



Department
for Education

Early Years Professional Development Programme (Phase 1)

Small-scale process evaluation

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Glossary of Terms

Abbreviation	Full Meaning
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
DfE	Department for Education
EYER	Early Years Education Recovery Programme
EYPDP	Early Years Professional Development Programme
EYPDP1	Early Years Professional Development Programme- Phase 1
EYPDP2	Early Years Professional Development Programme -Phase 2
EYPDP3	Early Years Professional Development Programme -Phase 3
PSED	Personal, Social, and Emotional Development
LA	Local Authority
MI	Management Information
EYP	Early Years Practitioners

Executive summary

In 2019, the Department for Education (DfE) funded the Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP), a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for early years practitioners. It sought to improve early years practitioners' practice in working with 2- to 4-year olds in disadvantaged early years settings to improve children's speech and language development. DfE commissioned Education Development Trust (EDT) with Elklan¹ to deliver the programme. This was the first phase of Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP1).

EYPDP1 was available to 50 local authorities who identified EYPDP1 'champions' and settings that would benefit from the programme (using the eligibility criteria set by DfE). Champions were EYPDP1 trained early years practitioners who cascaded training to 10-15 early years settings in their local area. The programme sought to train 400 Champions, 2,000 early years practitioners in approximately 1,200 settings (this delivery model was known as the 'cascade approach').

In March 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions affected the programme implementation. Training was moved from face-to-face to online delivery. Due to pandemic's impact on children's time out of early education, in 2021, the Early Years Professional Development -Phase 2 (EYPDP2) was developed and funded. The EYPDP2 was available to an additional 50 local authorities as a direct delivery model (not cascade) to support practitioners working with 2 to 4 year olds to support their speech and language, mathematics, and personal, social and emotional development (PSED). During 2022, DfE commissioned a third phase of PDP (EYPDP3), which built on EYPDP2 and was available to all local authorities. Phase 3 of the early years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP3) was a component of the Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) programme which provided early years practitioners (EYPs) with training on communication and language, early mathematics and personal, social and emotional development (PSED). The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned CooperGibson Research (CGR), an independent research agency, to conduct an evaluation of EYPDP3 and understand whether the training for early years professionals results in improvements in the quality of early years settings.

In 2019, DfE commissioned Ecorys, with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), Professor Kathy Sylva (University of Oxford) and A+ Education (now Inquisitive Minds Matter) to undertake a feasibility assessment, randomised controlled trial (RCT), and an implementation and process evaluation of EYPDP1. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions around conducting research in 2020, the evaluation was adapted to commence in 2021 with a new cohort of early years settings. However, in March 2022, the RCT was stopped following a progress review which found that the

¹ https://s4.elklan.co.uk/Blog/Specialist_training_for_early_years_practitioners

contractors had not achieved sufficient recruitment numbers required for an RCT. The EY PDP1 evaluation was repurposed to a small-scale retrospective process evaluation. The process evaluation comprised interviews with 7 local authority leads and 5 setting representatives.

Summary of findings

The evaluation sought to explore local authority leads' and early years practitioners' perceptions of the training, programme implementation (including enablers and barriers), perceptions of impact, and suggestions for improvements.

The evaluation found that some local authority leads were confident that settings most in need had received the programme, however others noted that those most in need were also those most impacted by capacity pressures and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, they thought that these settings might have been more likely to stop engagement in the programme or would struggle to fully engage.

Overall, local authority leads and practitioners expressed a strong desire for the programme citing several examples of children who had not yet reached expected levels of development in language and communication.

Local authority and setting representatives who participated in the evaluation consistently shared positive feedback about the content, structure, and quality of the training. They reported that Elklan training was well regarded.

When asked about the EYPDP1 implementation model, the views of local authority and setting representatives differed slightly.

- Setting representatives were positive about the cascade model as it helped reach more practitioners, sector-based practitioners delivered the training, and it helped with networking opportunities. They also praised the structure of the training as it afforded the opportunity to learn, implement learning, conduct observations, and reflect. The collective buy-in from local authority leads, setting leaders, and practitioners had helped facilitate implementation. Furthermore, DfE funding for the programme, including staffing backfill, was also reported as an enabler.
- Whilst local authority leads also appreciated the benefits of the EYPDP1 model, they reported some challenges with its implementation. These related to wanting greater clarity about the different stakeholder roles, and they were unsure whether using sector-based practitioners (who were not adult educators) was the best training approach. Other barriers related to staffing issues (for example, sector-wide recruitment, retention, and staffing absences); IT access issues within settings (which made engaging with the online training difficult); and a lack of

flexibility in the programme's delivery (which could have better accommodated unexpected pressures within the sector).

Local authority leads and setting representatives gave examples of whole-setting level change which they attributed to EYPDP1. This included improved practice; improvements in children's communication and language; enhanced practitioner interactions with children; and practitioners' having greater confidence and knowledge.

When asked about suggestions for improvement, evaluation participants suggested a need to enhance communication around the programme, especially before it started; for the training to be delivered in smaller sections with clearer resources; and for local authority leads and settings to have on-going access to the training materials to facilitate sustainability. Overall, the small-scale evaluation of the EYPDP1 offered valuable and positive insights into the programme's implementation and its perceived impact on practitioners and early years settings. While the findings were rich and detailed as captured in the interviews, they reflect the perspectives of a relatively limited sample of participants (5 local authority representatives and 7 early years setting leaders). For these reasons, the findings should be treated with caution and should not be considered representative of all programme participants in all local authorities.

Introduction

About the programme

In 2019, DfE funded the Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP), a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for early years practitioners. It sought to improve early years practitioners' practice in working with 2 to olds living in disadvantaged areas to improve children's speech and language development. The programme also contained a small early mathematics component. The Education Development Trust (EDT) with Elklan were commissioned as the programme's delivery partners. This was the first EYPDP (PDP1). Further information about the programme and its different phases is available on the Education Development Trust (EDT) homepage.

The delivery approach for EYPDP1 provided grant funding for 50 local authorities to convene partnerships between early years settings. Local authorities were asked to identify PDP 'Champions', early years practitioners who would receive training from Elklan, and who would cascade the training to 1-4 local partnerships (comprising approximately 10-15 early years settings). This was known as a 'cascade approach'. Champions who successfully completed the training were accredited to Level 3 Language and Literacy for 2-4s and Level 4 Creating Communication Friendly Settings. The aim was for the programme to reach 400 Champions across 50 local authorities who would cascade the training to a further 2,000 early years practitioners in approximately 1,200 settings.

In March 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of PDP1 was quickly adapted from face-to-face to online delivery. Due to the significant disruption in children's learning time within early years settings during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the EY Professional Development Programme-Phase 2 (EYPDP2) intervention was developed and commissioned to help mitigate the impacts of the pandemic, particularly in the most disadvantaged early years settings. The delivery model of EYPDP2 differed from EYPDP1 in that it was a direct delivery model over one academic year, and not a cascade approach as was applied in the EYPDP1.

During 2021, PDP2 was rolled out to additional local authorities (not the 50 that received PDP1). It aimed to support practitioners working with children aged 2 to 4 years to support their speech and language development as well as their mathematics development and personal, social and emotional development (PSED). During 2022, DfE commissioned a third phase of PDP (PDP3) which was also a direct CPD model seeking to improve children's communication and language development, early mathematics development, and PSED. PDP3 was available to all local authorities.

About the evaluation

In 2019, DfE commissioned a consortium of evaluation and early years assessment specialists to evaluate EYPDP1. The evaluation was led by Ecorys, with the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), Professor Kathy Sylva (the University of Oxford) and A+ Education (now Inquisitive Minds). Originally, the evaluation sought to conduct a feasibility assessment, a randomised controlled trial (RCT), and an implementation and process evaluation. Due to national restrictions on conducting research in March 2020 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), the evaluation was adapted to commence in 2021 with a new cohort of early years settings within the 50 local authorities involved in EYPDP1. For a range of reasons, including the impact of the pandemic on the programme and the sector, in March 2022, the RCT was stopped.

Later in 2022, the Ecorys evaluation team was asked to conduct a small-scale retrospective process evaluation of EYPDP1 with a small number of EYPDP1 participating local authorities and early years settings. This sought to explore the following research questions with local authorities and early years settings:

- How was EYPDP1 delivery implemented, was it perceived to be effective, and did it meet its original aims?
- How was the training delivered to Champions, and what was participants' experience of the training?
- How was the cascade implemented and how did it function?
- What were the facilitators and barriers/challenges to delivery, and how were they addressed?
- Were the most disadvantaged settings reached in EYPDP1, and if not, why not?
- What were the reported outcomes and impact of EYPDP1 on settings, practitioners, and children (if any)?
- What were local authorities' plans for sustaining the impact of EYPDP1?
- What are local authorities and setting representatives' suggestions for improvements to the programme?

Methodological overview

Between October and early December 2022, Ecorys researchers interviewed 7 local authority leads and 5 setting representatives. The evaluation team received a list of all local authorities that had participated in EY PDP1 and selected a larger pool of 16 local authorities for participation through purposive sampling. Sampling criteria were a geographical spread across 5 English government regions (north-east, north-west, midlands, East, South), type of authority (county, metropolitan etc.), as well as a deemed as having a reasonable engagement with the programme. Ecorys interviewers contacted local authority leads in these authorities, and participating leads recommended participants for setting representative interviews. Interviews were conducted online or over the phone and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes each.

The achieved sample included representation across the 5 regions. Of the 5 setting representatives, 2 of them were also tutor champions² and one was a nursery manager. It should be noted that this sample represented a very small number of all of those who participated in EYPDP1. Furthermore, interviewees self-selected for participation, meaning the sample might suffer from selection bias whereby interviewees might have had a more positive view of the programme. Furthermore, the evaluation team only spoke to setting representatives who had completed the full training programme and did not interview anyone who dropped out. Local authority leads had more contact with a range of programme participants which likely contributed to their broader range of views (compared to the setting representatives). Interviewees' opinions and perspectives are not representative of all of those who were involved in EY PDP1 and do not provide conclusions about the programme overall.

² Tutor Champions received an additional 2 days of face-to-face training, delivered by Programme Trainers, to enhance their Language, Literacy and Maths 2-4 qualification and be fully confident to cascade the training.

Evaluation findings

This section summarises the process evaluation findings. It outlines evaluation participants' views on delivery, perceived impact, and suggestions for improvement.

Delivery

Targeting disadvantaged settings

The programme's eligibility criteria, as set by DfE, aimed to ensure that disadvantaged settings were prioritised to receive the EY PDP1 programme. Local authority and setting representatives regularly mentioned the need for a programme that focused on developing children's speech and language. They cited examples of children who were 18 months behind in their expected language development stage, or 2 year olds who were unable to use non-verbal communication such as smiling, laughing, and pointing.

Of those interviewed, some local authority representatives felt confident that the programme had reached the intended settings, as one explained:

We definitely did reach some of the disadvantaged children, definitely speaking to the Champions and, particularly where some of the practitioners involved were managers, and particularly when they did the cascading within their own settings - in staff meetings and things like that. I know that they found a difference and they could see it. –
Local authority lead

That said, local authority representatives acknowledged that settings most in need of the programme were also most impacted by capacity pressures and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, local authority representatives thought that these settings might have been more likely to drop out of the programme due to wider pressures.

Training delivery

Local authority representatives were key in engaging early year settings, practitioners, and recruiting Champions, in collaboration with the EYPDP1 delivery partners. This was based on the eligibility criteria set by DfE which related to level of need (including Ofsted grades, deprivation indices, proportion of children receiving Early Years Pupil Premium, as well as local intelligence suggesting children would benefit from their practitioners receiving additional CPD). The data showed different selection and engagement approaches were adopted. Some local authorities asked practitioners to apply for the training and used the application to select Champions and settings who would participate. One local authority developed their own marking system where they reviewed

applications pulling out key characteristics, such as qualification level and experience with children of different ages, to select Champions and settings. Some smaller local authorities allowed everyone who expressed an interest to take part in the programme. In some cases, local authority representatives explained the delivery partner selected the Champions. In these instances, some felt that this did not work as well as the local authority representative selecting Champions because the delivery partners did not have the relationship with practitioners. Where the delivery partners selected participants, they set the eligibility criteria for Champions based on level of qualification, experience and interest in taking up the role.

Once Champions and setting representatives had been confirmed, delivery partners split Champions into Tutor and Mentor Champions. Tutor Champions received training on literacy and language development, whilst Mentor Champions received training on communication within settings. Champions received their training from the delivery partners, which was cascaded to setting representatives. Setting representatives in turn cascaded the training to practitioners in their own setting. Training and subsequent cascade training started in person but quickly moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local authority and setting representatives who participated in this evaluation consistently shared positive feedback about the content and quality of the Elklan training.

Implementation of the programme

When asked for their views on the EYPDP1 implementation model, the views of local authority and setting representatives differed slightly. Setting representatives consistently praised the cascade model as an effective way to reach as many children as possible within their area. They also praised the use of sector-based practitioners to implement the training. They explained that sector-based practitioners understood the specific needs and challenges of those they were training and were therefore best placed to offer support alongside the training.

I think the whole idea of it, of us becoming qualified and then training other people is the best way to do it because we understand the pressures that they're under and that they're facing every day, and how best to adapt it to different situations. And I liked how it was a mix of professionals. So, it wasn't just all schools or PVI settings. –
Setting representative

Another setting representative gave their view on the cascaded training:

All the ladies that, that took part in all the training were excellent, and they were all really friendly and they obviously all worked in early years because they had really good stories and examples that we could help relate to our own practice which helped. – *Setting representative*

Setting representatives were also positive about the structure of their training. They valued the opportunity to implement what they had learned, to conduct observations and then having time for reflections; they felt this model worked well and helped them to embed the training into their practice straight away. Local authority leads reported similar feedback.

I liked having the tasks and the assignments to do because it really made you think about your practice. As a direct result of the programme, we've implemented things that we probably wouldn't have done if we hadn't have done this programme. – *Setting representative*

Setting representatives also appreciated the opportunities to network and share practice that taking part in the programme afforded them.

Whilst local authority leads appreciated the benefits of the EYPDP1 model, they reported some challenges with its implementation. These challenges are outlined below.

- Some local authority representatives said they wanted greater clarity about the Champion role and what was expected of them. This would have enabled local authorities to provide better support to Champions and settings.
- Some local authority representatives explained that some participating settings were in direct competition with each other. This resulted in some settings being reluctant to cascade the training to other local settings.
- In some local authorities, due to Champion and setting attrition, it was difficult for the training to be delivered across all intended settings.
- Some local authority representatives (and some setting practitioners) were concerned about practitioners' confidence in delivering the cascade training to other settings. They argued it could be challenging for some Champions and settings where settings' practices differed from their own setting. This resulted in some local authority leads having to provide high levels of support to settings to help them to complete the programme, with a local authority representative describing the programme as a 'full time job'.

- Relatedly, some local authorities and setting representatives were concerned about early year practitioners' confidence to be adult educators, as this was new to many.

Facilitators to engagement

Overall, practitioners were eager for the opportunity to participate in the programme. Some noted that there had been a lack of investment in continuing professional development within the sector and they valued the opportunity to learn something new. As DfE funded the programme, interviewees explained that this also helped to facilitate engagement as it removed a financial barrier.

Interviewees argued that buy-in and commitment from local authority leads, setting leaders, and practitioners was crucial to ensuring the programme was implemented successfully. In particular, setting representatives highlighted the importance of their senior leaders' support to enable practitioners to participate. For example, setting leaders needed to facilitate practitioners' release from the setting, they had to apply for staffing backfill, and help find staff cover to ensure adult to child ratios were maintained.

Commitment from local authority representatives was also noted as being important for supporting and helping settings to overcome any barriers. Some local authority representatives explained that they had invested significant time and effort into supporting practitioners, both emotionally and practically, to complete the training.

Well, it was much more of my involvement than initially had been said and I wish that was planned from the beginning...I wish that we were more kept involved and trained not only just kept aside for when things weren't working - when practitioners were off with COVID or really depressed. And it was local authority people like myself, who were ringing [practitioners], asking them, checking on them. "How are you? How are you doing? You know, we can postpone the cascades. Let's get you right." So, a lot of mental health conversations and mental health first aid. – *Local authority lead*

In addition to supporting settings and practitioners emotionally, in some instances, local authority representatives said they had to dissect the training materials into smaller, more manageable pieces to aid practitioners' understanding and engagement of the materials. Whilst this was felt to be time-consuming, some felt it was essential as they had received feedback from Champions who were struggling to teach the material because they themselves did not understand it. As practitioners were often completing training in the evenings and/or during short gaps while at work, some local authority representatives felt it would be beneficial to have had the information in more manageable chunks to further aid engagement and learning from the outset.

As part of the EYPDP1 programme, staffing backfill was provided to settings to facilitate engagement in the training. Local authority and setting representatives agreed that this was a key enabler to implementation. Backfill removed financial pressures related to staffing and it helped secure setting leaders and local authority buy-in from the outset. One local authority lead explained:

It does make a difference if there's funding attached to something. –
Local authority lead

Another said:

The idea to fill to backfill was... the carrot that absolutely, you know, kind of got them to engage. – *Local authority lead*

While backfill was valued by some, it was also raised as a challenge, this is discussed below.

Barriers to implementation

Evaluation participants mentioned a small number of barriers to programme implementation, these related to staffing issues; IT challenges; and a lack of flexibility in the programme's delivery.

The recruitment and retention challenges facing the sector during the COVID-19 pandemic presented difficulties for the programme. When asked why some settings dropped out of the programme, local authority representatives frequently mentioned that Champions or practitioners had moved to a new job or now worked in a different sector altogether. Staff absences due to illness also presented additional challenges as it further limited settings' ability to make use of the backfill funding. At times, there was insufficient staff to cover practitioners' hours to enable them to be released from the setting to attend the EYPDP1 training. These staffing pressures also affected practitioners' ability to find time and energy to study.

Although the backfill costs were covered and that was great, if there aren't the people on the ground then there aren't the people on the ground to provide the cover. So that was an issue. – *Local authority lead*

Due to the onset of COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery partners adapted the programme from face-to-face to on-line training delivery. Some local authority and setting representatives felt that face-to-face training was preferable to online training.³ Online

³ Due to national COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, it was not possible to undertake face-to-face training.

delivery was further complicated as not all settings had sufficient IT facilities, such as internet access or IT equipment in a quiet space, to enable practitioners to take part. Interviewees explained that having printed booklets or resources helped to combat any IT issues as resources could be accessed and referred to anywhere.

Some interviewees reported that increased flexibility around the programme's delivery would have further facilitated engagement. Some local authority representatives explained that the timetable for attending training sessions or completing work was not flexible enough which, they felt, did not account for practitioners who needed to adapt to unexpected capacity issues or staffing absences in their setting. In some cases, practitioners dropped out of the programme as a result.

People just said if we've got a bit of flexibility, that's OK, we'll be able to do it. But if we've got no flexibility, which is what EDT were telling us, which we then, obviously, have to pass onto the settings. – *Local authority lead*

Perceived improved outcomes

Before presenting the reported outcomes of the programme, it is important to reiterate that the sample of participants for this process evaluation was small. The achieved sample also likely included local authorities and settings that were most engaged in the programme. That said, interviewees reported a number of improved outcomes for settings, practitioners, and children.

Whole-setting changes

Local authority leads reported holistic impacts of the programme at the whole-setting level. For example, they noted that new practices or strategies had been implemented and embedded; some representatives particularly praised the practical resources the programme provided. As a result of the whole-setting approach, local authority representatives argued the programme helped improve consistency of provision within settings.

Some interviewees explained that the programme had an impact on all staff, not just the early year practitioners:

It was that cascade that was more holistic with all staff. So, whether it was a staff [member] that was maybe reception based or a cook or a cleaner, they were included within the cascade. So, it meant that they would have ... little interactions, whether it was just at lunchtime having a couple of minutes of interactions with the child. – *Local authority lead*

Some local authority representatives noted that some settings had received improved Ofsted ratings since participating in the programme. While this could not be attributed directly to the programme, interviewees felt it was a contributing factor.

Improved staff confidence and knowledge

Setting representatives highlighted a considerable impact of the EYPDP1 training on staff knowledge and confidence. One interviewee described the impact of the training on practitioners:

I've noticed the staff are not asking as many questions of children, and that they're pitching the questions right. I know that a lot of them said the session about questioning was their favourite session because they didn't know those things. – *Setting representative*

Another explained:

They all enjoyed it, and it's definitely changed the way we all talk to the children, which is great. We do peer observations on the staff ... I see a lot more narrating of play, recasting of words, less questions, commenting, the waiting for 10 seconds... they've really all taken it on board. – *Setting representative*

Interviewees explained that practitioners' interactions with children, particularly around verbal interaction and questioning techniques, had improved substantially. Setting representatives also gave several examples of new practices that had been put in place following the training. For example, a setting had implemented the use of Makaton, a non-verbal form of communication, to support children who had delayed speech to communicate. In another setting, the setting layout had changed to facilitate conversations between children and adults, and between the children themselves. A further setting used techniques learned in the training to create observation booklets for all practitioners to consistently record children's communication progress.

Several setting representatives explained that the training had developed practitioners' understanding of children's frustrations around communication. In some instances, this had improved practitioners' confidence in identifying children with potential speech and language difficulties.

Others felt that the peer observations, which were a feature of the programme, were an impactful way to improve practice by enabling practitioners to learn from each other within their own setting.

Improved outcomes for children

Setting representatives consistently highlighted that the improved whole-setting level changes and practitioners' improved confidence and knowledge led to improvements in children's vocabulary, speech, and ability to communicate.

Now our development has really increased children's language because we're all doing the same approach and [the children's] understanding in the comprehension of language is a lot better. – *Setting representative*

Setting representatives reported particular speech and language improvements for children with significant disadvantage or those with English as an Additional Language (EAL). One setting representative explained that 75% of their children had some sort of speech and language delay but that children's language and communication had improved considerably since the programme started.

In addition, setting representatives cited further positive changes whereby professionals from outside of the setting had noted improvements in children's speech and language. For example, a local feeder primary school acknowledged the higher level of children's language development compared to other local settings that had not received the programme. In another example, a speech and language therapist had noted the improvements within a setting:

When I talk about the programme, [the speech and language therapist] is really enthusiastic as well, and they've commented saying they can see that the programme has really helped us and helped the children as well. – *Setting representative*

Lessons learnt and sustainability

During the interviews, the evaluation team explored lessons learnt and suggestions for improvements to the programme. Participants' suggestions are outlined below.

- **Interviewees felt that communication about when the programme would start could have been clearer.** Local authority representatives explained that this made it difficult to recruit settings and potentially resulted in some attrition when start dates were further delayed. The programme commenced in December 2019 with a one-day training for Champions. More intensive training started in January 2020 and was interrupted during March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated national restrictions. This may have been the reason for some delays as the delivery partners moved the training content online at pace.

- As noted above, some local authority representatives felt that **the content of the training needed to be further broken down to facilitate practitioners to cascade the training**, particularly as they were not trained adult educators. Simplifying the materials helped practitioners spend less time on and feel less daunted by them. This was particularly important where practitioners were already short of time or struggling to complete training after working hours.

I thought [the content] was fine. I think what it needed to do was chunk down a little bit simpler. I think initially it took time to understand what all of those module elements were about and how that would all be fitted in. It was quite overwhelming even for me at times just to dissect what we really needed to do. – *LA lead*

- Having two delivery partners led to some confusion for local authorities and settings about who to contact for advice and support.
- Local authority representatives also felt that they would have benefitted from being more informed about the training content, including having access to resources from the beginning. This would have enabled local authorities to better answer settings' questions, troubleshoot issues, and be a facilitator between training providers and participants. Linked to this, some local authority representatives felt that there was a lack of clarity around the expected role of the local authority. Some initially thought their role would be administrative but, in reality, they said they needed to provide direct support to practitioners.

We weren't given the manual or the guide or whatever, that the settings were using, so then it was unclear what our role was. So, for example, it became clear that we needed to chase settings up when they haven't completed parts of it, and then they would come back to us with questions about, you know, the content, and we didn't know what the content was. – *Local authority lead*

- Interviewees explained that they would have benefitted from being able to access resources beyond the end of the training programme. Interviewees said these had been removed from the website which made it difficult to continue embedding training within settings or to train new staff. There was also the potential to lose good practice and learning from trained staff if they moved jobs. The delivery partner also highlighted this issue citing intellectual property right as the barrier.

To try to sustain the programme's learning, some settings had attempted to develop their own resources to share with new staff. Whilst this worked well, it was time-consuming and not always possible. Interviewees argued that participants would have benefitted from further consideration about how the training and resources could be sustained beyond the end of the programme.

Conclusions

To conclude, this small process evaluation of EYPDP1 demonstrates the value the programme had in some local authorities and early years settings. This included: improvements to settings' learning environments, enhanced practitioner knowledge and confidence, and examples of improved speech and language development for some children. The process evaluation sample was small (7 local authorities and 5 settings) and may have included those that had been most engaged and positive about the programme but nevertheless, positive examples of change were cited.

Suggestions for how the programme's delivery could have been improved related to improved and timely communication about the programme; access to training and resources during and beyond the programme to maximise reach, impact, and sustainability; and increased flexibility in delivery to accommodate the challenges the sector was under during 2020/2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Subsequent evaluations of the other phases of Professional Development Programme (PDP2 and PDP3) should offer further insight into the value of the programme overall.



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