

Early Years Professional Exchanges

Final Report 2017/18

Background

The focus of the Early Years project was to support Early Years' tutors, trainers and assessors, impacting on the quality of the delivery of Early Years' courses leading to level 2 and level 3 qualifications by supporting a collaborative network approach.

Early Years tutors, trainers and assessors in the post-16 sector were brought together in three separate projects across the country to share knowledge, experiences and expertise and together develop their practice.

Three partners were identified to coordinate the exchanges:

- North East: Claire Collins Consultancy
- Midlands: emfec
- South: Creative Education

The projects were based on the research into the Early Years workforce undertaken by Research Base on behalf of the Foundation in the autumn of 2017.

Project process: engaging providers

The projects engaged over 30 organisations with around 80 direct participants, including:

- Access Training (East Midlands) Limited
- Brockenhurst College
- CACHE (AO)
- City College Norwich
- Cumbria Children's Services
- Cumbria Training Centre
- Darlington Borough Council
- Gateshead College
- Hawk Training
- Lakes College
- Loughborough College
- New College Durham
- New College Stamford
- Nottingham College
- Prevista Training
- ProTraining Solutions
- Redcar and Cleveland College
- Shape Training
- Walsall Adult and Community College
- West Nottinghamshire College

Project process: approach

All three delivery partners chose slightly different approaches to address local need. Two delivery partners (Claire Collins Consultancy and emfec) focused mainly on face-to-face meetings with several groups coming together discussing and exploring for example:

- The Early Years Workforce Strategy.
- Challenges in the recruitment, training and retention of EY practitioners in the FE sector. Participants identified and shared effective practice and ideas and discussed training needs.
- Knowledge and strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, participants felt they can now make informed decisions about methods that can be utilised in their own practice.
- Progress with T-Level pilots (CACHE presentation).
- Embedding maths and English.
- How the ETF Professional Standards relate to practice.
- Setting up peer-to-peer visits to other work places (ITPs and Colleges).

Creative Education chose to ask participants to self-identify areas of improvement and mainly arranged webinars to share practice as well as Teach Meets and provided the opportunity to undertake site visits and participate in an online hub.

The organisations involved in the Creative Education project have been developing their knowledge of apprenticeship approaches with a particular focus on using webinars to deliver training to groups of EYS practitioners in the workplace.

There was a strong commitment between the participants from some of the organisations to explore the use of webinars to deliver training and the outcome of one of the session was an agreement for practitioners from Prevista to visit Brockenhurst College to start closer collaboration.

Project process: focus on CPD

The Early Years professional exchange approach provided an opportunity for practitioners to come together and share ideas and also engage in CPD activities. The delivery partners either directly provided and supported CPD sessions or sign-posted to ETF training on the following topics:

- English & maths contextualised for Early Years.
- Apprenticeships – end point assessment and 20% off the job training.
- Resilience Training CPD. City College Norwich have run a training pilot for resilience (20 in a group, ran 6 sessions throughout the day, with more to take place).
- Development and application of Professional Standards.
- Supporting learners with mental health and/or learning difficulties.
- Keeping learners motivated and engaged and using digital technologies to support learning.
- Managing/tracking learning whilst on work placement.
- Professional tutor return to practice to update knowledge and skills (visiting workplace as CPD).
- Effective practice around developing the resilience of EY practitioners, assessors and tutors (much of this was in relation to the demands made on practitioners in relation to the levels of the learners and mental health issues many of them present with).

- Sharing of knowledge about progression qualifications e.g. between level 2 and 3 and preparing students for level 2 – addressing gaps in student readiness to undertake the next level.
- Sharing effective practice about advice and guidance to counter unrealistic parental, school and student expectations.
- EY apprenticeships and in particular improving engagement with learners whilst off site.
- Early years tutor peer review – tutors going into each other’s classes.

A comment from a member of staff from Redcar and Cleveland College:

“This has helped the team work together, improved resources and delivery techniques. We asked the learners to consider what resources they use in practice and how these help, i.e. visual timetables, social stories etc. This was a useful exercise as some students had more experience in special needs than others therefore supported sharing best practice. I could use this idea in my practice”.

Further training needs identified

The participants in all three projects identified training needs for their settings and the sector as a whole:

- English & maths that is contextualised for Early Years tutors.
- Working with employers and promoting the benefits of staff training. Helping companies to understand the requirements for learners to participate in off the job training.
- Keeping up to date with qualifications e.g. T-Levels including impact on organisational management e.g. student work experience policy.
- Keeping up to date with all relevant policy and research linked to the sector, e.g. Workforce strategy.
- How to support children with special educational needs.
- Continue to focus on the topic of resilience. To start with an initial study to identify some of the perceived causes of lack of resilience in early years students.
- Training and updating on recent research – an example would be Neuroscience to support the 401-development unit within EYE qualification.
- Tutor return to practice with employers to ensure that their workplace knowledge is up to date and relevant.
- Language and literacy developments - Gateshead College have students working with 7 Stories in Newcastle on their “Hooks into Books” project which is about engaging children in reading for pleasure. Students attend for 2 days developing their skills and to date this has been successful. The College now have a story chair in the nursery.
- CPD for employers to support 20% off the job training for apprenticeship delivery.
- More developmental opportunities for Work Based Learning tutors – not all of whom have teaching backgrounds, but have the subject specialism.
- To unpack how it more effectively engage with employers so that they can ensure that learners get the most out of their time with employers.
- Need funding for subsidised support for visits to other colleges – all learned a great deal from the visits to Walsall and Nottingham Colleges.

- College teachers want to spend time back in the practice setting to experience changes, come back reflect and cascade within the team.
- A national online database to contain EY subject specialist content, created and quality assured by experienced tutors. A section of this national database to be devoted to policy and mandatory training updates via PowerPoint slides that can be delivered in-house or online, in particular for team leaders and IQAs to cascade to practitioners during standardisation meetings on topics such as SEND, EYFS, legislative changes, a wider variety of training to be provided – in-house or online, for example; delivery/visits to colleges and PowerPoints could be shared on new EY practices, theory and implications, research findings, etc.

Issues and challenges

The project set challenging KPIs that were difficult to achieve due to a number of factors:

- Most organisations engaged with through this project have very few Early Years Practitioners and some of their curriculum is delivered by none subject specialists for example Health and Social Care and Psychology tutors, engaging the original target of 50 practitioners per project was a difficult challenge.
- A key issue for the project has been getting staff released to attend meetings. People are more than willing to participate; however, resources are so tight within the sector, teaching commitments must come first. Nevertheless, despite not being able to attend meetings, representatives from training providers have cascaded the information from meetings to other staff and have involved them in project activities.
- Professionalism of the sector – there was consensus that the sector was undervalued and lacked status. The suggestion of establishing a professional body for the sector may address some of the issues. This could also impact positively on recruitment and retention in the sector, a major issue identified within the workforce strategy of 2017.
- Tutors would like a single point of contact. Sector Skills Councils have this facility usually via a webpage e.g. Health and Social Care where tutors and others can access latest policy and other updates relevant to the sector easily. Members are joining the Early Education National Group which was recommended by Lakes College, this may assist with the single point of contact issue.
- Ensuring that qualifications, whilst robust are fit for purpose i.e. learners are employable following completion of the programme. Tutors sometimes felt that they were asking students to undertake activity that was no longer relevant to the workplace.
- One issue that was raised several times, was how in the past providers worked with Local Authorities and participated in the training they delivered to their contracted children's nurseries. This was felt to be very beneficial but no longer happens owing to some changes that were made nationally.

Each delivery partner persisted in achieving the targets and reported comprehensively their efforts to succeed. Despite direct target numbers lower than originally expected, the project outcomes have been achieved in so far as the scope of CPD for the Early Years sector going forward has been identified and in the short term this can be addressed in part using the existing professional exchanges.

Effective practice and success

Delivery partners reported engaged and interested participants, all wanting to continue their collaboration beyond the originally funded project period, a further meeting is planned in late May 2018. Some examples of success reported back to the Foundation include:

- Providers are now aware of the Workforce Strategy and are using it and the Research Base Report to inform their actions. A quote from Lakes College in Cumbria that supports the above statement:

“Reviewed Early Years workforce strategy and Research Base Report and agreed actions to take forward. Developed key clear actions to address CPD needs of staff to ensure they’re up to date”

- A Padlet has been produced housing all resources shared between participants as well as those shared by the national project manager as an online resource for the professional exchange network, e.g. Gateshead producing an EYE lesson and presenting it. Also, a Level 2 programme for students who are not ready for a level 2 has been shared, this programme has resulted in 95% attendance and 100% retention.
- Networking of providers: Gateshead College and Shape WBL provider are working together, sharing their Neuroscience knowledge and resources.
- The PEN group is becoming a consultative group for CACHE going forward.
- New College shared some of their models for “20%off the job” training with Cumbria Training, to help inform the evidence required for senior managers to make the case for changes in their practice.
- Lakes College have introduced a strategy for working with a range of settings and age groups including schools. Staff have become School Governors.
- Vision West Notts College practices are being considered and shared; e.g., their initial 42 day Baby-sitting qualification enables transfer into main programmes for those students who show they have the skills to undertake higher study and re-direction for others.
- Benefits from sharing resources from Vision West Notts; e.g., interview guidance booklet, practice of welcoming new students with letters from ex-students advising them what to expect and what can be achieved, sharing information about how to access remaining Erasmus funding to finance best practice visit to Finland for staff and students.

There was a consensus that all participants felt that tutors would benefit from “tutor return to practice” and this included work place assessors. Consequently, we have seen a programme of activity take place despite it at times being challenging to organise.

Peer observations have revealed the extent to which tutors are duplicating resources. However, with a more collaborative approach, in future these will be shared, saving tutor time and resource. This approach has also developed classroom management skills through observing new techniques.

Participant feedback

Dawn Morland – Shape Training

“The impact for me has been cascading the information back to staff to enhance learner training sessions with different techniques, which learners have responded well to in session.

The sessions I have attended have been useful to network with other practitioners and share strategies and knowledge around delivery. It has been useful to bring this back to the team so they are aware of how other providers are working and it has enabled us to look at our delivery for the future and what CPD is required to support the students going forward”.

Eliza Treme–Swales – Lakes College

“It has given us a clear focus and a platform through an action plan to review our CPD within the Early Years team. It has helped the team plan creatively CPD to help ensure that we are able to meet the needs of our learners and employers.

It was a good opportunity to get the teaching and assessing team together.

“Our learners will be taught by tutors and assessors who have current and up to date vocational knowledge and practices which are aligned to the sector. Learners will also benefit through tighter links with employers and will then have better access to work placements of a high quality”

“It was a really useful exercise and I believe that the more professional exchanges which can be introduced the better. This will ultimately improve the FE sector and learners’ experiences and outcomes.”