Evaluation of the Community Childcare and Early Learning Hubs

Case studies and survey analysis

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Case Study: Sheringham Hub, June 2014

The Hub is based within Sheringham Children's Centre in Newham and membership includes Sheringham primary school, a nursery and a network of over 20 childminders. The Hub builds on a pre-existing network of childminders, who had come together to share ideas about practice and build a support network. The establishment of the Hub has brought a new energy to the network and a clear focus on driving up quality, improving parental awareness of childcare options in the area, and creating new opportunities for blended childcare.

> *"We want the Hub to give more of a sense of options to parents – if they want to engage in training or employment, the system here will support them doing that."*
> (Hub Lead)

Success and impact

Through the work of the Hub, parents can now access more flexible childcare through the creation of blended childcare options, greater awareness of childminding and what it can offer, and the development of an after school club for primary school pupils.

> *"It is working. Parents are seeing that they can have a piece of this and a piece of that, and it all joins together." (Hub Lead)*

The Hub has provided training to its members, including courses from the charity ICAN and an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) course. The training has helped childminders in their day-to-day work by increasing their confidence in offering childcare advice to parents, inspiring them to build new activities into their practice and increasing their awareness of broader issues rating to children such as sexual health. Crucially, much of the training has been offered for free in the Children's Centre and a crèche was provided to enable childminders to access it.

> *"It's great to be part of a group where we actually have similar thoughts – it's great to share ideas and work together."* (Local provider)

In addition to training, the Hub is seeking to drive up quality through a newly developed '*green, amber, red'* system to encourage childminders to continually assess and improve their standards.

The Hub aims to be a 'one stop shop' for childcare information and to this end it has developed a new website and revamped the reception area at the Children's Centre. This provides both a virtual and physical central information point about childcare in the area.

> *"The Hub has really made us focus on publicity and parent outreach and engagement"* (Hub Lead)

Finally, the Hub has supported a number of events to widen its reach. This includes a "transition event" aimed at early years providers to begin developing a framework for improving transitions and a conference on health issues aimed at children's centres and health visitors.

Challenges

Whilst providers feel that the quality of childcare has been improved as a result of the Hub, there are persistent issues with a lack of work available for childminders, as parents in the area have traditionally opted to use extended family or nurseries instead. The Hub is exploring how to widen parents' awareness of childminders and what they can offer in a bid to increase the number of families opting for this kind of childcare.

Learning

Sheringham's experience to date has generated a number of learning points:

1. **A dedicated point of contact for the childminding network has been crucial** – to provide individual support to childminders to improve their practice and Ofsted ratings and to circulate information about upcoming vacancies.

2. **Think carefully about logistics when offering training to childminders** – consider hosting this in the local Childrens' Centre where crèche facilities are available, and if possible, look for training that is free of cost to encourage attendance.

3. **Think holistically about childcare in an area** – so that any changes in one provider or group of providers do not impact negatively on others.

4. **Create more demand for childcare through targeted marketing and publicity activities** – whilst improving quality is an important focus of the hub, it has also been important to create more demand for childminding which has not traditionally been a popular option for parents.

The future

Over the next year, the Hub is aiming to expand the childminding network, increase the number of funded 2 year places and focus on developing provision for 'at risk' children. Specifically, it has plans to develop information for parents whose children have special needs, make childcare information available in different languages, and initiate a Childcare Champion Programme, with a parent volunteer already trained to inform Newham parents about blended childcare options.

Case Study: DragonFishers Hub, June 2014

The DragonFishers Hub is a partnership of four childcare providers in York city. The Hub comprises three early years settings: at St Georges RC Primary School, Fishergate Primary School and Ducklings Nursery, along with FunFishers - a breakfast, day and afterschool provider attached to Fishergate Primary School. Based just short walking distance from one another, St Georges RC Primary School, Fishergate Primary School and Funfishers have a long history of working together, including an established offer of blended childcare. They joined the Childcare Hubs project with the aim of improving the availability and quality of childcare locally. As well as strengthening their existing relationships, they also hoped to connect to other providers, with Ducklings Nursery being a recent welcome addition to the Hub.

Success and Impact

The Hub has a strong track record of delivering positive impacts for parents/carers and children through its **blended childcare** offer. This allows parents of children attending either St Georges RC Primary or Fishergate Primary to drop off and/or collect their child at Funfishers. The children are transferred between the settings by Funfishers staff throughout the day.

For some parents, the flexible childcare arrangement has enabled them to resume full-time working hours. The close relationship between the providers is important to parents; knowing that their child is familiar with the settings, their staff, and the other children gives them the peace of mind to leave them in their joint care throughout the day:

"It has made a big difference to us. Previously my wife only worked part-time and having the facility here has allowed us to both continue in full-time jobs" (Parent)

A key success of the Hub is the **sense of community fostered between the different settings** through regular joint events such as sports days and carol singing. The children are also encouraged to share their experiences across the settings through a 'Talking Tom' teddy bear diary that is passed between them. When the children read Tom's diary they find out where he has been and what he's done at the other settings.

Sharing best practice and **driving quality improvement** are important aspects of the Hub. The providers use Hub meetings as an opportunity to share learning from Ofsted inspections and to keep each other up to speed on policy and practice in new areas, such as expanding under 2s provision. As a result of the Hub, the providers are also coming together more frequently to undertake **cross-moderation of children's learning journeys**. Furthermore, where individual children are transitioning between settings, the providers highlight any areas where they might need additional support and jointly discuss the best ways to meet their needs.

While the providers have been working together for some time, becoming a Hub has formalised this partnership and enabled them to focus on **collective objectives**, such as

engaging with a wider range of parents/ carers. For the first time they will promote themselves under the single brand 'DragonFishers'- a name chosen to incorporate the identity of the three original settings. The Hub will be publicised to parents/carers through the website, banners, leaflets and social media.

Challenges

Expanding the Hub's reach to other providers, such as local childminders, has proved to be challenging. Childminders' irregular working hours can contribute to their lack of engagement, as they are less able to commit to attend Hub meetings. The providers are persevering and continue to reach out to the childminders that come into contact with each setting. They are being flexible in their approach by allowing childminders to affiliate with the Hub without attending all Hub meetings.

Learning

A number of learning points are apparent from the DragonFishers Hub's experiences:

1. **Begin by building on what you already have:** at DragonFishers, the original providers began with an existing partnership and are using this as a foundation to show others what they have achieved to date. This will hopefully encourage other local providers to engage with the Hub in the future.

2. **Invest in maintaining relationships between the key individuals:** The providers benefit from strong relationships and maintain these through frequent contact beyond Hub meetings by phone, email and in person:

3. **Put the structures and processes in place to ensure the Hub's sustainability:** Formalising the identity of the DragonFishers Hub through the regular Hub meetings and the pending website means that the relationships between the settings will be sustained even if key individuals move on from their positions.

4. **Value the input of all partners equally:** A key example at DragonFishers is the regular cross-moderation undertaken where the professional judgement of all parties (whether from a nursery, school, or afterschool setting) is highly valued.

The future

Over the coming months the providers hope to launch their newly designed DragonFishers website, providing a 'one stop shop' for parents/ carers looking for high quality local flexible childcare. This will coincide with the beginning of the new school year, and with it a new cohort of parents and carers seeking flexible childcare to wrap around the school day. Alongside this, they will continue to meet regularly to share learning and good practice, and try to grow the partnership to include a wider range of local providers.

Case study: Wooler Hub, June 2014

Wooler is located in rural Northumberland. The Hub's catchment area encompasses a 10 mile radius of Wooler and members include primary schools, a children's centre, a playgroup and two childminders. Prior to the set-up of the Hub, many of the existing providers were part of the Local Authority's Early Years Network. The Hub was established to strengthen and rejuvenate this partnership, and to open up the network to other early years providers across the area. The Hub is coordinated and administered by an Early Years Consultant employed by the County Council.

Success and Impact

One of the first activities of the Hub was a joint training session on 'Fostering Positive Behaviour' leading to the development of a joint policy on 'Promoting Positive Behaviour'. This had two key benefits: firstly, it enabled the different providers to become more familiar with each other through joint training, and secondly, providers now use a common policy for tackling behavioural issues. This **joined-up approach has given the policy more validity** and provided parents with the confidence that issues will be dealt with consistently across all settings.

Through visits to each other's settings, hub members get new ideas to use within their own settings. This has helped **create an element of healthy competition, which helps raise standards and quality**. At the same time, providers report that their dealings with other settings are now *'much more cohesive'* and that this has **created a more *'supportive and equal Early Years environment'*** and a community which is willing to offer mutual support and advice. They have noticed a real difference in the sharing of knowledge and practice, which leads to improvements in their own practice.

"I feel more confident about calling Susan[1] *if I have an issue or want to discuss something, now we have open doors to each other's settings, which is great" (Local provider)*

The collaborative Hub approach has encouraged providers to think more about parents/ carers' needs within the local area and how they might be able to meet them as a partnership. In the past, the sparsity of the local area meant that providers were sometimes *'fighting for children'*, which encouraged a more inward focussed approach. Through the Hub, **providers are now looking at gaps in the market and thinking of ways to fill them**.

> *"The Hub is encouraging us to think about how we can better support parents/carers as opposed to just developing our own interests" (Local provider)*

Finally, the development of the Hub is leading to an increased awareness, knowledge and understanding amongst parents of local childcare options through regular newsletters and a

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[1] Name changed to protect identity

(future) website. This will **enable parents to make more informed choices** about how local childcare can meet their needs and, if blended childcare is needed, having better knowledge of the providers should increase the likelihood of them using this approach, which at the moment is very limited in its use. Linked to this, being a member of the Hub also provides the settings with an additional marketing opportunity.

Challenges

The rural location is by far the main challenge for the Hub. It can be difficult to organise meetings at times and locations to suit all Hub members. Providers work different hours and the rurality of the area means that travel can be extensive. This is an ongoing challenge for the Hub and they are currently looking at flexible arrangements for addressing it, such as having the different settings hosting in order to vary the meeting places, and alternating day and evening meeting times.

Learning

The experience of the Wooler Hub so far has revealed a number of key learning points:

1. **Diplomacy is important:** each provider needs to feel that they are equal to the others. It's an important balance to strike and different settings will have their own ways of achieving this. Wooler has benefited from having an EY consultant as the coordinator for the Hub who is independent and has experience of working with all the different providers.

2. **Build on what you already have:** make the most of existing relationships and build on them, even if this means you're starting small.

3. **Allow flexibility:** don't feel like you have to follow a certain Hub model, go with what works best within your locality. Where possible, also develop your own resources, this helps to develop ownership and partnership working at the same time.

4. **Start on a quick win that is driven by all involved:** Wooler began with the development of a behavioural policy. All hub members saw the benefit of this and were keen to engage with it. Having this 'quick win' at the start meant that the providers were able to recognise the benefit of being involved and collaborating in the Hub early on.

The future

The development and activities of the Hub to date have *'laid foundations for more collaboration'.* Hub members want to continue to work together and are seeking ways to achieve this, for example through their shared passion for outdoor learning. In addition, they hope, in future, to act as a collective voice for rural issues – for example to provide feedback on how new policies introduced by the Government will impact rural areas.

Case study: Haslemere Community Childcare Hub, November 2015

Introduction

Haslemere Community Childcare Hub is led by Haslemere Primary School with partners including Church Road Children's Centre, Haslemere Pre-School and a network of independent childcare providers. The primary school took over leadership of the hub from the LEA and a steering group one year into the project, since then they have carried out a needs assessment and targeted support in key areas. The hub is targeted at lower income families, with an aim of improving communications and language skills in readiness for joining the formal school system. The primary school, children's centre and pre-school are all located on the same site, enabling them to share resources, and act as a clear focal point for parents and providers. Through use of the Haslemere Primary School website, the hub provides information and signposting to other resources provided by the LEA.

Success and Impact

The most significant success has been the improved quality of core **'readiness for school' skills** in the children. Initial assessments by the hub partners set the focus for the hub on these skills. A **consistent approach across all providers** was supported with provider training and sharing of the children's centre's resources where individual providers did not have the capacity to focus on these skills. Pupils now entering primary school are reaching average levels of communication, language and social skills, as measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles. Previously, pupils were entering primary school significantly below average.

"*Overall I believe the pre-school to be the main factor why my daughter is so confident and has got off to a great start at the bigger Nursery at Haslemere*" *– Parent from Haslemere Hub*

Building on the development of 'readiness for school' skills, the sharing of information between each Hub partner has ensured this development can continue. Enabling **a continuous record of each child's development** has enabled learning to remain targeting at each child's needs. Developing a clear transition of development records ensures those children staying within the Haslemere system remain on track and continue to develop.

The hub has succeeded in creating a **single point of contact for parents**. The on-going work at the children's centre to aggregate provider availability and share this with parents, has enabled parents to have a one stop shop for finding childcare. Provision of additional resources to independent providers, for example speech and language training which they main not be able to offer, ensures that child and parents needs are catered for fully within the hub. The on-going success in this area is positioning the hub as a central point for direction of childcare and learning in the area.

The successes above would not have been possible to without the training and support offered to providers. On the foundation of the initial assessments, the hub made core training available to providers to ensure consistent and high quality childcare, irrespective of their size or resources. A key success factor was the ability to offer zero or low cost training by linking with existing training taking place across the hub.

Challenges

Maintaining on-going interaction with independent providers has been a key challenge. Where a provider is working at full capacity, and does not perceive the need for further development, they see little benefit in on-going interaction with the hub.

Extending the provision of funded under 2-year-old places is still a challenge within the hub. Self-evaluation surveys completed by the providers show that they prefer to take on children looking for full-day care. Many parents looking for funded places only require half-day care which requires more resources for providers to deliver.

Learning

1. **Lead the hub from within the delivery partners** – the hub has improved in both direction and delivery since leadership was handed over from the LEA to the Head Teacher at the primary school. The change created a single point of contact for leadership, increasing efficiency and ensuring responsibility for actions was not distributed across multiple organisations. 4Children provided the hub lead with support to develop their vision and maintain direction while allowing to hub lead to focus on the practicalities of delivery.

2. **Build an action plan based on partner needs to drive activity** – assessing the needs of your partners and involving them in development of an action plan ensures they buy-in to the approach and receive the support they need.

3. **Don't duplicate work** – take advantage of resources that are already available and find ways to complement them.

4. **Make contact early with providers and keep communicating** – to foster the feel of a hub, providers need to be involved early and continually updated. Keeping them informed of activities and the opportunities available to them ensure they are motivated to stay involved.

The future

Church Road Children's Centre is to be merged with two other children's centres in the borough. While this will present challenges during the transition, it presents an opportunity for the hub to achieve a wider reach and increased influence. The single management structure will also be able to oversee consistency and quality across the borough.

To strengthen the existing successes in 'readiness for school' skills, the hub is exploring the setup of a child hand over process. This process will further smooth the transition between providers, ensuring development needs are maintained.

To increase availability and uptake of childcare in the area, the hub is looking to grow the number of independent providers in the network and give parents better access to availability information, for example through use of smartphones. This will also involve wider communications to raise awareness of the services offered by the hub.

Case study: Homerton Hub, January 2015

Introduction

The hub is led and hosted by Homerton Early Years Centre. The hub membership currently includes 12 local providers from, private, voluntary and independent settings, local authority nurseries and childminders. The hub has focused on building partnerships between local providers through sharing learning across a number of key practice areas e.g. speech and language development.

Success and impact

Prior to the hub, providers noted that there were few formal opportunities for sharing learning with other practitioners locally. The introduction of hub meetings has given providers a space **to reflect on their own practice**, something which had been missing in their busy working days.

Sharing resources and materials within hub meetings is an effective way for practitioners to exchange ideas around what has worked well in their own practice. For example, in one meeting providers focused on tools for encouraging parent partnerships. Ideas included successful events for parents and children, ways to

A display at a hub meeting used to share ideas around successful events to engage children and their parents/carers.

support children's learning at home and ideas for parent's to enjoy sharing books with their children. This is an effective way of **raising quality across providers** and saves time spent 'reinventing the wheel' when testing out ideas.

Hub meetings also provide a safe place for providers to **seek advice around their current concerns and challenges**. Discussions have included how to have difficult conversations with parents around their child's behaviour. From the relationships they have developed, some providers have arranged visits to one another's setting and hope that more visits will take place in the near future.

The providers maximise their time at hub meetings by setting a topic in advance and undertaking preparation work between meetings so that they come prepared for the discussion. For example they each took away an assessment tool, tested it in their own setting, and shared their feedback in the next meeting.

Challenges

The hub has found it challenging to find a suitable time for hub meetings that is convenient for all types of providers. They initially tried to address the issue by holding each hub meeting at two different times. However, this approach was dropped because it prevented collaboration across the two groups. The hub now meets as one group which offers the opportunity for sharing quality practice across all the hub settings.

Another challenge is keeping up the hub membership numbers as it relies on practitioner good will and commitment. The hub lead has been very impressed with how practitioners do give up their own time to work together although this is a big commitment from practitioners at the end of a working day. An important part of the work of the hub lead is to support the current members to work collaboratively so that all experience the benefits of membership, and to encourage new membership.

The area is facing an increasing demand for 2 year old places, both funded and private. Homerton has made multiple efforts to increase places. As well as setting up their own two year old provision, they have worked with the local authority to visit local community halls that could potentially be used for provision. They have worked directly with settings and schools encouraging and supporting them to take on more funded twos.

Learning

1. **When recruiting hub members begin with a core group of local providers:** gaining the commitment of a core group of providers gives you a strong base from which to build on. Hub meetings are more useful when attended consistently by providers that are fully engaged in the topic.

2. **Maintain engagement and communication between hub meetings:** email is a useful way for providers to stay in touch, share updates and resources, and maintain the engagement of those who couldn't attend a meeting. Setting activities to take away after hub meetings and to prepare for the next meeting will add value to meetings.

3. **Give providers ownership of the hub from the beginning:** Hub members determine the content and contribute to the meetings which ensures the meetings are relevant and beneficial to their practice.

4. **The role of the Hub Lead is key:** Having a hub lead with designated time to undertake the work, ensure that activities are coordinated, and keep up momentum is vital.

The future

Hub members are looking forward to developing their hub and encouraging a wider range of providers to participate. They are also exploring the possibility of rotating the hub meetings across the different providers. This should help secure the sustainability of the hub by

releasing some pressure from the current lead, and give providers an opportunity to visit one another's settings. It is also hoped that this will boost engagement with the Hub by giving members greater responsibility and roles in securing the hub's future.

Homerton hub are also keen to explore opportunities to form networks more widely by visiting other networks undertaking similar activities and working with similar types of providers to share their learning and experiences.

Case Study: Strensall Hub, January 2015

Introduction

The Strensall Childcare hub, North Yorkshire, is the led by Robert Wilkinson Primary School. Within the hub are three nursery schools, a pre-school, the primary school and a network of child-minders. The school and nurseries have a history of early years partnerships, so are accustomed to sharing learning and networking. Previous networks have not, however, focused on blended childcare or funded 2 year old places. There is little demand for funded 2 year old places in the hub community, so the hub has focused on improving quality of provision. The hub activities have included half-termly meetings, external training events, partner relationship building, and improving parent access to childcare information. Hub meetings rotated across partner sites to ensure a shared sense of ownership.

Success and Impact

The local context offers significant benefits for the hub. The location in a small, affluent, village means that there are strong existing parent groups and networks. **Parents and providers are accustomed to working and sharing within networks** and have offered to support the running of activities and events. Support from York City Council's own Early Years partnership team has resulted in best practice and strategies being shared between similar local hubs and networks. The hub has **benefitted from networking with other hubs and expertise provided by the Council,** including an NHS representative and the Family Information Service, resulting in the development of a website and alignment with the local strategy.

"The local authority has tried to encourage shared partnerships over many years…and support for each other. I think it is a culture of York." (Head of Early Years, Robert Wilkinson Primary)

The biggest success is the **promotion of consistent quality across all providers**. The majority of providers were already rated as outstanding, however hub funding for expert trainers and programme to moderate judgements has improved consistency. By attending the same training events, the providers have a shared understanding of what a 'ready for school' pupil looks like and can work towards this.

The hub **partners have improved relationships with each other**. Previous local networks have not included childminders, and pre-school staff now have a better understanding of what a childminder does, enabling them to work more effectively together. The improved relationships have led to more joint working, including childminders covering each other when unavailable.

More consistent quality of provision and closer relationships are **expected to lead to a smoother transition into primary school.** With hub partners able to provide more consistent and reliable data regarding incoming pupils' abilities and needs, the school is

better able to plan resources in advance. This is particularly important for SEN pupils, and the hub lead's training in SEN has led to a hub-wide assessment of SEN needs and resources.

"A big thing for us, as a reception and F2 provider, is knowing that the children and the judgements [providers] come up with are accurate. As a teacher I have to baseline the children and set targets…if the information they are sending us is not accurate it gives us a problem." (Hub Lead – Robert Wilkinson Primary)

Challenges

It took over a year for the hub to have a clear identity and focus separate from the existing partnership. It took a new member of staff to apply a fresh perspective and identify that there was a lot of duplication. Following this, resources were focused on a targeted action plan.

Engagement outside of the core hub partners is still a challenge. In this relatively affluent area, there are many stay at home parents and child-minders are already well networked. This means that the central hub offer of blended childcare does not immediately attract parents and child-minders. Instead the Hub lead is required to use individual activities to engage these audiences in all the benefits offered by the hub.

The sustainability of a hub lead, who uses their own time to manage the hub, should be questioned. No problems are evident under the current lead, but in the long term, relying on teachers adopting these tasks in addition to their core teaching role could present challenges. To ensure sustainability in the long term there will need to be a clear transition plan in place that addresses continuity and a sharing of responsibilities.

Learning

A number of learning points are apparent from the Strensall Hub's experiences:

1. **Integration is needed with existing local networks:** Efforts should be made to integrate with existing networks rather than adding to and duplicating activities. Across proactive early years areas, such as York, numerous networks already exist so the support may be best used to re-energise or refresh existing networks, rather than adding new networks.

2. **A supportive local context removes barriers** – receptive local parents ensure that the concept of a hub or network can be quickly adopted. The support of the local Council can ensure that additional, non-financial, resources can be leveraged where hub resources may be limited.

3. **Engage childminders with clear benefits for them** – Childminders are particularly difficult to engage with, being very busy and working diverse hours. Successful engagement approaches include training, support, and access to resources linked to improved child outcomes. Where existing childminder networks exist the hub team should go out to these, rather than asking childminders to attend additional meetings.

The future

Hub partners are concerned about what they will do when the funding ends. Engaging childminders without funding for training will be the biggest challenge. At the end of the programme, the hub will revert to York Council funding which is continuing to reduce. Staff at the pre-school noted that childminders and providers would likely be willing to pay a small amount for training, so this could be an option to explore after the end of the programme.

Case study: Stroud Hub, January 2015

Introduction

Stroud Hub is led by Severn View Primary School, located at the same site as the local children's centre. The Hub currently has a membership of 17 providers: the majority are local childminders, however there is also representation from playgroups, nurseries and the children's centre.

The hub covers an area which is relatively deprived and faces a shortage of childcare places locally. Severn View was motivated to join the hub programme by a desire to improve collaborative working across providers and to raise the quality of childcare. They were also keen to support local working parents by providing them with quality information about childcare availability and offer flexible blended childcare arrangements.

Success and Impact

The hub has succeeded in establishing a network of different types of childcare providers in an area that had few pre-existing relationships. A key success has been engaging with a large number of childminders, a group that can feel isolated due to the independent nature of their work. The hub's offer was particularly attractive to childminders in the area because they had recently lost their local Childminders' Network. The hub provided an opportunity for childminders to stay connected, both to other childminders and different types of providers:

 "We want to work with other types of providers; they have good ideas and we all have children's best interest at heart and we can share ideas with other people who have been doing it for years" [Childminder]

Hub meetings provide a valuable space for childcare practitioners to share their knowledge and good practice. New ideas have been exchanged at these meetings, such as learning how to simplify observation paperwork by using tablet computers.

The focus of each meeting is determined by what practice areas hub members feel they need to develop. Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) was highlighted as a priority, particularly for childminders who can feel separated from policy and practice developments in this area. In response, the Hub Lead arranged for an external speaker to attend a meeting and talk through the newly implemented SEND reforms.

Another meeting focused on quality improvement. Attendees shared their learning journals and assessed how they could each be doing better. They reflected on their own practice by approaching quality from the perspective of the parent, Ofsted and the setting. Learning from the session was cemented by everyone going away with a task to apply to their practice.

Challenges

A key challenge has been maintaining momentum when faced with limited capacity and turnover of key staff. Progress towards developing the hub website has been slow for example, and is hindering the hub's progress towards developing a blended childcare offer.

Whilst the hub has a large number of providers affiliated with it, not all are engaging and attending at the same level. Coordinating meetings at a time that is convenient for all remains an ongoing challenge. Currently meetings are taking place in the evening, the preferred time of childminders, although others tend to prefer meeting in the day. The hub may explore holding meetings at a variety of times and locations to cater to different needs.

Learning

A number of key learning points have emerged from Stroud's experiences:

1. **Engage providers through face to face contact:** Stroud learned that face to face engagement is far more effective than phone or email. This was particularly true when engaging childminders; the majority were recruited when the Hub Lead attended their meetings at the children's centre.

2. **Build on existing local networks:** the hub filled a gap for local childminders who had recently lost their Childminders Network. However, there is further potential to build on the connections of the existing network to engage a larger number of people. Stroud's children's centre is also part of a local consortium so there is opportunity to 'piggy back' on this network too.

3. **Asking providers what they want out of the Hub upfront will help to keep meetings as useful and relevant as possible:** In Stroud, the Hub Lead asked members what issues were important to them and addressed their areas of concerns and priority.

4. **Regular contact will keep providers updated and engaged:** The Hub Lead keeps everyone updated regularly though emails even if they haven't come to a meeting.

The future

The hub will continue to operate and to engage with new local providers; the aim is for the hub to encompass all local settings, although they do not underestimate the time and effort this will require. Hub meetings will build on the successful work already undertaken around quality and will continue to develop providers' skills and knowledge through sessions tailored to their needs. Getting the website up and running will be a top priority, as this will be central to developing a blended childcare offer and broadening the positive impact of the hub to local parents. It is expected that the website will also raise the profile of the hub and its providers.

There is also the potential in the future to widen the hub's networks and connect with other hubs locally and nationally.

Detailed Survey Analysis

Surveys were distributed at the start and end of the programme to parents/carers and childcare providers in each hub area. The baseline survey was conducted over December 2013 – February 2014, and the follow on survey was conducted over November 2014 – Feburary 2015. We received the following number of responses from each hub:

		Merton	Homerton	Strensall	Stroud	Wooler	TOTAL
Parents/carers	Baseline	29	11	4	10	36	**90**
	Follow-up	0	9	3	4	15	**31**
Providers	Baseline	16	6	10	5	8	**45**
	Follow-up	1	3	0	3	8	**15**

It is important to note that the small number of responses for the follow-up surveys limits the extent to which definitive conclusions can be drawn. Because of this, response rates to each question are shown in the following format % (n) i.e. the percentage of respondents (number of respondents). Due to roundings not all percentages may add up to 100%.

Provision of childcare places

Availability of childcare places

The views of parents/carers about the **availability of childcare places** appear to have improved over the course of the programme, with more parents/carers in the follow on survey indicating that the types of childcare they require are available to them. As Table 1 shows, 28% felt this was the case 'to a great extent' and 46% 'to some extent' at the start of the programme, compared to 39% and 48% respectively at the end of the programme.

Table 1: Parents/carers: In your local area, to what extent are the types of childcare you require available to you? (baseline n=90, follow-up n=31)

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not much	Not at all	Not sure	Not applicable
Baseline	28% (25)	46% (41)	20% (18)	1% (1)	3% (3)	2% (2)
Follow-up	39% (12)	48% (15)	3% (1)	3% (1)	6% (2)	0% (0)

Providers showed a similar pattern of becoming more positive **about the general availability of childcare** places over the course of the programme. Table 2 indicates that at the start of the programme, 22% of providers felt that the type and number of childcare places meet parent/carer needs 'to a great extent', and 60% 'to some extent'. By the end of the programme these proportions had risen to 27% and 67% respectively.

Table 2: Providers: To what extent do you think type and number of childcare places available meets what is required by Parents/carers? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	To a great extent	To some extent	Not much	Not at all	Not sure	Not applicable
Baseline	22% (10)	60% (27)	2% (1)	0% (0)	13% (6)	2% (1)
Follow-up	27% (4)	67% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	7% (1)	0% (0)

Two thirds (67%) of providers who completed the follow-up survey indicated that **being a member of the hub increased their awareness of parents' wishes and needs for childcare** in their local area. The remaining third (33%) however did not feel being a member of their hub had this effect.

Places for funded 2 year olds

A **greater proportion of providers felt that the availability of childcare places for funded 2 years olds was good** at the end of the programme compared to the start. Table 3 shows that 44% of providers stated that availability was either 'excellent' or 'good' in the baseline survey. By the end of the programme this increased to 67%.

Table 3: Providers: How would you rate the availability of childcare places for funded 2 year olds (compared to the numbers of children eligible for these places) in the local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Poor**	**Not sure**
Baseline	4% (2)	40% (18)	16% (7)	4% (2)	36% (16)
Follow-up	7% (1)	60% (9)	20% (3)	0% (0)	13% (2)

Although this data suggests that providers felt that the availability of funded 2 year olds places had improved, more providers stated that they think there is a **need to increase the provision of these places** at the end of the programme (40%) than at the start (27%). This is illustrated in Table 4 below. It should be pointed out that over half of providers in both surveys indicated that they don't know whether there is a need to increase provision.

Table 4: Providers: Do you think there is a need in the local area to increase the provision of childcare places for funded two year olds? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Yes	**No**	**Don't know**
Baseline	27% (12)	22% (10)	51% (23)
Follow-up	40% (6)	7% (1)	53% (8)

Some providers chose to comment further on this in both surveys; 14 did so in the baseline, and 4 in the follow-up. Those saying 'No' in both surveys tended to state that there were already enough of such places in the local area.

Table 5 reveals that the proportion of providers intending to offer or increase funded places for two year olds has not changed across the programme, remaining at 27% for both surveys.

Table 5: Providers: Do you or your setting have plans to offer funded places for two year olds or to increase your funded places for two year olds *as a result of the hub? (italics asked in follow=up only)* (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Yes	**No**	**Don't know**	**Not applicable**
Baseline	27% (12)	31% (14)	31% (14)	11% (5)
Follow-up	27% (4)	53% (8)	0% (0)	20% (3)

Information about childcare

The sources parents/carers used to **find out about childcare options** remained largely similar between the two surveys. Table 6 shows that by far the most common means for parents/carers to find out about childcare is word of mouth (59% in the baseline, 61% in the follow-up), followed by schools (16% and 26% respectively). By the end of the programme, 16% of parents/carers stated that they found out about childcare options through their local hub.

Table 6: Parents/carers: How did you find out about the options available for childcare for your child/children? (baseline n=90, follow-up n=31)

	Word of mouth	School	Your local child-care hub	Internet search	Family information service (FIS) at the Local Authority	Community noticeboard	Other
Baseline	59% (53)	16% (14)	N/A	11% (10)	7% (6)	0% (0)	8% (7)
Follow-up	61% (19)	26% (8)	16% (5)	16% (5)	10% (3)	6% (2)	10% (3)

Over the course of the programme, more parents/carers indicated that they found it easy to **find out about childcare providers**. In the baseline survey, 21% said that it was 'very easy' and 56% found it 'fairly easy'; by the end of the programme, those proportions had risen to 32% and 58% respectively.

The surveys also asked parents/carers as well as providers about **access to up to date information about the availability of childcare places.** Table 7 shows their responses. Just over half (51%) of parents/carers had found it 'very' or 'fairly' easy to find this information at the start of the programme, but by the end this proportion had risen to 71%. There was a similar increase in providers' attitudes, with 56% at the start of the programme stating that it is 'very' or 'fairly' easy for parents to find this information, rising to 74% by the end of the programme.

Table 7: How easy is it for parents/carers to find up to date information about childcare places? (Parents/carers, baseline n=90, follow-up n=31; Providers, baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

		Very easy	Fairly easy	Not very easy	Not at all easy	Not sure/ I haven't looked
Parents/ carers	**Baseline**	12% (11)	39% (35)	29% (26)	4% (4)	16% (14)
	Follow-up	29% (9)	42% (13)	13% (4)	3% (1)	13% (4)
Providers	**Baseline**	7% (3)	49% (22)	27% (12)	7% (3)	11% (5)
	Follow-up	7% (1)	67% (10)	27% (4)	0% (0)	0% (0)

The above effect may be explained to some extent by the fact that in a subsequent question of the follow-up survey, 67% of providers stated that their **hub had improved the information available to parents/carers about childcare opportunities locally**. However a third (33%) disagreed with this.

Similarly, more providers indicated that the i**nformation for parents about what childcare is on offer in the local area** has improved over time. Table 8 shows that whilst 51% of providers in the baseline survey felt that this information was 'excellent' or 'good', by its end the programme this proportion had risen to 80%.

Table 8: Providers: How would you rate the information to parents/carers about what childcare is on offer in the local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Not sure	Not applicable
Baseline	9% (4)	42% (19)	36% (16)	4% (2)	9% (4)	0% (0)
Follow-up	13% (2)	67% (10)	13% (2)	0% (0)	7% (1)	0% (0)

In the follow-up survey, providers were also asked whether they experienced any **differences in the volume or types of enquiries they received** from parents about the childcare they received. Of the eight that answered this question, five said they had not, and two said that they had.

Parental awareness of hubs

The follow on survey asked parents whether they **had heard about the local childcare hub in their areas.** There was an almost even split in responses, with 48% stating they had not heard about their local hub, and 45% stating that they had. 6% of parents/carers said they were not sure.

Parents/carers who had heard of their local hub were asked where they found out about it. Eleven parent responded to this question, pointing to:

– Their child's school/preschool

– Friends and their children

– An advert

– Through a playgroup

– A publication by the hub

– Their childminder

– Through the local sure start centre.

Experiences of childcare

The **levels of satisfaction of parents/carers with the quality of childcare** on offer in their local areas was generally high at the start of the programme but did increase by the end. Table 9 shows that, at the start of the programme, 34% were 'very satisfied' and 50% 'fairly satisfied' with the quality of childcare available locally. Over the course of the programme, this increased to 55% of parents being 'very satisfied', and 39% being 'fairly satisfied'; only a small minority were not satisfied by this point.

Table 9: Parents/carers: How satisfied would you say you currently are with the quality of childcare on offer to you in your local area? (baseline n=90, follow-up n=31)

	Very satisfied	**Fairly satisfied**	**Not very satisfied**	**Not at all satisfied**	**Not sure**
Baseline	34% (31)	50% (45)	9% (8)	1% (1)	6% (5)
Follow-up	55% (17)	39% (12)	3% (1)	0% (0)	3% (1)

This trend was also seen among providers of childcare, as illustrated in Table 10. At the time of the baseline survey, 66% of providers rated the **quality of provision of childcare** in the local area as 'excellent' or 'good'; by the end of the programme, this had risen to 94% of providers.

Table 10: Providers: How would you rate the quality of provision of childcare in the local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	It varies significantly across different settings	Not sure
Baseline	16% (7)	60% (27)	0% (0)	0% (0)	18% (8)	7% (3)
Follow-up	27% (4)	67% (10)	0% (0)	0% (0)	7% (1)	0% (0)

Quality Improvement

Continuous professional development (CPD)

Providers generally saw good **levels of recognition by practitioners of the importance of CPD** although this did improve in the course of the programme. As Table 11 shows, 29% of providers felt this recognition was 'excellent' at the start of the programme, and 53% thought it was 'good'; this had risen to 40% finding it 'excellent' by the end of the programme, and all the rest (60%) finding it 'good'.

Table 11: Providers: Baseline: How would you rate the recognition by practitioners in your setting of the importance of continuous professional development? Follow-up: In your local area, how would you rate practitioners' recognition of the importance of continuous professional development? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Not sure
Baseline	29% (13)	53% (24)	13% (6)	0% (0)	4% (2)
Follow-up	40% (6)	60% (9)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)

The overwhelming majority of **parents/carers in the areas found it important that local childcare providers recognise the importance of CPD**, with the levels unchanged between the start and the end of the programme. In each case, around four in five

parents/carers stated that this was 'very important' to them (80% for the baseline and 81% in the follow-up survey). Most others held it to be 'fairly important'.

Quality improvement practices

As indicated in Table 12, providers stated they/their setting were currently working a variety of different **areas of quality improvement**, with clear differences between the start of the programme and the end. Whilst assessment (44%) and environment (40%) were most common at the start of the programme, at the end of the programme 80% of survey respondents stated they were working on environment quality improvements.

Table 12: Providers: Which areas of quality improvement are you/ your setting currently working on? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Special educational needs	Environment	A specific area of the EYFS	Assessment	Other
Baseline	20% (9)	40% (18)	9% (4)	44% (20)	36% (16)
Follow-up	13% (2)	80% (12)	13% (2)	27% (4)	20% (3)

Participants who selected a specific area of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) or stated 'Other' were provided with a space to elaborate on their area of improvement. Areas detailed in the two surveys included:

– Planning (including for Continuous Provision)

– Behaviour management

– Multicultural play

– Communication, language and phonics

– Monitoring child's progress

– Engaging with parents/carers

– Outdoor learning

– Training staff for two and under-two year olds

When providers were asked **how they monitor their own quality improvement**, the same types of methods tended to be mentioned at the start of the programme and at the end, although by the end of the programme greater proportions of providers were stating that they use each measure. Action plans were the most commonly used, with 56% of providers using

them at the start of the survey and 80% at the end. Twenty-four percent stated that they use quality improvement plans at the start of the programme, and 33% did so by the end.

Participants who selected 'other' in the baseline survey indicated they were using monitoring methods including: Ofsted criteria; manager/staff meetings; self-evaluation; talking to other practitioners; attending training; and, parental surveys. In the follow-up survey, two providers described working with their local authority early years consultants, and one of these also mentioned working with a reception class teacher.

Table 13: Providers: How do you monitor your own quality improvement? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Quality improvement plan	Action plan	Working with a network	Other
Baseline	24% (11)	56% (25)	22% (10)	24% (11)
Follow-up	33% (5)	80% (12)	27% (4)	13% (2)

Cooperation between providers

At the start of the programme, childcare providers were already quite positive about **how effectively early years settings work together to share practice and learning in their local areas.** However, as Table 14 shows, this improved considerably over the course of the programme. Whilst at the start, 61% of providers felt they worked together 'very effectively' or 'fairly effectively', by the end of the programme this had risen to 93%, with no providers at all stating that cooperation was not effective.

Table 14: Providers: How effectively do early years settings currently work together to share practice and learning in your local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Very effectively	Fairly effectively	Not sure	Not very effectively	Not at all effectively	Not applicable
Baseline	18% (8)	43% (19)	14% (6)	25% (11)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Follow-up	13% (2)	80% (12)	7% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)

As with the importance of CPD, the vast majority of **parents/carers also feel that it is important that difference childcare providers work together to share learning and practice in their local areas**. In the baseline survey, 61% felt that this was 'very important' to them, and 65% did so in the follow-up survey. A further 37% in the baseline survey, and 26% in the follow-up, thought this was 'fairly important'.

Impact of the hubs on quality

Two thirds of providers (67%) responding to the follow-up survey said they felt that **their local hub's activities have led to improvements in the quality of provision**. Only 13% did not think it had, with the remaining 20% unsure.

The providers who reported that quality had improved were asked to give examples of this. Their responses centred on:

– Shared policies. This was the most commonly cited example.

– More communication and meetings between providers and with other organisations such as schools, EYFS

– More or better information sharing

– Improved or new services for children and parents

– Comments in a recent Ofsted inspection

Providers were also asked **whether their involvement with the hub led to any changes in the ways in which they monitory their own quality improvement**. Respondents were evenly split on this question, with 47% stating that the hub did have an effect on their practices, but another 47% stating that it did not.

Those that stated their practices around monitoring quality improvement had changes as a result of involvement with the hub were asked to elaborate on this. The changes mentioned were:

– More joined up working, including sharing best practice

– EY consultant visiting settings

– Measuring progress through the 2 year old provision and EYFS

– Closer monitoring of staff and individual children's files

Blended childcare

Availability of blended childcare

Before discussing blended childcare itself, the surveys for parents/carers asked **how flexible parents/carers thought the childcare on offer to them was**. There were slight improvements in parents/carers' answers from the start of the programme, when 20% said flexibility of childcare was 'excellent' and 37% 'good'; to the end, where 23% thought flexibility was 'excellent' and 39% thought it 'good'.

Parents/carers were then given a description of 'blended childcare'. Respondents were then asked to rate **how easy it is for them to organise blended childcare**. As illustrated in Table 15, large and roughly similar proportions of parents stated they were not sure or had not looked into this in both waves of the survey.

Those parents/carers who did know about or had used blended childcare were more likely to describe this as easy to organise at the end of the programme compared to the start. In the baseline survey, 8% of parents/carers described organising blended childcare as 'very easy' and another 29% as 'fairly easy'; by the end of the programme, these proportions had risen to 16% describing it as 'very easy' and 35% as 'fairly easy'.

Table 15: Parents/carers: In your local area, how easy is it to organise blended childcare for your child or children? (baseline n=90, follow-up n=31)

	Very easy	**Fairly easy**	**Not very easy**	**Not at all easy**	**Not sure/ I haven't looked**
Baseline	8% (7)	29% (26)	18% (16)	3% (3)	42% (38)
Follow-up	16% (5)	35% (11)	3% (1)	6% (2)	39% (12)

Providers were also asked to rate the availability of blended childcare opportunities in their local area. As Table 16 illustrates, providers tended to be positive about this both at the start and the end of the programme. Forty-nine percent of providers rated the opportunities as 'excellent' or 'good' at the start of the programme, rising to 60% by the end of the programme.

Table 16: Providers: How would you rate the availability of blended childcare opportunities offered to parents using childcare in the local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Not sure	Not applicable
Baseline	13% (6)	36% (16)	20% (9)	4% (2)	24% (11)	2% (1)
Follow-up	7% (1)	53% (8)	27% (4)	7% (1)	7% (1)	0% (0)

Providers who rated their local blended childcare opportunities as 'satisfactory' or 'poor', were asked to comment further on this in both surveys. The issues identified were:

– There are not enough places or childminders

– Childminders would be reluctant to pick up a child from a nursery in the evening

– Direct competition between settings means that settings do not want to 'share' children or support parents to use several providers.

– The concept is still new and requires further development

– In a very rural area transport between care givers can be problematic.

Parents/carers were also asked **if there is a need for more options for blended childcare opportunities in their local areas**. Responses did not change much over the course of the programme, with just under half of respondents agreeing that there is this need (47% at the start of the programme, 45% at the end). Most of the other respondents said they don't know (46% at the start, 45% by the end).

Information about blended childcare

Parents/carers were asked **how easy it is to access up to date information about blended childcare opportunities in their areas**. Table 17 reveals that amongst half of parents in both surveys twere not sure or had not looked into it: 47% at the start of the programme, and 42% by the end.

Of those parents/carers that were aware of the information available, most thought this was 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to access. Views did improve over the course of the programme, with 34% at the start finding such information 'very' or 'fairly easy' to access, rising to 49% by the end of the programme.

Table 17: Parents/carers: In your local area, how easy it is to access up to date information about opportunities for blended childcare? (baseline n=90, follow-up n=31)

	Very easy	Fairly easy	Not very easy	Not at all easy	Not sure/ I haven't looked
Baseline	6% (5)	28% (25)	17% (15)	3% (3)	47% (42)
Follow-up	10% (3)	39% (12)	6% (2)	3% (1)	42% (13)

Providers became more positive about the information available about local blended childcare offers over the course of the programme. As shown in Table 18, 31% thought information was 'excellent' or 'good' at the start of the programme, rising to 47% by the end. However, larger proportions in both cases did find this information to be only 'satisfactory': 36% at the start and 40% by the end. Again, fewer providers said they were not sure about blended childcare by the end of the programme (7%, compared to 20% at the start).

Table 18: Providers: How would you rate the information available to Parents/carers about the offer of blended childcare in their local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	Not sure	Not applicable
Baseline	1 (2%)	13 (29%)	16 (36%)	6 (13%)	9 (20%)	0 (0%)
Follow-up	0 (0%)	7 (47%)	6 (40%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)

Providers' blended offers

The majority of providers in both surveys stated that they **work with other providers to offer blended childcare opportunities in their local areas**. As revealed in Table 19, 60% did so at the start of the programme, rising to 73% by the end.

Table 19: Providers: Do you or your setting currently work with other providers to offer blended childcare opportunities to Parents/carers in the local area? (baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)

	Yes	No	Don't know	Not applicable
Baseline	60% (27)	27% (12)	7% (3)	7% (3)
Follow-up	73% (11)	20% (3)	7% (1)	0% (0)

At the start of the programme, just under half of providers (49%) indicated that they had plans to offer blended childcare opportunities in their local areas, as shown in Table 20. By the end of the programme, 60% stated that they had plans to offer blended childcare opportunities as a result of the programme.

Table 20: Providers: Do you or your setting have plans to offer blended childcare opportunities to Parents/carers in the local area? (Follow-up:) *as a result of your involvement in the hub?* **(baseline n=45, follow-up n=15)**

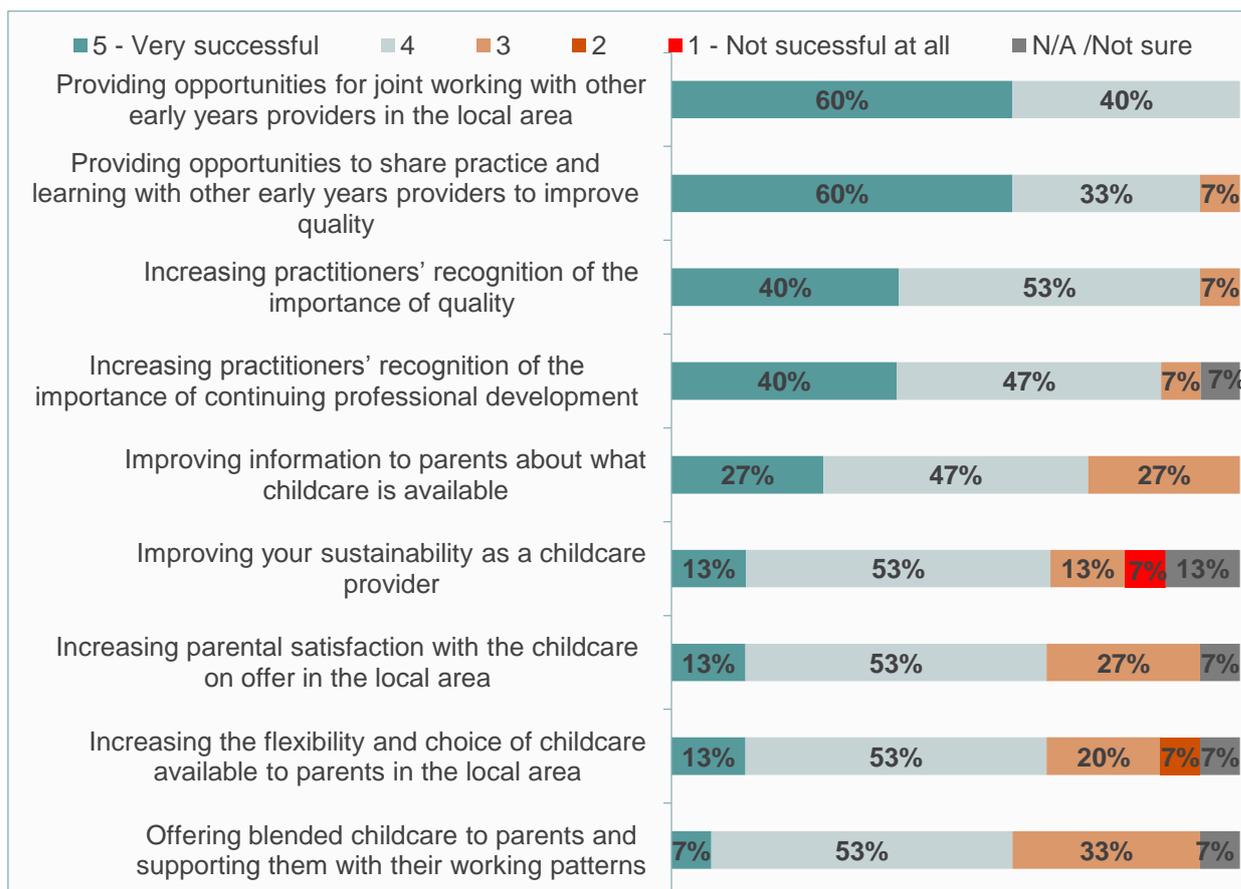|	**Yes**	**No**	**Don't know**	**Not applicable**
Baseline	49% (22)	11% (5)	27% (12)	13% (6)
Follow-up	60% (9)	27% (4)	13% (2)	0% (0)

Other Findings

Provider views and experiences of the impact of the hubs

The follow on survey asked providers about a range of possible impacts of the hubs. Figure 21 illustrates their responses. The two biggest impacts were (i) **providing opportunities for sharing practice and learning with other providers to improve quality,** and (ii) **providing opportunities for joint working with other early years providers in the local area.** 60% of providers indicated that the hubs had been 'very successful' in achieving these impacts. Many providers also rated the hubs as successful at **increasing practitioners' recognition of the importance of quality** and **of the importance of continuing professional development.** (40% indicated that the hubs were 'very successful' in doing this).

Providers were somewhat less positive about the impacts of the hubs in other areas, although the findings are generally very positive. The measure providers were least positive about was the impact **on offering blended childcare to parents and supporting them with their working patterns**; only 7% rated this as '5 - very successful', although 53% gave it a rating of '4'.

Figure 21: Providers (follow-up) On a scale of 1-5, please rate how successful you feel the hub has been in achieving the following? (n=15)

Legend: ■ 5 - Very successful   ■ 4   ■ 3   ■ 2   ■ 1 - Not sucessful at all   ■ N/A /Not sure

Measure	5 - Very successful	4	3	2	1 - Not successful at all	N/A /Not sure
Providing opportunities for joint working with other early years providers in the local area	60%	40%				
Providing opportunities to share practice and learning with other early years providers to improve quality	60%	33%	7%			
Increasing practitioners' recognition of the importance of quality	40%	53%	7%			
Increasing practitioners' recognition of the importance of continuing professional development	40%	47%	7%			7%
Improving information to parents about what childcare is available	27%	47%	27%			
Improving your sustainability as a childcare provider	13%	53%	13%		7%	13%
Increasing parental satisfaction with the childcare on offer in the local area	13%	53%	27%			7%
Increasing the flexibility and choice of childcare available to parents in the local area	13%	53%	20%	7%		7%
Offering blended childcare to parents and supporting them with their working patterns	7%	53%	33%			7%

At the end of the programme, providers were asked to sum up what they have gained from the hub. They cited a number of positive effects, as summarised below:

– The chance to meet with or visit other providers in the area to share ideas, knowledge and practice

   "I feel that the hub has helped the staff gain a broader view - being able to visit other settings has been a valuable experience to help further knowledge and ideas."

– Access to useful training

   "Team Teach Training was CPD Training that our setting had been looking for for the last few years, using hub funds to secure this training has probably been the most beneficial element to come from the hub to date."

– Working collaboratively with other providers to drive up quality

   "An opportunity to work in collaboration with other local EYFS providers to improve the quality of childcare and early learning in the Wooler area"

– Increased awareness and recognition of their own organisation/business.

"We feel that it has brought us together, working more cooperatively to share best practice, support one another in training needs and advertise each other's practise."

Individual providers also described how their hub had helped them gain recognition from professional peers; find out about new policy developments; become more aware of other local offers; raise the profile of EYFS in the area; and simplify internal procedures.