1DUM=1)

A5. How many, if any, registered childminders and/or childminding assistants do you regularly work with at the address at which you normally childmind? If you do not work with anyone else, please enter '0'

WRITE IN. ALLOW 0-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

A6. And could you please tell us roughly how many children under the age of 5 [IF NOT CHILDMINDER - A1DUM=2: are currently registered at your setting; IF CHILDMINDER – A1DUM=1: do you regularly childmind?

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-99

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

IF NO REGION ON SAMPLE (HASREGION=2)

A7. Finally, can you tell us which region your setting is located in?

1. North East
2. North West
3. Yorkshire and the Humber
4. East Midlands
5. West Midlands
6. East of England
7. London
8. South East
9. South West
10. Don't know
11. Prefer not to say

B - Engaging with Stronger Practice Hubs

ASK ALL

B1. How did you first hear who your local Stronger Practice Hub settings were?

MULTICODE.

DS: RANDOMISE CODES 1-8.

1. Invited to launch event
2. Email
3. Word of mouth
4. Advertisement in a flyer or newsletter
5. Social media post
6. We applied to be part of a Stronger Practice Hub ourselves
7. Saw a list of settings who were part of a Stronger Practice Hub

8. Contacted directly by a Stronger Practice Hub
9. Other (please specify)
10. Don't know

ASK ALL

B2. How frequently [IF CHILDMINDER: have you; IF ELSE: has your setting] engaged with each of the following to-date?

SINGLECODE

DS: ONLY SHOW RESPONSES SELECTED AT S1

B2_1 Read/reviewed the regular newsletter from your local Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_2 Read blogs and social media news from your local Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_3 [IF S1 = 3] Attended Hub webinars or received information about specific issues in the early years sector

1. Once
2. Twice

- 3. 3-5 times
- 4. More than 5 times
- 5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_4 [IF S1 = 4] Attended one or more early years network meetings, organised by your Hub

- 1. Once
- 2. Twice
- 3. 3-5 times
- 4. More than 5 times
- 5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_5 [IF S1 = 5] Used the online Evidence Store (hosted by the Education Endowment Foundation)

- 1. Once
- 2. Twice
- 3. 3-5 times
- 4. More than 5 times
- 5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_6 [IF S1 = 6] Received information from your Hub about what early years support / funding you can access (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: Please mark as 'once' if you have received information on multiple occasions about the same specific support or funding.)

- 1. Once
- 2. Twice
- 3. 3-5 times
- 4. More than 5 times
- 5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_7 [IF S1 = 7] Attended one or more of the evidence-informed / training programmes being funded through your Hub

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_8 [IF S1 = 8] Received tailored or one-to-one support / advice from your Hub about a specific issue you needed help with (DS ADD AS DROP DOWN: Please mark as 'once' if you have received support/advice on multiple occasions about the same specific issue.)

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

B2_9 [IF S1=9, PULL THROUGH RESPONSE]

1. Once
2. Twice
3. 3-5 times
4. More than 5 times
5. Don't Know/Not applicable

ASK ENGAGED SETTINGS, AND NEWSPAPER ONLY HAVE READ IT. IF [S1DUM=1] OR [S1DUM=3 AND B3_1=1-4]

B3. Which of the following best describes the reason(s) why [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] engaged with [IF 1 CODE SELECTED AT S1: this activity?; IF >1 CODE SELECTED AT S1: these activities?]

MULTICODE.

DS: RANDOMISE ORDER OF CODES 1-9

1. It seemed like a good idea

2. To improve [IF CHILDMINDER: my; IF ELSE: our] childcare provision
3. Other childcare providers were doing it
4. There was a specific issue that [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] wanted support to address
5. To connect/network with other childcare providers
6. To get free advice
7. [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] had identified a particular gap and [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] wanted training to address it
8. The Hub encouraged [IF CHILDMINDER: me; IF ELSE: us] to engage
9. For [IF CHILDMINDER: my; IF ELSE: our staff's] professional development
13. For my own role as a mentor to others
10. Other (please specify)
11. Don't know
12. None of these

ASK ENGAGED SETTINGS, AND NEWSPAPER ONLY HAVE READ IT. IF [S1DUM=1] OR [S1DUM=3 AND B3_1=1-4]

B4. [IF 1 CODE SELECTED AT S1]:Thinking about when [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] [INSERT S1 CODE – NOTE TO DS NEEDS TO BE EXPANDED TO INCLUDE S1 and S2 “received and read the local Hub newsletter(s) / read the social media and blogs from your local Hub], to what extent do you agree or disagree that it has so far been...?

[IF >1 CODE SELECTED AT S1]: Thinking about the Stronger Practice Hubs' activities that [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] engaged with and/or newsletters, social media and blogs, to what extent do you agree or disagree that they have so far been...?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

B4_1 Relevant to [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting]

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

B4_2 Accessible to [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting]

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

B4_3 Practical / actionable

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

B4_4 High quality

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

B5. What, if anything, has prevented [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] from engaging with your local Stronger Practice hub more than you have done so far?

MULTICODE

DS: ROTATE CODES 1-7

1. Too busy/don't have the capacity
2. Concerns about accessing funding for backfill to maintain staff ratios
3. Support offered isn't relevant to our setting
4. Timings don't work for our setting
5. Geographical/logistics
6. Costs too much money / not sure it will be covered by funding
7. Means working at weekend/outside of core hours
12. Places for activity over-subscribed / all booked-up
8. Other (please specify)
9. Nothing in particular
10. Don't know
11. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

B6. Please could you tell us whether there are any types of support that [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] would have liked to have been offered but weren't available through the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

ASK ALL. DS: SHOW BOX ON SAME PAGE AS B7

B7. And are there any other ways that the Stronger Practice Hubs programme could be improved to make it more valuable and relevant to [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting?]

WRITE IN

1. Don't know

C - Assessing your setting's competencies

SHOW TO ALL (ON SEPARATE PAGE)

In this next section, we ask a range of questions about your assessment of your setting's skills and competencies. If there is more than one person working at your setting then please answer about how you perceive staff at your setting feel on the whole, rather than about your individual skills and competencies.

As a reminder, your responses are completely anonymous and [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] will not be assessed based on your answers to these questions.

ASK ALL

CONFIDENCE

C1. On a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting], you are:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C1_1 Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 0-2 year olds

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_2 Confident leading appropriate activities for typically developing 2-4 year olds

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_3 Confident leading appropriate activities for children with developmental or language delays

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_4 Confident in supporting children with their early language and communication development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_5 Confident in supporting children with their personal, social and emotional development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_6 Confident in supporting children with their early mathematics development

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_7 Confident interpreting evidence and applying evidence based approaches

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_8 Confident implementing the reformed Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C1_9 Confident in supporting children's learning and development following the COVID-19 pandemic

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK ALL

KNOWLEDGE

C2. And on a scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting], you have:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C2_1 A good understanding of how babies and children learn and develop

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

C2_2 A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early language and communication development

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

C2_3 A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's personal, social and emotional development

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree
- 4. Disagree
- 5. Strongly disagree
- 6. Don't Know
- 7. Not applicable

C2_4 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) A clear understanding of evidence-informed strategies to support children's early mathematics development

- 1. Strongly agree
- 2. Agree
- 3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK ALL

SKILLS

C3. And on the same scale, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', to what extent do you agree or disagree that [IF CHILDMINDER: you are; IF ELSE: your setting is] confident in identifying when a child...?

Please remember your responses are completely anonymous and [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] will not be assessed based on your answers to these questions.

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C3_1 Requires additional support

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C3_2 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) Would benefit from specialist support

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_3 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) Requires one-to-one support

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_4 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) Requires support with their early language and communication development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_5 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) Requires support with their personal, social and emotional development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

C3_6 (DS: ONLY SHOW IN WEB SURVEY) Requires support with their early mathematics development

1. Strongly agree

2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C3_7 Is showing signs of developmental delay

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK ALL

PRACTICE

C4. Now please tell us to what extent you agree or disagree that as [IF CHILDMINDER: a childminder; IF ELSE: an early years setting]:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C4_1 [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] lead activities that include areas of the EYFS

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ONLY ASK ENGAGED SETTINGS ([S1DUM=1], AND NEWSPAPER ONLY WHO HAVE READ IT [S1DUM=3 AND B3_1=1-4].

C4_2 [IF CHILDMINDER: I have or am planning to improve my practice based on my participation in the Stronger Practice hubs programme to date; IF ELSE: We have or are planning to change our practice based on our participation in the Stronger Practice hubs programme to date / [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] have improved our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

ASK IF HAVE NOT MADE CHANGES TO PRACTICE (C4_2=3-6)

C4a. You mentioned that you have not (yet) changed your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hub programme. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you will make future changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

SINGLECODE

[IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] will make future changes to [IF CHILDMINDER: my, IF ELSE: our] practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't know

ASK IF HAVE OR PLANNING TO MAKE CHANGES (C4_2=1-2 OR C4A=1-2)

C5. And to what extent to do you agree or disagree with the following:

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

C5_1 [DS: WORDING IN POST SURVEY]. IF C4-2=1-2:

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's language and communication skills.

IF NOT YET MADE CHANGES BUT WILL (C4A=1-2) . The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] will make to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's language and communication skills.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_2 [DS: WORDING IN POST SURVEY]. IF C4-2=1-2:

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's personal, social and emotional development.

IF C4a_1-2 (NOT YET MADE CHANGES BUT WILL).

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] will make to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's personal, social and emotional development.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree

5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_3 [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY]. IF C4-2=1-2:

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's early mathematics development.

IF C4a_1-2 (NOT YET MADE CHANGES BUT WILL).

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] will make to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will improve children's early mathematics development.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_4 [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY]. IF C4-2=1-2:

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will help reduce gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers.

IF C4a_1-2 (NOT YET MADE CHANGES BUT WILL).

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] will make to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will help reduce gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree

4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

C5_5 [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY]. IF C4-2=1-2:

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will support the development of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

IF C4a_1-2 (NOT YET MADE CHANGES BUT WILL).

The changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] will make to our practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme will support the development of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK IF HAS IMPLEMENTED CHANGES TO PRACTICE (C4_2 = 1 OR 2)

C6. You said you have or are planning to implement changes to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. What are those changes?

ASK IF HAS IMPLEMENTED CHANGES TO PRACTICE (C4_2 = 1 OR 2)

C6a. What other, if any, changes have you planned but have not yet implemented?

MULTICODE FOR EACH COLUMN, EXCEPT CODE 7 WHICH IS SINGLE CODE.

Column 1: **Changes made (C6)**

Column 2: **Changes planned (not yet made) (C6a)**

1. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting communication and language development
2. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development
3. Introduce(d) new practices around supporting mathematics development
4. Introduce(d) new practices to support with developmental or language delays
5. Other (please specify)
6. Don't know - (SINGLE CODE ONLY)
7. No further changes planned – (SINGLE CODE ONLY)

ASK IF PLAN TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES TO PRACTICE (C4A = 1 OR 2)

C6b. What are the changes you are planning to implement to your practice following participation in the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

MULTICODE

1. Introduce new practices around supporting communication and language development
2. Introduce new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development
3. Introduce new practices around supporting mathematics development
4. Introduce new practices to support with developmental or language delays
5. Other (please specify)
6. Don't know

ASK IF MENTIONED CHANGES MADE (C6 = 1-5)

C7. And how easy or difficult has it been, or will it be, to implement these changes?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C7_1 [IF C6=1]: Introduce new practices around supporting communication and language development

1. Very easy
2. Easy
3. Neither difficult nor easy

- 4. Difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't Know

C7_2 [IF C6=2]: Introduce new practices around supporting personal, social and emotional development

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Easy
- 3. Neither difficult nor easy
- 4. Difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't Know

C7_3 [IF C6=3]: Introduce new practices around supporting mathematics development

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Easy
- 3. Neither difficult nor easy
- 4. Difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't Know

C7_4 [IF C6=4]: Introduce new practices to support with developmental or language delays

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Easy
- 3. Neither difficult nor easy
- 4. Difficult
- 5. Very difficult
- 6. Don't Know

C7_5 [IF C6=5]: PULL THROUGH RESPONSE

1. Very easy
2. Easy
3. Neither difficult nor easy
4. Difficult
5. Very difficult
6. Don't Know

ASK IF CHANGES WILL BE DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT (C7_X=4/5)

C7a. Could you please briefly explain why you say that it has been or will be difficult to implement these changes? (optional)

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

ASK IF A PRACTICE LEADER (A3 = 1-4)

C8. And now thinking specifically about yourself as a practice leader, to what extent do you agree or disagree that...

SINGLECODE PER ROW

C8_1 [DS: USE THIS WORDING IN POST SURVEY ONLY] In my experience, the skills in the early years sector have improved due to the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

C8_3 [DS: INCLUDE THIS CODE IN POST SURVEY ONLY] Following advice and support from my local Stronger Practice Hub, I am better able to support my staff to improve their practice regarding children's communication and language development (follow-up only)

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

DS: INCLUDE SECTIONS D AND E IN POST SURVEY ONLY

D - Programme outcomes

CHILD OUTCOMES

ASK ALL

D1. To what extent would you say that since your setting's engagement with your local Stronger Practice Hub, the following outcomes has changed?

SINGLE CODE PER ROW

D1_1 The communication and language development of the children[IF CHILDMINDER: you childmind; IF ELSE: in your setting]?

1. Improved to a great extent
2. Improved to some extent
3. No change
4. Made them somewhat worse
5. Made them much worse
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

D1_2 The personal and social development (PSED) of the children [IF CHILDMINDER: you childmind; IF ELSE: in your setting]?

1. Improved to a great extent
2. Improved to some extent
3. No change
4. Made them somewhat worse
5. Made them much worse
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

D1_3 The early mathematics development of the children [IF CHILDMINDER: you childmind; IF ELSE: in your setting]?

1. Improved to a great extent
2. Improved to some extent
3. No change
4. Made them somewhat worse
5. Made them much worse
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

D1_4 The school readiness of the children [IF CHILDMINDER: you childmind; IF ELSE: in your setting]?

1. Improved to a great extent
2. Improved to some extent
3. No change
4. Made them somewhat worse
5. Made them much worse
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

RETENTION

ASK IF A PRACTICE LEADER (A3 = 1-4)

D2. And since your engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme began to what extent do you agree or disagree that...?

SINGLECODE PER ROW

D2_1 The programme has improved staff retention

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

D2_2 The programme has improved staff skills

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

D2_3 The programme has improved staff practice

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

6. Don't Know

ASK IF A PRACTICE LEADER (A3 = 1-4)

D3. And now thinking about the early years sector as a whole, to what extent do you agree or disagree that in your experience, the skills in the early years sector has improved since the Stronger Practice Hubs programme began?

SINGLECODE

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

E - Looking forward

ASK ALL

E1. Thinking about the impacts of your engagement with the Stronger Practice Hubs Programme, to what extent do you agree or disagree that:

SINGLECODE PER ROW

ASK IF (C4_2=1-2) (MADE CHANGES):

_1 [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] expect that the changes made to our practice will be permanent changes

ASK IF (C4A=1-2) (PLANNED TO MAKE CHANGES):

_1 [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] expect that the changes we make to our practice will be permanent changes

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree

3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK IF (C4_2=1-2) (MADE CHANGES):

_2 New staff working [IF CHILDMINDER: with me; IF ELSE: at our setting] will be trained in the practice changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] have made

ASK IF (C4A=1-2) (PLANNED TO MAKE CHANGES):

_2 New staff working [IF CHILDMINDER: with me; IF ELSE: at our setting] will be trained in the practice changes [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: we] plan to make

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK ALL:

_3 [IF CHILDMINDER: I; IF ELSE: We] will continue to engage with other local settings to ensure that best practice is shared

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know

7. Not applicable

ASK ALL:

_4 [IF CHILDMINDER: I will continue engaging in activities that I; IF ELSE: Our setting will continue engaging in activities that we] took part in as part of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. Don't Know
7. Not applicable

ASK IF DISAGREE WITH ANY AT E1 (E1_X = 4/5)

IF E1_1=4-5

E2. Can you tell us why feel the changes made to your practice will not be permanent, and what could be done to encourage them to be more permanent?

DS: PLEASE SHOW TEXT BOXES ON SAME PAGE

Why changes will not be permanent:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

What could be done to encourage this:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

IF E1_2=4-5

E2a. Can you tell us why new staff working [IF CHILDMINDER: with you; IF ELSE: at your setting] will not be trained in the practice changes you have made?

DS: PLEASE SHOW TEXT BOXES ON SAME PAGE

Why staff will not be trained?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

What could be done to encourage this:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

IF E1_3=4-5

E2b. Can you tell us why you will not continue to engage with other local settings to ensure that best practice is shared?

DS: PLEASE SHOW TEXT BOXES ON SAME PAGE

Why you will not continue to engage?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

What could be done to encourage this:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

IF E1_4=4-5

E2c. Can you tell us why [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] will not continue engaging in activities you took part in as part of the Stronger Practice Hubs programme?

DS: PLEASE SHOW TEXT BOXES ON SAME PAGE

Why you will not continue to engage?

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

What could be done to encourage this:

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know

F - Engagement with other EYER strands

ASK ALL

F1. The Stronger Practice Hubs programme is part of a wider range of initiatives within the wider Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme. Which of these other EYER programmes [IF CHILDMINDER: have you; IF ELSE: has your early years setting] been part of, if any?

MULTICODE. (FOR CATI: DO NOT READ OUT)

DS: RANDOMISE ORDER OF 1-9

1. The Experts and Mentors programme [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Delivering support and coaching for leaders, mentoring for practitioners and whole setting support for early years settings most in need
2. The EYFS online child development training [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Offers a module-based training programme to upskill staff and improve their knowledge of child development
3. The Professional Development Training Programme [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Providing early years practitioners with training on communication and language, early maths and personal, social and emotional development.
4. Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Designed for reception-age children needing additional support with their speech and language development and early literacy skills
5. National professional qualification in early years leadership (NPQEYL) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Helps early years leaders develop their skills in managing and leading high-quality early years education.
6. Home Learning Environment (part of the Family Hubs work) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funding local authorities to train practitioners to support parents in talking, playing and reading more with their children, both in and around the home, to help improve cognitive skills and future attainment

7. Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funded graduate-level specialist training leading to early years teacher status. Designed for those who wish to specialise in working with babies and young children, from birth to 5 years

8. Early Years SENCO training [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: Funded SENCO training to help identify and support children with additional needs.

9. Level 3 qualifications reviews [DS ADD AS DROP DOWN]: The review will improve the quality and rigour of the level 3 early years criteria, through public consultation and engagement with the sector and other stakeholders such as awarding organisations, and analysis of new and available data.

10. None of these

11. Don't know

G - About your setting (cont...)

ASK ALL

We are near the end of the survey. Thank you for your responses so far. We just have a few more questions about your setting to help with analysis.

G1. How long [IF CHILDMINDER: have you been working as a childminder?; IF ELSE: has your early years setting been in operation for?]

Please provide answer in number of years. An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact number of years.

WRITE IN. ALLOW 1-200

1. Don't know

2. Prefer not to say

ASK ALL

G2. [IF CHILDMINDER: Are you; IF ELSE: Is your early years setting] a standalone setting or a part of a larger organisation?

SINGLECODE

1. A standalone setting

2. Part of a larger organisation

ASK ALL

G2. [IF CHILDMINDER: Are you; IF ELSE: Is your early years setting] a standalone setting or a part of a larger organisation?

SINGLECODE

1. A standalone setting
2. Part of a larger organisation

ASK ALL

G3. What is the postcode of the main site of your setting?

ADD IF NECESSARY: We are asking this so that we can match the data to broader contextual data about the kind of area your setting is located in.

WRITE IN.

1. Don't know
2. Prefer not to say

G4. Could you please tell us roughly what proportion of the children [IF NOT CHILDMINDER - A1DUM=2: that are currently registered at your setting; IF CHILDMINDER – A1DUM=1: that you regularly childmind] have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)?

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact proportion.

1. None
2. Under 5%
3. Over 5% up to 10%
4. Over 10% up to 20%
5. Over 20% up to 30%
6. Over 30% up to 40%

7. Over 40% up to 50%
8. Over 50%
9. Don't know
10. Prefer not to say

G5. And roughly what proportion of the children [IF NOT CHILDMINDER - A1DUM=2: that are currently registered at your setting; IF CHILDMINDER – A1DUM=1: that you regularly childmind] are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium?

An estimate is fine if you're not sure of the exact proportion.

1. None
2. Under 5%
3. Over 5% up to 10%
4. Over 10% up to 20%
5. Over 20% up to 30%
6. Over 30% up to 40%
7. Over 40% up to 50%
8. Over 50%
9. Don't know
10. Prefer not to say

H - Close

ASK ALL

We are now at the end of the survey. Thank you for taking the time to share your views.

H1. Would you be willing for us to call you back if we need to clarify any of the information you have provided today?

1. Yes

2. No

3. Don't know

ASK ALL

H2. We are planning to carry out some follow up interviews to further explore your experience with the Stronger Practice Hubs programme. These interviews are scheduled to take place in Spring or early summer 2024. They will be done over the phone or by video call and will last around 45 minutes to an hour. As a thank you for your time, we would offer [IF CHILDMINDER: you; IF ELSE: your setting] a £30 payment.

Would you be happy to be recontacted about taking part closer to the time? Please note that saying yes now does not mean that you or anyone at your school are obliged to take part when contacted.

1. Yes

2. No

IF AGREE TO BE RECONTACTED (H1=1 OR H2=1)

H3. That's great. Please can you confirm the best contact details to contact you? These details will only be used to make contact about [IF H2=1: participating in follow-up interviews; IF H2=2: clarifying the information you have provided, if necessary.]

Name:

Job title:

Email address:

Phone number:

H4. Thanks again for your time today.

The information you have provided will be used only for the purposes of this evaluation. Data collected through these surveys will only be shared with the organisation appointed to evaluate the full Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme, which the Stronger Practice Hubs is a component of. The report, and data supplied, will be completely anonymised and none of your responses will be attributed to your organisation.

Just to confirm, we'll be keeping your responses to the survey for analysis purposes and if you'd like a copy of your data, to change your data, for your data to be deleted or to lodge a complaint, then please follow the process outlined on our webpage <http://www.iffresearch.com/gdpr>

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