

Supporting Leadership

Top Practice Tips

- Develop a clear and simple vision of the benefits of being part of a Hub, which will engage and motivate settings to join the partnership
- Ensure that trust and credibility are developed to overcome partners' initial concerns
- Map out strengths of each setting to develop peer support and a training programme.
- Identify early quick wins so partners can see benefits from the start

Background

All Early Learning and Childcare Partnership Hubs have three goals: to improve the quality of provision; support the provision of new childcare places and to focus on funded two-year olds where this is seen as a gap. They also support parents with their working patterns by offering blended childcare and early education which incorporates the 30 hour entitlement and 2YO offer. Strong leadership, practical support and a clear vision are vital to the development of Hubs.

What drives organisations to set up Hubs?

West Bridgford Hub is a network of 15 to 30 suppliers. "I saw how existing activities and networks needed a better focus," says Nicky Palmer, early years specialist at Nottinghamshire County Council. "It had become clear that settings would benefit if communications improved. The settings trusted me because of previous relationships built up over the years. I was also aware of the 30 hours entitlement and wanted to develop and support the means of making this work."

"We could see the Hubs programme meeting our strategic aim of sustainable high quality early years and childcare," says Matt Biggs, Staffordshire childcare and sufficiency manager. "The initial school partner withdrew, so with operational support from Entrust, a joint venture company set up by Staffordshire and Capita to

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improve education, we finally managed to recruit a partner - Little Owl, a PVI nursery. It was then possible to think about centralising childcare in the area, and supporting a blended offer of care for parents in the light of the 30 hours childcare.”

How can Hubs engage partners and meet the three goals?

“I had a clear vision of what the Hub could do, and engaged partners with that vision by avoiding being woolly,” says Ms Palmer. “They could see the benefits for them and for children.” Settings were willing to engage with Ms Palmer as they already knew and trusted her, and she was able to draw on her experience of what would interest different providers when inviting them to meetings. “In any new venture, it is important to identify quick wins and make sure that actions which have been agreed actually happen, and start having an impact,” she says. “It was important to use the training opportunities and initial funding to provide big impact events, to enable settings to get a benefit from the Hub. I worked with the settings and childminders for them to identify the training that would make a difference for their work, which was the thinking behind a workshop on children’s critical thinking that would give all the providers a real buzz and enable them to see ways of improving practice.”

In Staffordshire, Little Owl contacted settings including childminders, preschools and nurseries by telephone to explain the concept of the Hub and invite providers to a meeting. “This successful start was down to the vision and passion of Little Owl,” says Mr Biggs. “They are able to motivate local settings and explain that integrated and collaborative working benefits families. Settings came to the meetings with very positive and proactive mindsets and this created a good attendance and momentum for future events.”

The meeting allowed space for the attendees to ask questions. “The flexibility of the model, with its three clear goals but no prescription of how to get there, gives an opportunity for all settings to shape the direction of the Hub,” says Mr Biggs. “This was a strong motivator as they could see the benefits, so they saw quality could be about sharing policy and procedures or being able to share staff across settings.”

What challenges do Hubs face around meeting the goals and engaging partners?

Both West Bridgford and Little Owl Hubs have identified time as a major challenge. “Settings and childminders struggle with the time needed to do ‘additional’ work that has costs – travel for example,” says Ms Palmer. “Differing working hours of partners within the Hub has been a barrier,” adds Mr Biggs.

Another challenge is finding a leader with the vision to explain how the collaborative working approach can benefit both providers and the communities supported by the Hubs. “Finding this local leader is a challenge but it will have more traction if a provider is talking to providers than if it is coming from the local authority,”



says Mr Biggs. “If the Hub is school-led, the problem is that it is not seen as an equal talking to others – schools do not have the understanding of the operational pressures facing PVI settings.” The hub lead needs to be able to support partners to share and overcome their different pressures and challenges.

Is there anything about the Hub programme that could be done better?

Those involved with the Little Owl Hub feel more support in the initial stages of development would be helpful. “We wish more face-to-face contact at the beginning were possible to help plan the Hubs direction of travel,” says Sarah McCormick, owner and manager of Little Owl. “Also it would have been good to have had the programme lead at the Hub event to show that it was a national programme, as well as helping with the understanding of how to implement the three goals.”

What are the next steps for Hubs?

West Bridgford Hub is supporting Nottinghamshire’s roll-out of the 30 hours entitlement. It mapped the strengths of each setting to enable peer support with an agreed focus, such as maths, and is considering widening the scope of its work through partnerships with local health agencies.

Little Owl Hub is involved in the 30 hours entitlement and with auditing the spaces available well as supporting the development of other Hubs county-wide.

