



Luton Early Outcome Fund Evaluation Report - Talking Takes Off

Research Report

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Acknowledgements

This report has been written by a range of colleagues who have all contributed to the delivery of the Early Outcome Fund Programme in Luton.

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Executive Summary

This report provides a review of the transformational activity and learning that Luton Council has made over a year (2019/20) using funding from the Early Outcome Fund (Department for Education). The aim of this fund was to support the government's ambition to reduce the proportion of children who do not achieve "at least the expected levels" across the early learning goals in communication, language and literacy areas of learning by 50% by 2028¹. The structure of this report is based on the Early Intervention Foundation Maturity Matrix for Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years. The use of this matrix was a prerequisite of the funders. It was expected that the local early year's partnership used this tool to create a baseline assessment of the local system in relation to communication and language. Furthermore the system was then expected to use the findings to identify areas for focus in the planning of the Early Outcome Fund programme. As such, Luton completed the matrix in January 2019 and then repeated the task in February 2020 to assess the level of transformation over the year. The structure of the report follows the four main domains of Plan, Lead, Deliver and Evaluate.

This report includes feedback from the project leads who were responsible for each work stream as well as the findings from our independent evaluation of various elements of work conducted by the University of Bedfordshire. The University was commissioned to evaluate the work on strategic leadership, the workforce development programme and the parental programme. A mixed-methods approach was utilised for the evaluation including surveys and semi-structured interviews across the system. As described in our Theory of Change, the main elements that we focused on included: strategic leadership, workforce development, commissioning, the development of a new system wide early identification tool and a new graduated response model, parental and community involvement, the use of data and communication on the importance of the home learning environment.

Over the year, we have seen exceptionally strong partnership working and a willingness across the system to focus on the importance of communication and language in the early years both at the strategic level and at an operational level. The programme, which we called Talking Takes Off, sits under the Flying Start programme and so had a boost from the established partnership working already in place. Furthermore other local policy drivers have been influential including a corporate focus on eradicating poverty in Luton by 2040 and the Luton Written Statement of Action for Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) which highlighted that improvements were needed to support access to Speech and Language Therapy services.

Strategic leaders have understood the importance of communication and language as vital skills for all children and we have successfully ensured that this issue is a priority in our

¹ Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential, A Plan for Improving Social Mobility Through Education 2017

new Population Wellbeing strategy 2019-2024 and the forthcoming Children and Young People's Plan. We have been able to make significant inroads into upskilling the multiagency workforce through the delivery of universal, targeted and specialist training based on the Communication Trust Competency Framework. The evaluation from our universal training 'Talking Takes Off Takeaway workshops' both immediately post-delivery and three months following training shows significant improvements to practitioners knowledge and skills. Our Talking Takes Off champion model is growing and offering additional capacity to spread the messages across the wider workforce. A new Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit has been developed and launched through the universal training.

We developed a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for speech, language and communication to understand the needs for our children. Working with our Children's Integrated Commissioner, we are aligning our Special Educational Needs team who have a Speech and Language Therapy specialism within their workforce with our community provider of Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) services. We have developed a speech, language and communication outcomes framework, which will support commissioning going forward and allow us to understand the impact of our transformational change.

Working with the community and our Parent Carer Forum has meant that we have involved parents in the development of resources and the new communication and language pathway in a meaningful way. We have developed and implemented a Talking Takes Off communication and marketing strategy, supporting the importance of the Home Learning Environment and promoting key communication and language messages across the community. Listening to the views from our diverse community some Talking Takes Off resources have been developed in community languages and we have continued to grow our ICAN Ambassador model of volunteers who provide local families with key messages about the importance of communication and language in the early years.

The report demonstrates the work that has been delivered over the year and includes our learning; we have included details of the person you can contact if you would like to find out more. We are fortunate to have had this funding to support this transformational change as part of our Flying Start programme and are now in the position to move into the next year with a work programme to further embed the changes. We have also been successful and secured the additional capacity of a Speech and Language Therapist and a Community Liaison Officer who both will provide the capacity alongside our partners to drive forward Talking Takes Off In Luton.



Programme Lead Talking Takes Off

Introduction

Flying Start –Luton’s Pregnancy to Five Strategy

Flying Start is Luton’s prevention and early intervention strategy which consists of a strong and flourishing partnership across the town, who work together to improve outcomes for babies and children from pregnancy to five. The strategy has three overarching outcomes which are:

- a) Significantly more children, by their 5th birthday, will have age-appropriate communication skills, will interact effectively with adults and children, resulting in better educational outcomes and improved employment opportunities.
- b) More children are securely attached and emotionally resilient, with improved school readiness. In the longer term the impact of poor maternal mental health and associated risk factors on children's outcomes are reduced.
- c) Babies will have improved birth outcomes; with fewer women obese in pregnancy, improved understanding of nutrition and healthy behaviours, breastfeeding will be increased and fewer children are obese or have dental decay, with improved health and wellbeing into adulthood

Flying Start is a ten year strategy which emerged from the development of a bid to the National Lottery as part of A Better Start programme in 2013/14. While Luton was not successful in securing the funding from the Lottery, strategic and political partners agreed to continue to deliver the ambition set out in our proposals and the Flying Start strategy was agreed. [Click here](#) to see the Flying Start Strategy. Flying Start is delivered through a partnership arrangement between Luton Council and the Early Years Alliance which allows a productive use of resources and expertise. The brand of Flying Start is well recognised across the town and is understood by both professionals and parents.

Flying Start Children’s Centres provide prevention and targeted services to parents across the town and are managed by Luton Council. The service has made significant changes to its delivery model since 2018 and is funded by both Children’s Services and Public Health. The Children’s Centres deliver a core offer of services consistently across Luton and are a key delivery arm for the Flying Start Strategy. [Click here](#) to see the Flying Start website with information of the services in Flying Start Children’s Centres. Our Community Health Service provider, Cambridge Community Services 0-19 services, work very closely with the Children’s Centres to deliver a range of services as part of the Healthy Child Programme.

Early Intervention Foundation Maturity Matrix - Initial Findings and Follow Up Findings

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) Maturity Matrix for Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years was used to measure the local system's change. Improving speech, language and communication outcomes as part of a local early years system depends on effective arrangements for strategy and planning, leading change, delivering effective single and multi-agency working, and evaluating progress. The Maturity Matrix is divided into four dimensions (Plan, Lead, Deliver and Evaluate) which are the key strands contributing to a joined up local system to help children in their early years to thrive. This report is structured in line with the four dimensions.

Each of the dimensions from the EIF Maturity Matrix is divided into key elements that can be rated from 'basic' to 'mature'. This helps identify areas in need of improvement and local strengths. The Early Outcome Fund Programme Board met in January 2019, in advance of submitting a bid to the DfE, to work collaboratively to determine Luton's baseline position and to identify areas of work. At this time, the four dimensions were rated at either basic level ('plan' and 'evaluation') or as early progress ('lead' and 'deliver') although some aspects of 'deliver' were rated as being at the substantial progress stage.

To structure the work and visualise the path from project inputs, to activities, outcomes and goals, the work was mapped onto the 'Theory of Change'. The Theory of Change is used to demonstrate how the approach will allow progress from the baseline system to a more mature system, and why the changes should deliver benefits to early years speech, language and communication outcomes. The EIF Maturity Matrix was used to guide our Theory of Change ([click here](#) to see the Early Outcome Fund Theory of Change).

To help evaluate the progress made throughout the Early Outcome Fund, as well as identifying areas in need of further development, the Programme Board completed the EIF Maturity Matrix again in February 2020 to determine Luton's new position on the matrix. A visual illustration of the project's development on the matrix can be found in Appendix 1.

In summary over the year, it was agreed that substantial progress had been made in the 'plan' dimension. Much work has been completed on achieving a whole systems approach with a clear vision, strategy and plan. A comprehensive Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on speech, language and communication was also completed. However, it was acknowledged that while some work has been undertaken with maternity colleagues still further emphasis needs to be placed on the antenatal period. It was agreed that commissioning have been involved in the programme and in particular supported the work with commissioning the alignment of the Speech and Language Therapy Service and the speech and language provision in the Special Education Needs service with

clear plans for future accountability on how this model will work. Workforce planning was rated as almost mature by all partners, demonstrated by the successful workforce development programme that had been delivered over the year. However it was recognised that a stronger emphasis could be placed on Speech, Language and Communication as part of role specifications, recruitment and retention strategies.

The dimension ‘lead’ had improved significantly during the project and was now rated as almost fully mature. Strategic champions, including local politicians, speak with one voice on the importance of Speech, Language and Communication and influential and effective partnerships were formed which are driving the local strategy of improving Speech, Language and Communication in the early years. Community ownership has progressed during the year but partners identified this could be further improved. Parents have been involved in the development of the new communication and language pathway and in the development of the communication plan.

‘Deliver’ scored between early progress and substantial progress at this point.

Luton has good (and high) quality services to support young children. All services recognise their role in promoting Talking Takes Off and there has been exceptionally good partnership working across the system. Additionally, Luton is particularly strong in using evidence based services. Nevertheless, there is not yet a high take up of early education entitlement in Luton. It is clear that the proportion of disadvantaged 2 year olds accessing the free entitlement in nursery settings is low, which may limit the impact of strategies predominantly delivered through such providers. Furthermore, the Local Offer which is currently undergoing significant improvements still needs to be completed. Although this is starting to happen, the sharing of strategic and operational information could be further improved.

Early progress, with some evidence of substantial progress was made on the dimension ‘evaluate’. Although it is relatively early in the project to draw firm conclusions, we have some early evidence of improvements reported by parents. All services provided are evaluated with standardised surveys, as well as with qualitative feedback. We do not continue to deliver services if the evidence does not confirm its (positive) impact.

The Luton Context

Luton has wide geographical variations in outcomes for children, in terms of child poverty, infant mortality, low birth weight, breastfeeding, oral health, childhood obesity, early education outcomes, social and emotional development, child protection and domestic abuse. The town has a very diverse community with over 130 languages spoken, and over 50% of children having English as an additional language. The 2018 Mid-Year Population Estimate states that there are currently 17,547 children aged under-five living in Luton.

Deprivation and Population Churn

In Luton it is estimated that 46 per cent of children (28,400 children) are living in poverty and Luton has the 7th highest rate of child poverty of all the local authorities in the country. This trend has been increasing since 2015. Approximately two thirds of children are living in poverty in the Biscot, Dallow and Saints wards. Biscot and Dallow wards are in the top ten wards in the country for the proportion of children living in poverty (Source: Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University). The population of Luton continues to change and using various data sources it is estimated that more than 50 per cent of the current population were either not born or not living in Luton at the time of the 2011 Census.

Ages & Stages Questionnaires

The Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) scores for the current cohort of children continue to show that the highest level of need at the 2 to 2 ½ year check is Communication with 114 children (6.7%) in the Developmental Concern category. The next highest category is Problem Solving (62 children, 3.6%). This trend is consistent with every term of data for the last two academic years having Communication as the highest level within Developmental Concern. The percentage in the Developmental Concern category increased from 6.6% in December 2018, 6.8% in April 2019, 7.2% in July 2019 and 7.7% in December 2019. As such, the current figure, albeit not at the end of the term as the other figures are, so subject to change, has shown a decrease to 6.7%.

Early Years Foundation Stage Outcomes

The proportion of children in Luton meeting the expected levels for communication and language is below national (Luton 80%, National 82%) as is the proportion achieving a Good Level of Development (Luton 68.4%, National 71.8%). The proportion achieving the Good Level of Development had been steadily increasing but in 2019 it decreased by 0.5 points compared to 2018 (68.9%). This has resulted in a slight widening of the gap between Luton and National to 3.4 points compared to 2.6 in 2018. Luton is ranked joint 126th out of 151 LAs, compared to joint 124th last year.

Prevalence of Speech, Language & Communication Needs

There is higher prevalence of Speech, Language and Communication needs in Luton compared to England. Up to 10,530 under-fives in Luton are affected, although most have needs which are transitory given the right support early on. There are complex underlying reasons for the higher rates in Luton, including higher rates of deprivation, more children with complex learning disabilities and poorer oral health. The rate of children with a severe learning disability, for example, is two and a half times higher than the national rate. Boys are more than twice as likely to be identified with Speech, Language and Communication needs in Luton compared to girls, a pattern which is similar to the rest of the country. Unmet Speech, Language and Communication needs impact negatively on educational outcomes and wider life chances.

Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

In 2019 there were 5,706 children and young people with special educational needs attending state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in Luton. This equates to 15% of pupils in these schools which is statistically similar to the England rate. There is a difference between the rates at primary and secondary schools, with 14.9% of primary pupils having a special educational need and 11.7% of secondary pupils (and 100% of pupils at special schools). Luton has a higher rate of special educational needs in primary schools than England, but a lower rate in secondary schools. In terms of recent trends, Luton has been relatively static in the number and rate of all pupils with special educational needs since 2015, though there is an increasing number and rate in primary schools and a decreasing number and rate in secondary schools.

The most common primary needs for pupils attending state-funded schools in Luton are Moderate Learning Difficulties; Speech, Language and Communications Needs; and Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

Plan

Vision, Strategy and Planning

The Flying Start Strategy provides the overarching strategy for improving outcomes for children from pregnancy to five in Luton. For the purposes of the Early Outcome Fund, a specific one year strategy plan was developed with partners for the transformational changes proposed. The Strategy was signed off by the Children's Trust Board in June 2019 to endorse the programme of delivery and provide the commitment of partner agencies. The strategy set out two key outcomes:

- a) to ensure significantly more children will by their fifth birthday, will have age-appropriate communication skills and will interact effectively with adults and children, resulting in better educational outcomes and improved employment opportunities.
- b) to provide a coordinated, needs based response to identified communication difficulties and to support children to effectively communicate with their parents, teachers and carers.

[Click here](#) to view the Early Outcome Fund Strategy, which has been branded as the Talking Takes Off Strategy.

A dedicated transformational team was established to deliver the strategy and a clear project plan formulated to drive the programme of change through project management arrangements and the Early Outcome Programme Board (See page 20).

Development of our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Speech, Language and Communication

A Speech, Language and Communication Needs Assessment was developed to provide the following:

1. an understanding of factors that affect Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) needs in Luton
2. to explore the wider determinants that make SLC more likely in some communities
3. to highlight key challenges and opportunities across the system.

A dedicated team in the Luton Business Intelligence Team (BIT) was commissioned to undertake this task.

The team set out to :

- describe the problem and why it matters, including an outline of the national picture
- highlight unmet need
- use local data to better understand who is most affected, where inequalities exist, and where there may be intervention opportunities
- understand local perspectives and barriers / opportunities relating to speech, language and communication needs
- use best practice evidence to explore how Luton can better approach the issue of speech, language and communication needs to make a real difference to people's lives

Why did the process work well?

The method used was standard needs assessment methodology². Historically lack of time, buy-in and direction have been notable barriers to successful completion of needs assessments. In contrast, this project was properly resourced from the outset, with a clear understanding that the analysis was only part of the project and that other people had a major part to play in ensuring the assessment 'did what it said on the tin' and was fit for purpose. Specific ingredients for a co-produced document were:

- designated project lead
- analytical lead, plus additional analytical resources
- broad analytical experience and a range of data sources
- expert input and a collaborative approach
- robust quality assurance process
- shared recommendation setting

The perception of the BIT that this needs assessment was a success was validated by the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) who noted the difference in the quality of this document compared to the 2015 Children with Disabilities Needs Assessment for Luton, and to other needs assessments within the region. The CDC came across the SLC Needs Assessment while conducting an analysis of JSNA documents pertaining to disabled children across the region as part of the [Delivering Better Outcomes Together](#)

² See step 2 in [Health Needs Assessment: A practical guide](#)

project. They noted that the Luton assessment “*is really comprehensive, it’s clearly co-produced and it’s by far the best example of a JSNA document [...] in the region*”.

What could have been better?

A good needs assessment is always dependent on the data and information that is available. While the team did manage to source a range of data to meet the requirements, they felt they could have developed a richer understanding with better data sources. Improving the intelligence yield through improved recording and reporting of data is an ongoing challenge for the council. Below are examples of themes that the team would have liked to have explored, but were not able due to local data limitations:

- the influence of Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) of young people who offend or are criminally exploited
- the continuing journey of older children who do poorly in early years, or whose needs were not identified or met when they were young, or those identified with behavioural difficulties in secondary education
- intergenerational effects

What did we learn?

Colleagues working on a well-directed project felt that the work was empowering and motivating for the analytical team. The experience showed the team the value of not trying to do everything themselves, thus freeing the team to concentrate on the analysis. At the same time, they reported substantial learning from the professionals that co-produced the document and those they liaised with throughout the process.

Links to the documents

[Luton Speech, Language and Communication Needs Assessment - Summary](#)

[Luton Speech, Language and Communication Needs Assessment - Full Version](#)

For more information contact Helen Vincent, Senior Intelligence Analyst,
Luton Council

Email: helen.vincent@luton.gov.uk

Commissioning of Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years

Over the year, the work programme with the Children's Integrated Commissioning team has focused on a number of elements of work. This work has been heightened by focused attention to the delivery of improvements to speech and language services for children with special educational needs and difficulties which was identified as an area for development in Luton's Written Statement of Action following a SEND inspection in February 2019.

Historically speech and language support has been delivered by two services in Luton, namely the Speech and Language Therapy Service which is commissioned by Luton Clinical Commissioning Group and delivered by Cambridge Community Service, and the Luton Special Educational Needs Service Speech and Language function which is funded by Luton Schools Forum and located in Luton Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate. While these two services have worked together at an operational level to agree delivery, there has been a recognition that there would be value for a more strategic agreement to be in place on how the services work together. It was recognised that to get the best outcomes for families there would be value in reviewing the current services and ensuring there was closer working arrangements for delivery across the system. A strategic partnership agreement is being developed which outlines a shared vision, shared outcomes and principles of shared working, as well as the agreed Graduated Response Model for speech, language and communication from age 0 to 16 years, and a shared training offer from both services. New governance arrangements are to be put in place, so this new agreement can be overseen by the Clinical Commissioning Group Service Development Improvement Plan Board and be reviewed on a regular basis.

While the Early Outcome Fund specifically required focused attention on the early years, Luton has focused on developing a whole systems response to children's speech, language and communication needs from 0 to 16 years in response to the SEND Written Statement of Action. In parallel to the early years work, a second work stream has been working on developing an offer for supporting speech, language and communication development from 5 to 16 years. This educational settings workforce offer for this age group is due to roll out from May 2020.

As specified in our programme of work, the newly developed early years communication and language pathway has been included in the Community Health Providers contract for 2020/21 and specifically is included in the section for the Health Visiting service and School Nurses. The expectations from commissioning for the Flying Start Children's Centres are also to implement a the new pathway as part of the delivery for 2020/21. A new early years speech, language and communication outcomes framework has also been completed (see page 48).

Workforce Planning and Development

The training offer

As part of our Theory of Change we focused on putting in place local arrangements for ensuring that the multiagency workforce had the right skills and confidence to deliver the Talking Takes Off strategy. A group was established from partners across the workforce and it was agreed that we would use the Communication Trust's Speech Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) when deciding on the training offer to be provided through Talking Takes Off. [Click here](#) to view the framework.

The SLCF clearly sets out what is expected from the workforce at a Universal, Enhanced and Specialist level. The training was mapped against this framework and core competencies were agreed upon for evaluation purposes. The use of this framework for training and evaluation was made clear to attendees at each training session.

To extend the reach of the universal training and to acknowledge the difficulties some services have in releasing staff, a train the trainer session was offered to create Communication Champions. Following attendance at the universal training, these Champions were provided with training and resources to enable them to deliver a session containing key messages from the universal training, back at their workplace. These sessions were typically delivered during team meetings. For a role description of the communication champions [click here](#). In total 49 champions signed up for this training.

In addition to the universal training, enhanced and specialist training was offered to the workforce. This included training on areas identified as key issues for Luton by the Speech, Language and Communication Needs Assessment. Our targeted training which was attended by seventy five professionals offered courses in enhanced support for communication and language development, selective mutism and bilingualism to support Luton's super-diverse population. Due to the higher numbers of children with SEND as part of our specialist offer we trained twenty eight staff in the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) training. Further bespoke training has been delivered to foster carers with children under the age of five to support their understanding and skills in supporting this vulnerable group. More information about the training on offer can be found on the Talking Takes Off website [click here](#).

Universal Training – Talking Takes Off Takeaway training

One of the aims of Talking Takes Off was to create change in the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the workforce across the system to support a Communication Friendly environment across Luton. To achieve this, free training was provided to anyone working directly or indirectly with families and their children, and to those working in the voluntary and community sector. Between October 2019 and March 2020, 449 people attended

the training.(Unfortunately our last universal training event, which would have taken our numbers to 480, was cancelled due to Covid 19). Attendees came from different sectors such as, but not exclusively, early years providers including pre-schools, nurseries and childminders, Children's Centres, the neonatal unit and paediatric nursing staff and teachers, community nursing staff, family workers from schools, library staff, early help staff, foster carers, social workers, adult learning, the voluntary and community sector etc. Staff from around 80% of all Luton early years settings have attended the Talking Takes Off universal training and 94% of staff in the Community Health Services 0-19 team have attended.

During the 2.5 hour training, attendees were supported to understand what typical communication and language development looks like; what to expect at each stage of language development and when to be concerned. Attendees were also provided with Luton specific information given the number of multi-lingual families and number of children with lower speech and language skills than the national average. Attendees were introduced to a new Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit to support early identification of speech, communication and language needs ([click here](#) to view the toolkit) and [click here](#) to view the new simplified pathway. Attendees were also given branded Talking Takes Off bags containing free resources to use at their setting which included practical information, advice and strategies for professionals and parents, including books, games and worksheets. These resources were agreed as useful to all sectors by a multi-agency panel.

Impact of the training on workforce development

To measure the impact of the training, attendees were asked to rate their understanding and awareness of SLCN, as well as their confidence in identifying and helping children with SLCN before and after the training. Attendees were asked to rate seven statements on a five point Likert scale from one (not at all) to five (fully) and included statements like "I feel confident using and promoting positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with" and "I am aware of positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with." The survey was designed based around the Communication Trust's Speech Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) as mentioned above. The survey also included an open ended question asking attendees to provide up to three examples of how they may use the learning from the training in their work. Data collection occurred between October 2019 and February 2020.

Results

The (anonymous) survey was completed by 93% of attendees. Average scores per statement were calculated and compared before and after the training. Scores ranged from one to five with higher scores indicating higher rates of confidence and

understanding. To determine whether the differences pre and post training were of statistical significance, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted using SPSS v22 software. The mean scores, standard deviations (SD) and test results per statement are displayed in Table 1. The results clearly illustrate that the aim of upskilling the workforce was successfully achieved as the scores post training were significantly higher than before training.

Table 1: Average scores before and after training

Competency Statement	Mean score (SD) Before Training	Mean score (SD) After Training	Significant difference
I understand what the terms speech, language and communication mean.	3.47 (.72)	4.68 (.48)	Z= -16.68 P<.001
I understand the typical stages in speech, language and communication development.	3.31 (.79)	4.58 (.52)	Z= -16.59 P<.001
I am able to identify when a child is not developing speech, language and communication as expected.	3.46 (.82)	4.50 (.56)	Z= -15.63 P<.001
I am aware of positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with.	3.39 (.85)	4.55(.53)	Z= -15.80 P<.001
I understand the importance of the role parents and carers play in their child's speech, language and communication development.	4.06 (.79)	4.83 (.37)	Z= -14.29 P<.001
I feel confident in identifying when a child is not developing speech, language and communication as expected.	3.41 (.84)	4.48 (.58)	Z= -15.75 P<.001
I feel confident using and promoting positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with.	3.34 (.88)	4.45 (.56)	Z=-15.55 P<.001

Planned use of training in the workplace

Responses to the open ended question ‘please provide up to three examples how you would use the training in our workplace” were collated and fell into 7 categories:

- Support parents to improve home learning environment, including supporting parents to use the language they are most confident in (e.g. “*to allow parents to understand their child and how to help and feel confident in doing so, giving ideas and strategies for parents to try in the comfort of their own home*”)
- Encourage others to attend the training
- Encourage colleagues to use the resources and tools
- Create more child-friendly communication focused setting/atmosphere in setting
- Use the screening tool to identity children who need additional support
- Be more aware of communication needs and style of children (e.g. “*encouraging, promoting more small group session to promote communication, adapt child's level of communication, e.g. lying on floor etc., discuss about an object, to get more conversation out of children*”)
- Support children ‘in house’ before referral to speech and language services, putting strategies in place, prior to any referrals.

For more information on the Talking Takes Off Training Offer contact:
 Susan Thomas, Early Years Consultant, Luton Council

Email: Susan.Thomas@luton.gov.uk

Lead

Partnership

There is a broad and active partnership in Luton which oversees the delivery of the Flying Start programme. This Board is accountable to the Children's Trust Board and then the Health and Wellbeing Board. A new Programme Board was established to oversee the delivery of the Early Outcome Fund Programme, which has senior level representatives from across the partnership. The Board met monthly across the year and provided the governance for delivery of the transformational change. This board has been supported through project management tools including a project plan, a risk log and monthly highlight reports from each project lead. [Click here](#) to see the Terms of Reference for the Programme Board and the Governance arrangements. In order to keep partners and professionals across the system informed about the Early Outcome Fund transformation work, a bi-monthly newsletter was also published circulated widely across the system. [Click here](#) to see the January 2020 newsletter.

Leadership

The Early Outcome Fund Programme Lead attended the Children's Trust Board on a regular basis to provide an overview for the programme and sign off of key documents including the strategy and workforce plan. The commitment to the delivery of the transformation has been positive and was particularly supported through the delivery of a training session for the Children's Trust Board members in September 2019 on the importance of speech, language and communication in the early years and the impact on outcomes for children. Children's Trust Board members were invited to become Talking Takes Off Strategic Champions and invited to attend the training. A specific role description was developed for this role. [Click here](#) to see the role description.

There has been an increase in the understanding of the importance of speech, language and communication over the year and this is a priority that is now sitting in both the refreshed Luton Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the developing new Children and Young People's Plan.

Strategic Leadership Commitment

As mentioned above, 14 members of the Children's Trust Board attended a one hour interactive training during which the crucial role of communication in child development was addressed as well as its impact on a child's future life chances. It was explained how children in Luton perform lower than the national average and how Talking Takes Off is working towards improving child outcomes and narrowing this word gap. This adapted

version of the universal training, as described in earlier sections, was delivered in September 2019. To encourage full commitment from the strategic leaders, the strategic champions were asked to complete a pledge form at the end of the training noting what their commitment would be and what they were planning to do to achieve this within the next week, month, and three months.

Ten strategic champions from various sectors (NHS including Luton CCG, CAMHS, Luton and Dunstable Hospital, Bedfordshire Fire Service, Bedfordshire Police and a range of strategic Council leads) completed their pledge demonstrating that speech, language and communication is a high priority within the wider Children's transformation work in Luton. The pledges were focussed on raising awareness within their organisation; encouraging colleagues and staff to attend Talking Takes Off training; and promoting the importance of SLC and Talking Takes Off. A summary of the pledges made is given below:

Pledges made:

- Promote the work and use poster “learning to talk” in Occupational Therapist areas and waiting areas
- Encourage staff to attend the Talking Takes Off training
- Promote Talking Takes Off via their organisation’s social media
- Incorporate Talking Takes Off and speech and language skills with the NHS Team
- Understand the impact of low language/communication skills on young people and how this may contribute to criminality
- Make sure that all Flying Start Children’s Centres are Communication Friendly within 12 months
- Arrange whole staff training to embed this approach within their daily practice for CAMHS practitioners

To assess whether the priority of speech, language and communication has started to change within the wider Luton’s Children’s transformation work, the strategic champions were sent a ‘mini survey’, three months post training, to assess if the importance of speech, language and communication has increased at strategic level and to follow up on the pledges they made. Questions included “What did you take away from the training? Has it changed how you think about Speech, Language, and Communication Needs?” and “Were there any barriers in carrying out your planned work? If so, could you please describe how you overcame them, or what you think needs to be done to overcome them?”

Four strategic leaders did respond to the ‘mini survey’:

- The Associate Director of Bedfordshire & Luton CAMHS added “Talking Takes Off” on the senior management team agenda for promotion, which resulted in incorporating relevant training for the wider staff team.

- The Chair of Luton’s Clinical Commissioning Group reported that the learning and initiative was shared with other strategic health leaders across the system. She has linked up Talking Takes Off with the Building Healthy Partnerships work which is funded via NHS England to support primary care networks to engage with communities. She is further seeking opportunity for Talking Takes Off to be part of a children’s protected learning time session for Luton Practices.
- A third Champion, stated she has continued to raise awareness through the maternity ward teams at Luton Hospital. She states that staff absences in the team have been a barrier in the delivery of her pledge.
- The head of the prevention and protection Fire and Rescue service stated that the training has made him aware of the consequences on future life chances for pre-school children who fall behind in developing talking skills. He recognises he was not aware how big the issue in Luton was and reported that the training has changed the way he thinks about this issue. After the training he arranged for relevant public facing community safety staff to attend the training. He also promoted Talking Takes Off in their newsletter. However, he identified lack of staff as a barrier in promoting Talking Takes Off.

Interviews with strategic leaders

To gain a deeper understanding of how Talking Takes Off may have changed the priority of speech, language and communication needs at strategic level, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three strategic champions (the Clinical Chair of Luton Clinical Commissioning Group, the Director for Children Services in Luton, and the General Manager of General Paediatric Surgery) and one local political leader who is also the Portfolio Holder for Children Services. Questions were related to the training (“Did you find the training useful?”), the Talking Takes Off model (“What do you think works well within the Talking Takes Off model?”), the workplace (“Has the priority of early communication and language development changed within your organisation since Talking Takes Off?”) and promotion of Talking Takes Off (“What have you done to promote Training Takes Off in your workplace/ setting?”) .

Each interview lasted between 12 and 21 minutes and were conducted over the phone. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim before being analysed. A narrative summary of the findings is given below:

All four champions were fully on board in raising the priority of speech, language and communication needs in Luton. The strategic champions viewed this priority as part of the wider ambition in Luton of eradicating poverty. The local political leader viewed child poverty as the biggest barrier for optimal child development in Luton and thinks early intervention, with a particular focus on speech and language, is vital. He stated that Talking Takes Off is a great initiative to work collaboratively in improving child outcomes

in Luton. This view was echoed by the other champions. The importance of understanding the critical role that speech, language and communication plays in the child's development, and how delays or speech, language and communication problems can negatively impact upon a child's future chances was emphasised during the training and regarded highly by the champions:

"When I think about the work that's underway, just to raise the ambition of, or to take forward the ambition of eradicating poverty, and when I think about speech, language and communication in relation to that, and part of the evidence base, then the speech and language ability of the children entering school has been, I think, is now a very prominent feature and the impact on their learning and how disadvantaged they are and playing catch up in terms of their future learning, is now much more broadly understood thanks to Talking Takes Off. The role of early intervention is key in relation to that."

The champions reported that although they were aware of the importance of speech, language and communication needs, they did not, however, appreciate the full extent of its importance. The training was rated as "transformational" and "eye-opening". The role-play task during which attendees experienced what it may be like to have speech, language and communication difficulties was rated as particularly powerful with a long lasting impact:

"I found it grounding you know to be sort of taken back to what it would feel like to have speech and language difficulties and communication issues. I think it was very important that key leaders across the organisations experienced that and if they are not cognisant of these aspects every day, then just to be immersed would help in their thinking and planning and just to be, to raise the profile of the impact of communication difficulties. I have seen that to be maintained, the cognisance and awareness through a number of presentations and discussions, so I think there has been a certain definite increased awareness raising"

Although the interviews took place, just three months since their training, it was evident that early communication and language development was on the champions' agenda. The strategic champions all provided evidence of promoting Talking Takes Off and encouraging other operational leaders to attend the Talking Takes Off universal training. One champion, who manages the paediatric ward, has arranged training more specific for NHS staff, to be delivered in-house. The Director of Children's Services ensures that Talking Takes Off is on the agenda during strategic meetings and has used promotional material such as posters and leaflets in her office to not only remind herself of Talking Takes Off messages, but also others.

"It's (Talking Takes Off) certainly much more embedded in my thinking and therefore in my practices. Raising awareness of contributing factors to the need and risks concerning the vulnerability of young children, I am now mindful of it a lot of the time".

Early communication and language development was not only prioritised within their organisations' strategic plans but also linked with existing strategic plans. The Director of Children's Services, for example, noted that Talking Takes Off coincided with their SEND Written Statement of Action. She stated that Talking Takes Off is running closely aligned with the requirements of the Written Statement of Action. She mentioned there is the "broader awareness raising" and the responsibilities of Luton Council and Luton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to increase the Local Offer. She explained that, therefore, people's understanding and commitment is further supported by Talking Takes Off.

It was too early in the programme to evaluate whether the new communication and language pathways had been embedded throughout the organisations. However, according to the clinical lead of CCG, Talking Takes Off and the new communication and language pathway enables earlier and simpler identification of potential delays or problems and should allow quicker intervention. She noted the pathway was easy to use and could foresee no issues in its implementation.

What have we learned?

One of the aims outlined in the bid was to have strategic children's services leaders in place and to be able to demonstrate that speech, language and communication needs is a high priority within the wider Luton's Children's transformation work. The strategic champions experienced (and anticipated) no barriers in the promotion and delivery of Talking Takes Off, although, unsurprisingly, lack of time was given as a barrier in fulfilling the pledges to this date. Similarly, despite several reminders it was challenging to receive updates on the strategic pledges. Nevertheless, as per the Theory of Change, one of the project's goals was to ensure that strategic leadership and governance would be fully committed to Early Years Speech, Language and Communication strategy, which the strategic champions clearly demonstrated.

Community Ownership

Service user's engagement

In the original proposal to the DFE we had planned to work with a partner organisation to develop the role of parental researchers and parental advocates. Due to a range of factors this did not develop and so we developed alternative strategies to ensure we had strong parental engagement through the programme.

We worked with different groups of the community for different elements of the programme. For the work on communication and marketing of key messages we met with parents in a range of forums. This included meeting with ICAN Ambassadors (who are also parents), grandparents who attended a South Asian Elders network, parents who attend adult or family learning sessions and parents who attended our annual Picnic

in the Park event. Parents in the Flying Start Children's Centres were also consulted as the Talking Takes Off resources were developed.

For the development of the communication and language pathway, we specifically worked with Luton's Parent Carer Forum at a number of stakeholder meetings and also directly consulted with parents at coffee mornings to ensure we had regular feedback.

Community Assets

We have been working in local communities to develop priorities and actions to support the importance of communication and language in the early years. We are working with those communities where the outcomes for communication and language was identified as lower than the Luton average. Our first community meeting was held in January 2020 in the Farley ward; this meeting was attended by 48 people including parents, local VCS groups and professionals. The group identified a wide number of local priorities they would like to work on and these included running Talking Takes Off Coffee mornings for local parents in early years settings; holding a music, poem and storytelling session at the summer festival on the estate; as part of work to create more open spaces for the community install family friendly trails and benches to encourage communication and story telling. Parents were also keen that professionals reviewed the local Child Development Clinic so there is more time for parents to be involved in learning about the home learning environment when they come to the clinic.

This community focused project also linked with the national Building Health Partnerships, a NHS initiative which is about working within a local community with the voluntary sector and community members on an important health and wellbeing issue. The opportunity for this collaboration came from one of our strategic Talking Takes Off champions who identified the potential synergy between Talking Takes Off and Building Health Partnerships. To date it has been valuable to have strong NHS involvement in a community based initiative and this new collaboration will be explored in year two. A follow up meeting was held in Farley in February 2020 and the community are developing a range of projects and are working closely with the local GP practice.

Picture from the Farley Talking Takes Off Community Meeting January 2020



A second community meeting was held in March 2020 in Northwell, another ward in the town, which was identified as an area for focus. This event was equally productive with a 25 parents and professionals attending the meeting to discuss their views of what could make a difference for them in supporting their children's communication and language development. This group were interested to explore the use of online resources and the opportunity to arrange a trip for families which would have pre and post trip activities focused on using communication and language skills. The work in both communities will continue to be developed in 2020/21.

ICAN Communication Ambassadors

What is an ICAN Ambassador and what value can they bring?

Luton Council has worked with ICAN, as an organisation, for many years through various programmes. Because of a trusted relationship, we have been fortunate to develop over time a train the trainer model for the delivery of ICAN training. The implementation of ICAN Ambassadors locally has been part of the Flying Start vision and further developed through the Talking Takes Off programme. The ICAN Communication Ambassador's role supports families in raising awareness of speech language and communication needs in children from birth to five years. ICAN Communication Ambassadors are trained to disseminate information on typical communication development, how to spot if children are struggling and where to go for help and support (i.e. health services or the Flying

Start Children's Centres). ICAN Ambassadors share information with family and friends and use their informal networks to reach families at places they regularly attended in their communities such as the shopping centre, libraries, doctors surgeries and schools. ICAN Communication Ambassadors add value by engaging with hard to engage families. The ICAN Communication Ambassadors offer a range of languages spoken, however the criteria to become an Ambassador is rooted in having a sound knowledge and understanding of English to undertake the training required to distribute the key messages.

Numbers of ICAN Communication Ambassadors who have received the ICAN training

Within the Early Outcomes Fund bid, we noted our original nine ICAN trained Ambassadors and stated we would increase this number to 30. We have surpassed this number and have trained a combination of professionals and community members and now have 74 trained individuals. The ICAN volunteers are from a wide range of culturally diverse backgrounds and all strongly promote the message that parents should speak the language they speak best to help their child's language development.

Of the 74 individuals who have been trained, we have 30 ICAN Ambassadors who are highly active in their engagement with their local networks and wider communities. They will also support at events and share messages, helpfully often in community languages, and they engage well with Flying Start evaluation processes to allow us to count hours engaged and the messages they give.

Evaluation of the Ambassadors hours and impact of their work

Communication Ambassadors frame their volunteering commitments alongside their personal lives, for example their work hours, school runs and social events. This allows for a flexible approach in supporting the sharing of key messages within a community context. Evaluation of their work is collected through hours engaged with parents or at events and messages shared. (Please see Appendix 2 for more detailed evaluation) Personal feedback from the Ambassadors is also gathered, as often this is easier to capture as the experience of the training and the activity increases confidence and knowledge. Many Communication Ambassadors have gone on to paid employment and therefore recruitment to the role is ongoing.

Case study

Mrs A approached Flying Start to offer her services as a volunteer. Mrs A had already attended parenting courses and felt she had the skills to empower families. Mrs A was originally a maths teacher in her birth country of Pakistan; however, she was unable to practise here. Mrs A used to regularly attend Stay and Play sessions at the Children's Centre with her own children; it was there that she developed an interest in early learning and development.

Becoming an ICAN Ambassador has enabled Mrs A to use the information learnt to help her own children. Mrs A is able to tell other parents about her role and encourage them to become volunteers. Mrs A shares the activities provided by ICAN to parents to support home learning and developing communication skills. Mrs A is bilingual and understands the importance of promoting the key message; use the language you speak best. Mrs A has been able to spread positive messages in the community and has engaged with the local early years providers delivering coffee mornings. Mrs A has also connected with the local school and now regularly supports there.

Mrs A says “If I can help a single child through my volunteering I will consider myself successful”

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Deliver

Supporting Parents

While the Early Outcome Fund was not primarily funding the delivery of interventions, we worked with our Flying Start Children's Centres to review the delivery of messages about the Home Learning Environment and decided that one change we wanted to make was to the delivery of our PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) Learning Together sessions. The PEEP Learning Together parenting programme is about supporting the important role parents have in their child's learning and development. The programme focuses on the importance of the Home Learning Environment and provides practical means for parents to interact with their child. For more information [click here](#).

The Children's Centres have delivered PEEP at a universal level for a number of years. During the development of our communication and language pathway, it was decided that the Children's Centres would continue to deliver activities such as Stay and Play and Messy Play with strengthened home learning messages, and we would use the PEEP sessions to become part of our Early Years Communication and Language pathway at the lower targeted level. Our Children's Centre offer and how it supports Talking Takes Off can be viewed in the Children's Centre brochure. [Click here to view.](#)

Talking Takes Off for Communication - a new 6 week intervention for parents

Starting in October 2019, new Talking Takes Off workshops for parents were set up aiming to improve communication skills for parents and young children who may have been identified as needing some early help. 'Talking Takes Off for Communication' has been specially set up for emerging communication and language needs with a focus on two year olds and is delivered through six workshops. Parents are referred to this group by health visitors and nursery nurses when there is an identified need for some additional support. The evaluators reviewed the two groups which were running simultaneously at Flying Start's Children's Centres in Luton South and Luton Central in November and December 2020.

Findings from the evaluation

To explore whether Talking Takes Off has made an impact on the home learning environment, parents who attended more than four sessions were invited to take part in a short semi-structured interview to explore their views on the sessions, and the impact attending the group has made on their child's speech, language and communication skills. The interviews were conducted during the final session. Parents were provided with an information sheet and were advised that participation was voluntary and confidential. After written consent was obtained, the interviews were audio recorded. A semi-structured interview guide was used and included questions like "Have you noticed

any change in your child's speech since attending the sessions?" and "Have you used anything from the sessions at home?"

Six parents were interviewed (three from each setting). All parents were female and from various ethnic backgrounds: English (n=2); Polish (n=1); Chinese (n=1); Indian (n=2). There were five boys and one girl, ranging in age from 24 to 35 months (average age 29.3 months). Three mothers were referred by health visitors after the two year health review revealed that the child may have a delay in speech development. One mother was referred by her doctor and another was referred by a speech and language therapist. One mother was referred through the Children's Centre stay and play sessions.

The interviews were transcribed and coded by the researcher. Using framework analysis, three broad themes were: impact on the child's development; impact on the home learning environment; and content and structure of the sessions.

Five out of six mothers noted an improvement in their child's speech as a direct result of the sessions. (*"In six weeks, since being here I have seen an improvement, absolutely. Numbers.. he counts to 10 now"*). The mothers thought that that focus on the importance of talking with their child was the main reason for this improvement. They also reported how singing and reading made a real change as one mother explained: *"Another thing I picked up is music sessions. We did a session here which was about music and how that can develop speech and actually I was really really surprised with how that has worked with Lucas as well... and how yeah and the flow of the words ... has actually helped him a lot in his speech."*

Mothers also noticed an increase in their child's confidence in talking to other children and adults. They attributed this to the small group size and knowledgeable staff. One mother described how the knowledge of the staff in how to communicate with her child made a real difference, and noted that they were able to get him to talk more, which was something she had not been able to do at home yet. The mothers reported that due to the small group size they were able to focus more on their child and that it provided an opportunity to really listen and talk with their child as opposed to bigger play groups where children run round together. The structure of the sessions also helped their children with social skills. One mother, for example, said that sitting together and having a snack together at the table helped her child develop social skills.

Only one mother did not notice a direct impact on her child's speech and language development. Her son is tongue-tied and she was advised by her speech and language therapist to practice certain exercises. Her expectations of the group where therefore not entirely met, although she did note that the songs and games were good for her son's English and gave her ideas to use at home.

Impact on home learning environment

All six mothers reported improved skills, knowledge and/or behaviours in helping their child with their speech, language and communication needs as a result of the sessions. All six mothers said they used the games and songs they learned during the sessions at home, and that this positively impacted on their interactions with their child. One mother explained, for example, that she uses the “what’s in the box” game to talk with her child about what items are in the box. Another mother added that not only the games but also learning new skills of how to talk to your child has helped her communicating with her child:

“There is a lot that I have learned from these sessions. So much and uhm just actually taking time, taking time sitting down playing.. and I do that anyway but actually do more of it. Uhm and as I say breaking things down for them in a childlike way, I wasn’t used to that and simplifying words and just being out and seeing other parents and Lucas playing with other children and engaging with other adults is so nice.”

The underlying message of the importance of talking with your child was clearly understood by all parents: *“uh yes I speak a lot, because of them. They make me know I have to always talk. You have to always talk to them”.*

Three mothers said they felt more confident in talking with their child because of the sessions. They thought that the way they now interact with their child has contributed to their child’s improvement. A few mothers reported that their child also enjoyed other activities such as art and crafts and how this would help communication at home by talking about it. One mother explained how her daughter would show her father what she has made during the sessions which would provide an opportunity to talk with her. The mother said they would not normally do this and that this was a result of attending the sessions.

What worked well?

As mentioned earlier, the mothers said they particularly enjoyed the small group size of the sessions. They argued that one of the reasons for their child’s improvement was the focused attention they were able to give to their child. They noted how in a small group there was more opportunity to really talk and listen to their child. This ‘one- on- one’ was very well received. One mother was also very pleased that the staff were able to help with her other child and that she was therefore able to provide more attention to her son. The mothers all said this was a major benefit of the sessions compared to traditional ‘stay and play’ groups.

Mothers also noted the social support element of the group as a benefit, and enjoyed meeting other mothers. All six mothers stated that they enjoyed the social aspect for their child too. They reported how useful it was for their child to interact with other children and

adults. No real suggestions for improvement were made apart from one mother who suggested that it would be nice to take the children outside and use the outside environment as another opportunity to talk to their children.

What did we learn?

The feedback from the parents was largely positive. In line with the Theory of Change, the findings suggest that the children not only showed an improvement in their speech, language and communication skills, but that parents felt better equipped and empowered to support their child with their speech, language and communication skills through knowledge, skills and behaviours. Parents were more aware of the importance of talking with their child and learned skills to talk to their child such as simplifying language and creating opportunities for talking with their child. Parents also reported behavioural changes such as using the games and resources at home with their child.

Case Study:

Z was identified following his Ages and Stages Questionnaire at age two, where he scored low (30 Amber) in his Communication section. Mum was contacted and invited to attend the TTO communication group.

During the first week of the sessions, the Quick check list was completed. Z scored quite low in the area of Use of language. Due to this the Use of language check list from the communication tool was completed. This then indicated where the facilitator's focus should be in regards to promoting Z's communication development. It was also noted that Z attended the session drinking milk out of a bottle. This was addressed by the facilitators. It was explained that using a bottle beyond the age of 12 months could result in him struggling to develop speech sounds made the front of the mouth including p, b, t, d, s. Mum was not aware of this and was keen to learn more. Mum was very receptive to the advice that was given to her and at week two mum approached the facilitators to say that she had stopped giving Z a bottle as much and that she was hoping to give up the bottle altogether. Facilitators gave appropriate recognition to mum for this. After week six, Mum stopping Z from having a bottle of milk throughout the day was a great unexpected outcome.

Z's mum felt that she was very confident at the start of the session, as the session's progressed Mum realised that there was so much more to her child's language and communication development which she had not realised. Z is now observed to be much more interested in books and will often enter the room and find one to look at. Z has started to say some familiar words that appear in rhymes and is beginning to learn the actions. Mum and Z have been encouraged to attend stay and play sessions to continue to build upon Zs vocabulary and experience with books and rhymes.

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Coordinated Working – Developing Speech, Language and Communication Screening Tools and Pathways

Early Years Screening Tool

One of the priorities of Talking Takes Off has been implementing a screening tool for use by early years professionals including settings, childminders, Children's Centres and Health Visitors. Practitioners told us that they wanted a method of screening communication skills to enable them to implement targeted support in a timely manner, to focus on early intervention and to inform referrals to specialist services.

In the initial bid we had planned to use the Wellcomm tool, however we wanted to ensure that this was the best choice for Luton. In order to decide which screening tool would best suit our local need we started with a review of existing tools, including national products and local resources and tools that could be developed, to look at advantages and disadvantages and to examine what we as a town wanted from the screening tool.

A working group was set up which included local professionals who would be using the tool and a range of early years, education and SEND team representatives. A local project that was using Wellcomm also attended to discuss and share their experiences of using it. The working group discussed the review and the available tools at length. This proved to be a learning point for the project as there were a lot of views amongst the working party and the group had to work together to consider what would work as a whole moving forwards, rather than what individual teams had already been doing. It was decided that a locally developed tool would allow us the opportunity to adapt the tool to local need, review and develop the tool for years to come and negate long term cost of renewing subscriptions, therefore supporting sustainability of the project after the funded year. Working with the range of professionals also showed us that people have different amounts of face to face time with the children and we wanted to ensure that the tool was accessible to all regardless of their contact time with the child by having the ability to screen at a basic level before extending to a full screen for those with more time.

The local Speech and Language Therapy service were developing a screening tool for use across the wider local area of three local authorities including Luton and it was agreed that using this tool would mean consistency for children and professionals who may move areas or live on borders and also complement local pathways of support. The Talking Takes Off Speech and Language Therapist played a key role in the development

of the tool, regularly taking ideas and drafts back to the wider working party for review and comment. As a result of feedback from the working party, the screening tool was developed into a toolkit. There is a detailed introduction that includes the local pathway of support options available and information on wider local services and support. There is also a resources section with a wealth of advice and support strategies for use by professionals and/or parents that can be photocopied and shared. Once the draft was finalised, the toolkit was launched in a pilot phase, with a range key professionals feeding back on their experiences of using the toolkit and how it could be improved. The pilot phase happened in all three local authority areas at the same time to maximise feedback and ensure that it was used with a range of children representative of our local demographic.

The toolkit was finalised in January 2020. Professionals have been introduced to the toolkit in the Talking Takes Off universal training with an activity and explanation of the tool. Those who attended the training whilst the toolkit was in the pilot phase were made aware that they were using the draft version and have now been sent the final version. Moving forward, we intend to roll out specific professional training on using the toolkit, bespoke training at team and network meetings and develop a guidance video for professionals, which will sit on the local Speech and Language Therapy website alongside the toolkit. The local Speech and Language Therapy referral forms have also been amended to reflect the professional's use of the toolkit. As it is primarily an online tool, there is negligible cost to professionals as screening forms can be printed as needed. The toolkit will be reviewed annually to make any amendments needed, which will also support long term sustainability.

Local Pathway of Support

It was always understood that we had a range of support available for communication development in Luton, however we knew that the support was provided by different teams and that there was not consistent awareness and understanding of the different services and how they worked together. We asked our wider professional networks to tell us what support they offered or were aware of locally and began to plot this into universal, targeted and specialist levels of support. This was taken back to the Programme Board for initial comment and review. Once the toolkit was drafted, we were also able to add in when the screening tool might be used and consider referral routes that could be followed. At this stage, we identified a gap in our higher level targeted support, so new interventions were planned and added which are to be delivered by our new Speech and Language Therapist post.

We also took the pathway to a number of stakeholder events for review and comment at each stage in its development. It was shared with local parents at engagement events, specifically the Parent Carer Forum, to ensure that the pathway was relevant, clear and accessible to them. Feedback was taken on board at each event and the pathway was

amended accordingly. Changes made included the use of colours to highlight the different levels of support and ensuring that the signposting options listed were available to all children, not just for example those in settings. [Click here](#) to see the new Talking Takes Off Early Years Communication and Language pathway. Parents also told us that they wanted the pathway to be available to both professionals and parents so that they did not feel excluded; however to ensure the information is accessible to all, we have worked with parents to develop a simpler version for use as needed. [Click here](#) to see the Talking Takes Off leaflet which supports parents with their child's communication and language development.

The new pathway is now embedded into the toolkit to demonstrate support options and referral routes. It contains hyperlinks which follow through to the Local Offer for further information and details on how to access the intervention/support as needed. This allows us to ensure the pathway is kept up to date and available to all.

GP Screening Tool

In consultation with the parent carer forum, we had strong feedback on the role of GPs in supporting and signposting for communication needs. In particular, parents reported that they had visited their GP with their child at age 18 months when they had social communication concerns and were advised to 'watch and wait'. Analysis of Speech and Language Therapy referrals also showed that GP referrals were the most likely to be returned at triage, usually due to insufficient information. Feedback from GPs was that they found the referral system difficult, that they are limited in the time they have to gather information and they have limited ways to obtain further information when referrals are returned.

We contacted Speech and Language Therapy services across the country for information on how they work with GPs and had feedback from one area that they use a specific screening tool. Using this idea, we were able to develop our own GP screening tool which reflected local Speech and Language Therapy referral criteria and local services. This idea was reviewed by local GPs and the IT services and in order to progress the work, we had a proposal submitted and approved by the local Clinical Commissioning Committee. We were able to continue consultation and testing of the tool with local GPs throughout its development. We also visited Protected Learning Time and Practice Managers events to discuss and gather feedback on the tool.

The tool allows GPs to ask specific questions about the child's communication development to place their needs in a red, amber or green category. Red children are referred to Speech and Language Therapy via a new, streamlined electronic referral, which has also been a local NHS priority to implement. Amber children are referred into local Flying Start services, where the referral is picked up by a Speech and Language Therapist and families are signposted into appropriate targeted interventions. Green

children are classed as universal and signposted to local Children's Centre services. All families are given a printable advice sheet by the GP with details of local websites, enabling immediate advice rather than a wait for further contact. The screening tool is completely online for GPs, meaning easier access. Ultimately, it will allow for early advice and support and more effective referral and signposting.

The tool was launched in early March 2020, supported by publicity to make GPs aware it is now active and offer bespoke training as requested to ensure that the tool is embedded into practice. Due to electronic referrals being a priority for the local NHS services, there has been a great deal of interest and as a result it is planned that the tool will be rolled out to the wider Bedfordshire area in the near future.

[Click link](#) to the Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit

[Click here](#) to see the new Talking Takes Off Early Years Community and Language pathway.

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Data Collection

Development of the Luton Assessment Tracking System (LATS)

Overview

The LATS system was developed in Luton as a result of a collaboration between Fletcher Blake and Luton Council. It has been used by the majority of early years providers in Luton to track and analyse the attainment and progress of children accessing their early years entitlement in registered early years provision.

LATS is a simple electronic system to record practitioners summative assessments of children's attainment in a way that is efficient and user friendly. It uses the stages in the Early Years Outcomes framework as an indicator of children's attainment in the 17 Early Learning Goals from the Early Years Foundation Stage. Early years settings typically record their assessments throughout the year. The system allows providers to monitor the attainment of children individually or in groups. It also allows providers to run reports to monitor the rate of progress of children on an individual or group basis. The system

also includes the SEN Developmental profile which supports settings to record small steps of progress for children who have additional needs. There is also the facility to record other information such as interventions, key person, well-being scales, demographic information and more. The system is designed to record professional judgements and does not require practitioners to record unnecessary evidence. It allows leaders in settings to evaluate provision and identify trends to highlight areas that may require further attention and support.

Luton Council have worked with providers to ensure that the attainment and progress of children accessing their funded two year old place is monitored closely. It is recognised that this cohort of children are at risk of lower outcomes later in their educational career, and that access to funded places for eligible two year olds is intended to improve educational outcomes.

Luton Council use LATS to analyse the attainment and progress of funded two year olds on a termly basis in order to identify areas of greatest need and inform the targeting of support and strategies. It has supported ongoing relationships between early years providers and Luton Council and ensured a more consistent approach to assessment across the early years sector. This has been achieved through regular training, site visits and moderation programmes which have encouraged a culture of peer to peer support and sharing of good practice. The system has also been invaluable in providing evidence to inform the provision of early intervention services; such as Flying Start Children's Centres and early years advisory support to settings.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile outcomes show that disadvantaged children in Luton have better outcomes than disadvantaged children nationally. The focus on the attainment and progress of funded two year olds is a key part of the strategy to understand and meet the needs of the youngest children.

Improvements made

- Developed mandatory fields to ensure that there is a more complete data set to improve analysis
- Developed guidance and the operating system to reduce errors and improve consistency and comparability of data
- Improved reporting on children tracked through the SEN Development profile
- Improved reporting facilities for settings
- Improved reporting facilities for strategic analysis
- Changed the way that the data is hosted to make it securely accessible to other Council datasets

Moving forward

Whilst there is a move away from focussing upon data as part of the Ofsted inspection of schools and settings, providers still need to know and understand the attainment, progress and needs of their children. By developing the LATS system to become more efficient it supports settings to monitor the progress of their children whilst reducing the workload for practitioners.

Local Authorities have a duty to improve early years outcomes. The benefits of early intervention are well documented and in order to support this, understanding of the needs of the youngest children is essential. Through effective partnerships between early years providers and Luton Council, attainment and progress information can be shared and used to inform and review local strategies.

Fletcher Blake and Luton Council are working in partnership to develop a package of support to providers and other Local Authorities to enable them to use the software and develop a system of collecting and analysing information about the attainment of young children in order to inform and review local strategies.

For more information about LATS and how Luton uses this tool contact Carol Wylde, School Improvement Adviser (Early Years), Luton Council

Email: Carol.Wylde@luton.gov.uk

Use of Strategic Data

Overview

As part of our proposal to the DfE we wanted to be able to use data more strategically to help us understand needs and in particular, interrogate data to help us understand better how we could support more vulnerable families around early communication and language development. The data work stream has focused on understanding how we can make better use of Council and partners' data. In the Council, data is currently used for performance reporting and to understand our population, however much of this is produced manually which restricts capacity, self-service and timeliness. The opportunity to link with the Early Outcome Fund programme to look at the use of strategic data was very timely as the Council had also made the decision to work towards making data more easily accessible and timely through auto-production, and assist our journey towards becoming an intelligence led council. This work stream was led by the Business Intelligence Team (BIT) in the Council.

What we did

Using data better is a long-term project for the council and the first area the team worked on was the development of a Master Data Management system (MDM). This involved developing an index of all citizens in Luton so they can be tracked through their interaction with the council, which would allow profiling of citizens and identifying those who match pre-determined criteria.

Indexes are important in data governance as they are a trusted baseline that other data can be compared against and are therefore essential to any data strategy. The council already had an address index (the gazetteer) and through the citizen's index the Business Intelligence team was aiming to create the same approach for people. It allows the use of data collected from a variety of services to be used, in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, to better understand our citizens and their needs. Central government is encouraging use of indexes to create better data governance.

A small number of councils have developed MDM using a range of different approaches, so it is possible but it is a challenge. Much of the project involved the classic 'unknown unknowns'. This work was a new area for the council and required an iterative approach as there was not a clear model to follow. Officers in the Business Intelligence team had never undertaken anything like this and are still developing their skills in this area.

Challenges

There have been a large number of challenges to overcome to deliver the project, including some very specific technical issues. As the council has not previously undertaken a lot of transformational data work, the systems and processes were not in place to develop MDM. Much of the work of this project has been to put these in place, using software already available to the council that was not being fully utilised. There have also been technical challenges around the council's legacy database systems, which were a challenge to integrate as they are older systems. However, it has been a positive learning curve for officers as they have been able to explore the many ways of connecting and transferring data.

Data quality is a challenge for all organisations and is one of the difficulties for delivering the Index. Other barriers have included developing the use of our reporting software, skills development for both council staff and its third party IT contractors, a cultural approach by managers and officers who are used to working in a certain way with data and a lack of knowledge of what technology allows us to do. Officers did not have a robust understanding around the complexities of the council's data, including what is held, the structure of the databases it is held in, how the data can be linked and what is the best technology to use to link data, particularly with the older legacy systems. To manage this the council has restructured the BIT team to introduce a data and systems team, to lead on active management of data, data engineering, data quality and the

technical aspects of data. A data governance board has been established with representation from services. This has included the third party IT provider, who have been encouraged to get involved in the council's data projects.

The aim of the MDM project is to develop a unique golden record for each citizen, mirroring the approach of the NHS which uses the Spine to hold national patient data. Creating this from the council's data has proven to be a slow process, with only eight per cent of records linked confidently. Our aim is to link 50% confidently, so there is still some way to go. A short cut would be to instead link to the NHS dataset. The CCG in Luton covers Luton as a borough almost exactly and the NHS data is generally high quality with wide coverage, as most people will use the NHS. There are data protection challenges to using the data, but discussions have been positive with regards to this. If the council is eventually able to link to this data the project would move forward rapidly. It would also create a richer data picture, linking health, social care and a wider council dataset.

What worked well?

A new data governance board has been established to manage the project and provide the strategic oversight required for such a corporate project. To date the BIT has downloaded and started using Microsoft BI stack, created a dedicated server space for the index and created connections to bring together data from seven council systems to establish the index, including LiquidLogic social care systems for adults and children, Academy, Census, some customer service data and open housing. This has meant that officers better understand the council's data, the technical requirements to create an index and explored various approaches to data linkage. This has transformed how BI data officers understand the council's data and what can be done with it, which has positively impacted how the council has managed linking data to create dashboards and automate reporting.

The creation of the data and systems team has also been a success, creating a team that specialises in data and was a major step forward.

We have also been able to bring into the Index the data from our Luton Assessment Tracking System to add extra information about children who are in our early years settings. Work has been undertaken with our Community Health Provider to strengthen our Information Sharing Agreement which will mean that we will get regular electronic information around new birth data and outcomes from the Child Development Checks regarding the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Other Information Sharing Agreements are being explored to understand what is possible.

What could have been better?

The process has been slow and currently as stated above, only eight per cent of the data has been linked. These are people the BI team are confident are correctly linked. Because

this approach is new to the council a very conservative approach has been adopted as officers were concerned that poor linking would undermine confidence in the project.

What did we learn?

There were three main learning points from this project:

- 1) There is a skills gap, with not enough knowledge across the council on data and with much of the approach focusing on technology rather than data and how it is used. BIT has focused on how to grow the skills of its officers, making particular use of the apprenticeship levy. This has centred on officers in the data and systems team and has been expanded to other BIT officers and an officer in the third party provider of IT services to improve their skills in this area too.
- 2) The council's culture around data and its uses needs to be modernised to exploit opportunities. Data is now a workstream in the council's transformation plan and funding has been agreed to explore what is further required to develop the council's work in this area.
- 3) Data governance needs to further improve, while concurrently the council needs to be more willing to accept concepts like fuzzy matching. Better data governance can help to build confidence in this. The data and systems team are leading on data quality, but it requires a whole council approach and is part of the transformation work stream.

What will we do next?

The MDM is not yet using National Insurance Number data, which would add an extra layer of data quality in the systems where it is held and will be the next step of the project, though few systems are collecting this as standard. We are also exploring connecting to Mosaic, which would produce anonymised profiling using postcodes to provide generalised data.

We have linked with another council who have created MDM, so we can learn from how they overcome issues such as data quality. Their approach is interesting in that they have limited the amount of data they have included, to exclude lower quality data, which we are considering copying. The BIT and Technology Managers recently viewed software which would take the MDM and connect it to council systems to bring up a known citizen that officers could choose to use to populate their records. This is a very practical application of the system and is something the council will consider.

The MDM project is an ambitious project and our experience over the last year has shown us that managing data needs to be a whole system approach to ensure the council has high quality, standardised and usable data, where possible in conjunction with other parts of the public sector to create a greater whole. We will continue to focus our attention on using the MDM to provide strategic insight to support our work in the

early years and enable us to better understand our targeting of programmes and services for families with young children as part of our Flying Start strategy.

Strategic data we have completed outside of the MDM

In order to develop our understanding and use of strategic data sets alongside the above project, BI officers and an early years consultant worked manually to check various data sets to understand what could be extracted from current data the Council holds.

The cohort of children who were assessed on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) in Luton in 2019 were compared to the children who received their funded education entitlement in Luton in the previous year. Those children who could not be matched either did not access their entitlement at all or did so in another Local Authority. The characteristics of these ‘missing’ children were compared with the whole cohort to see if there were any obvious differences in the uptake of the funded education entitlement.

Pupils from the ‘White other’ ethnicity group and those who speak Romanian as their first language had lower levels of uptake of the education entitlement. Ethnicity and language data was missing for a number of children and it was noticeable that children for whom this information was not available also had much lower uptake of the funded education entitlement. Take up was lower for pupils in the South ward of the town.

Conversely, pupils from the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities and those who have English, Urdu or Bengali as their first language had high levels of take up of the funded education entitlement. Take up was relatively high in the Biscot and Dallow wards.

As it is known that being disadvantaged correlates with lower outcomes, further analysis was carried out on the characteristics of pupils who did not achieve the Good Level of Development (GLD) but were not classed as disadvantaged. This analysis suggests that pupils whose ethnicity is ‘any other White’ or Pakistani are more likely to have low outcomes, even if not disadvantaged. The same is true for pupils whose first language is Urdu, Romanian or Polish. Pupils from the White British or Bangladeshi communities are more likely to have good outcomes, as are those whose first language is English.

With the children who are disadvantaged taken out of the cohort, the children with lower outcomes tend to be from Round Green, High Town and Icknield. There are fewer non-disadvantaged children with low outcomes from Biscot, Dallow and Farley. This is interesting because these wards do have higher proportions of children with low outcomes overall but this suggests that the vast majority of these are also disadvantaged. As is often seen in analysis of EYFSP results, summer born boys typically have lower outcomes and Autumn born girls typically have higher outcomes. This pattern persists regardless of whether the children are disadvantaged.

Outcomes for children on the Troubled Families programme

Of the children who are in the Troubled Families programme (known as Stronger Families in Luton), 57.5% achieved the GLD compared to 68.4% of the Luton cohort therefore this group have much lower outcomes.

For more information on the MDM and Citizens Index contact Zoë Bulmer, BI Manager, Luton Council

Email : Zoe.bulmer@luton.gov.uk

Information for Families

A main element of our programme was to increase the information available to parents about the importance of communication and language in the very earliest years of life and about their important role in supporting their child's development. We worked with parents and the wider community to find out their views about the best way to engage with families recognising the diverse needs of families within the town (see page 24).

Branding

Flying Start already had a strong brand for families and professionals in Luton. We decided to develop a brand for the activities we were doing as part of the Early Outcome Fund that parents and professionals would relate to. After considering a number of options, it was agreed the programme would be called Flying Start – Talking Takes Off and branding was commissioned to support the communication and marketing plan.



Web and social media

During the programme we developed a Talking Takes Off webpage on the Flying Start website which includes a wide range of information for parents including universal and targeted messages and information. [Click here](#) to see the web page.

A social media campaign using the Flying Start Facebook page and the Flying Start Children's Centre Facebook page has been actively posting messages twice a day. Google Analytical data shows 1412 unique views on the parental information site from July 2019 to February 2020.

We have also made sure that the Luton Local Offer has been updated with a clear information about services for families that support early language and communication development. The new early years communication and language pathway includes hyperlinks to all the services which are listed on the Luton Local Offer [Click here to review](#). A video in Polish has also been developed to help parents to understand why communication and language development is so important in the early years and where to get support if they have any concerns. [Click here](#) to view the video which was made with our ICAN Ambassadors. We plan to do further video's in Urdu and Romanian in the future.

Key messages

At the beginning of the programme the Board agreed five key messages for sharing with our parents and these have been developed into a series of posters. [Click here](#) to see all the posters, some which have now been translated into community languages.

- Talk and have fun with me
- Talk and listen
- Talk and play
- Talk and show
- Talk to me

These posters have been published and disseminated through the universal training and through partners who are displaying them in their premises. For example, the posters and information about Talking Takes Off are shown on the screens in Primary Care providers throughout the town.

We have also been able to secure celebrity endorsements for Talking Takes Off providing local role models for supporting the messages into the community. These have included Naydia Hussain (Great British Bake Off Winner who came from Luton), Jason Reynolds (an England wrestling champion from Luton) and Luton Town Football Club.

The new early years communication and language pathway

As mentioned above, all information relating to the new early years communication and language pathway has been added to the Luton Local Offer site. A parent friendly information leaflet has been developed to help parents understand about what is expected when in terms of their child's development in relation to communication and language and where to get support and service if they have any concerns. [Click here](#) to see the parent leaflet. The Flying Start Children Centres brochure has also been updated and includes information on Talking Takes Off and emphasises the services in the Children's Centres that will support communication and language development. [Click here](#) to see the brochure.

Launch event and using the media

On the 10 October 2020, we held a Talking Takes Off launch event for parents in the main shopping centre. Parents and young children enjoyed a range of activities linked to the book 'Dear Zoo' including story times and music sessions. A range of professionals including Flying Start Children's Centre staff, Health Visiting Staff, Library staff and Speech and Language Therapy staff were also on hand to talk to parents and families about the project and share key messages. The Chief Executive of Luton Council, Robin Porter, read Dear Zoo to children and parents and BBC Look East came along to film the launch and talk to members of the team about the project.

Talking Takes Off launch 10 October in The Mall Shopping Centre with the Chief Executive of Luton Council reading Dear Zoo



During the year we used the local community radio and regional television to gain publicity for Talking Takes Off and used a range of community publications to promote the programme.

Luton a Communication Friendly Town

Communication Friendly Award

Luton has had a Communication Friendly Award for a number of years and during this year we have reinvigorated the award as part of Talking Takes Off. Twenty two settings have signed up to working towards this award this year; eight of the settings were identified by Early Years strategic colleagues and the other thirteen were settings who came forward themselves as they wanted to get involved.

The Award consists of three parts including:

- The Environment
- Adult Interaction
- Setting Development

Settings are encouraged over a six-month period to work to collect evidence to demonstrate their actions against each element of the programme. During this year an early years consultant has worked with the settings to support their completion of the award. A multiagency panel will be formed to assess achievements and this is due to meet in June 2020. The Award lasts for a two year period and then it is expected the setting will need to reapply for accreditation. A specific Communication Friendly Award has now been developed for roll out in the Flying Start Children's Centres from April 2020.

For more information contact Kay Gayle, Early Years Consultant, Luton Council

Email: kay.gayle@luton.gov.uk .

Look for a Book during National Story Telling Week

A pilot project was established to test the idea of sharing books in a community in the north of Luton. The project was based upon models seen in other areas of the country and called 'Look for a Book'. Two primary schools in the area were asked to collect pre-loved books for young children over a three week period. These books were collected and after sorting by volunteers they were then given to a range of settings with under-fives, whose children would be involved in the hiding of the books in the local community. The books were placed in plastic bags and included a poem and some information about the importance of early communication and language. Using a range of communication methods, this project was then promoted to the community for families to go out to find a book, to take home and enjoy and then hide again.



Talking Takes Off “While you Wait” Boxes

Parents provided us with the feedback that they would like more information available to them in the public spaces whilst they wait for their appointments. As part of the project, we developed a branded box with the Talking Takes Off messages and a pledge. Forty places across the town agreed to host the boxes with the books and activity cards provided by the project. Each place that has a box has been asked to sign a pledge and display this along with a branded window sticker. The range of settings which has agreed to have a box includes; customer services in Luton Council, Active Luton (the local sports and leisure provider), local clinics such as dental and audiology, the Luton and Dunstable Hospital, the Child Development Centre, Children’s Centres and Community Centres.



For more information about Luton as a Communication Friendly Town contact Colette McGeough, Luton Council

Email: Colette.McGeough@luton.gov.uk

Evaluate

A Speech, Language and Communication outcomes framework

Work on an early years speech, language and communication needs outcomes framework has been progressed with partners and describes at a universal, targeted and specialist level, the outputs and short, medium and long term outcomes we will be measuring. This work will support commissioning going forward and the data scorecard will be reported to the SEND Programme Board to provide headlines on the transformation work of Talking Takes Off.

Family access and experience

We have now included some questions for parents in our annual Children's Centres satisfaction survey to collect information about parental views. The questions ask about parental understanding about how to support their child's communication, speech and language development at home; the benefits from attending a Children's Centre to support communication and language development and where to get help if they have any concerns. The survey which is available online or as a hard copy for all parents attending the Flying Start Children's Centre. We usually get 600 surveys completed. This year will form a baseline for us to use going forward and we will repeat these questions on an annual basis.

Interventions being delivered as part of the new Early Years Communication and Language Pathway are being evaluated. Methods include pre and post course questionnaires for parents to examine changes in their levels of knowledge, confidence and concern as a result of the intervention and also satisfaction scores rated by parents. Further evaluation of the new interventions will look at the numbers of children accessing the service, what the initial concerns were and the outcome, including advice and signposting required to support the child and their family. For an account of parental views on one of the new interventions, please see section 'Deliver' on page 29.

As part of work for the Written Statement of Action for SEND, a new survey is being planned to understand parental experience about services and will include the following questions which will add to our understanding:

- that speech, language and communication needs are understood by families and that parents
- settings are satisfied or very satisfied with the support they receive for this child's speech, communication and language needs.

Feedback from the workforce following attendance at the Talking Takes Off Takeaway training at 3 months post training.

As part of our evaluation we were keen to understand the impact the training has had on staff who attended over time. In the section ‘workforce planning and development’ we discussed the training on offer and how it helped us achieve the aim of ‘upskilling’ the workforce. To evaluate whether the described changes in knowledge, skills and behaviours were sustained over time (see page 17), a follow up survey was sent out via email three months post training. Due to the project’s timeline, only participants who received training between October and December 2019 were sent a follow up survey. This follow up survey also included questions relating to how useful the training has been and included open ended questions asking how the training has been used in practice. All responses were anonymous. The survey was sent to 178 participants of which 54 completed the survey, meaning a response rate of 30.3%. The majority of respondents worked in Children Centres (n=19) or Early Years Settings (n=15). Other sectors included Education (n=5), Early Help (n=4) Social care (n=1) Foster care (n=1) voluntary sector (n=2) or ‘other’ (n=5).

Competencies

Participants were asked to rate the seven statements regarding their confidence, knowledge and understanding of SLC needs as described earlier. Three months post training, the majority of participants reported to feel either ‘fully’ or ‘somewhat’ confident in their knowledge and skills to identify SLC needs. For example asking if participants feel confident identifying when a child is not developing speech, language and communication as expected, 48% of respondents answered ‘mostly’ and 40% answered ‘fully’. The mean score and standard deviation (SD) per statement is provided in Table 2. The scores suggest that the increase of the workforce’s competencies remained similarly high three months post training.

Table 2: Competencies measured three months post-training

Competencies Statements:	Mean score (SD) After Training	3 month follow up (n=50)
I understand what the terms speech, language and communication mean.	4.68 (.48)	4.44 (.54)
I understand the typical stages in speech, language and communication development.	4.58 (.52)	4.28 (.57)
I am able to identify when a child is not developing speech, language and communication as expected.	4.50 (.56)	4.30 (.58)
I am aware of positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with.	4.55 (.53)	4.31 (.68)
I understand the importance of the role parents and carers play in their child's speech, language and communication development.	4.83 (.37)	4.71 (.47)
I feel confident identifying when a child is not developing speech, language and communication as expected.	4.48 (.58)	4.26 (.72)
I feel confident using and promoting positive strategies to support the speech, language and communication development of children I work with.	4.45 (.56)	4.28 (.70)

Use of training and resources

Five questions related to how participants have used the learning from the training in their work. The results showed that 64.6% have used the learning in their work since the training; 79% have shared the learning with colleagues; and 86% have recommended the training to others. More than half (52%) of the respondents had used the resources provided in the take away bags. The ‘building blocks of communication’; ‘screening tool’; ‘speech sound wheel’; and ‘ICAN Early Talkers activity cards’ were most commonly named as having been used in the workplace.

When asked in more detail how they had used the training or resources, respondents provided examples of how they used the resources to support their communications with parents (e.g. *“I was able to identify a child who was developing below in speech and language. I encouraged and supported the parent how to encourage speech at home. I used the resource pack to support this”* and *“I’ve incorporated the checklist into my*

setting for all children. We've used the lovely free books / cards and we've been using the laminated sheet when reading stories out loud to each other."

The attendees also provided examples on how they used the learning during the training at their workplace. As one respondent stated "*I have become more relaxed about my non English speakers pronunciation of words understanding that this will come with time. I no longer correct words pronounced wrong I only model the correct pronunciation. I pay more attention to whether the child is listening and is attentive.*" The training also encouraged attendees to become champions and to attend additional training. Respondents reported how they used the learning as guidance for planning and developing a TTO for communication group. Almost all of those working with families stated they used the training and resources as an aid when having discussions with parents around speech and language development/delay.

Train the Trainer Model

To ensure sustainability of Talking Takes Off, a 'Train the Trainer' model was adopted through training communication champions to deliver training and promote Talking Takes Off to their peers, colleagues and staff. 24 communication champions attended a two hour workshop and were provided with materials to share with their team, including a PowerPoint presentation.

To evaluate the (potential) success of the 'Train the Trainer Model', semi-structured interviews were carried out with eight communication champions. These interviews also aimed to explore the impact of TTO in the workplace and how the resources and training have been used in practise.

The interviews took place either over the phone (n=3) or face to face (n=5) and lasted between 18 and 40 minutes (mean 22.00 minutes (sd=8.8)). Participants included nursery managers (n=4); children centres managers (n=2); preschool teacher (n= 1) and an early years advisor (n=1)

A semi-structured interview guide was used covering five topics relating to the impact of Talking Takes Off in their workplace; the promotion of Talking Takes Off; their views on the training and toolkit; and barriers in the delivery and promotion of TTO. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed before being analysed using Braun and Clarke (2010) recommended steps for thematic analysis.

The following main and sub themes were identified:

Table 3: Interview findings

Main theme	Subthemes	'Quote'
Impact of TTO	Confidence and empowerment	"It is giving the staff the confidence you can do some of this stuff, you don't just have to send them to speech and language so it is empowering them as well"
	Change in priority	"We are all so much more aware of the importance of communication now"
	Pathway	"Because the staff is more aware of what to look out for, and how we can help initially... we not all going to send them speech and language. We are trying to do more in house"
Advocating TTO	Train the Trainer	"I debriefed all the staff when I came back from the training and showed them what it was and the resources we were provided and will give proper training during next staff meeting "
	Promotion	"We have arranged a coffee morning with the parents and that's going to be around talking takes off"
Barriers to TTO	Parents	"I think just the parents. I don't know what a suggestion could be, put all the parents in training. But I don't know. I think they're quite hard to reach."
	Lack confidence	"I think one of the barriers for the staff would be the fact that they lack confidence with that comes to the toolkit"
	Consistency	"It's just making sure all the staff will be using it"

Impact of Talking Takes Off

The impact of TTO in the workplace was predominantly evident in the raised confidence and feelings of empowerment of the communication champions. All champions reported they felt confident in delivering the TTO messages and training their staff and/or colleagues. They reported that it increased their understanding of what was expected of

children at different stages and found the ‘speech and sound wheel’ and the ‘building blocks of communication’ particularly useful tools for their own understanding but also to use in their communication with parents and staff.

Although some settings were already working towards ‘communication friendly’ status, they said the training reaffirmed the importance of speech and language. For others, the priority of speech and language had increased since attending the training.

The champions had received a draft version of the referral pathway in December and although some confusion existed about it not being the final version, those who are working directly with children stated it was easy to understand. Champions noted that staff at their settings were now more likely to work with the child before referring onto a speech and language therapists. Two champions stated that it would have been useful to learn more about what speech and language therapists do to have a deeper understanding of the referral pathway. This will be covered in future training. Although not much time has elapsed since receiving the pathway and the interviews, the champions expected to see a drop in referrals to specialised services.

When asked if TTO has made a difference to the children in their setting, the champions noted that more time was required to provide a clear answer. The pre-school and nursery teacher, however, already noticed a difference in their children’s speech and language development. They argue this is because they use a lot more speech specific games and activities with the children as a direct result of Talking Takes Off.

Advocacy of Talking Takes Off

All champions actively promoted TTO through newsletters, social media, and posters at their setting. As mentioned above, few settings aim to become communication friendly settings and therefore included ‘communication zones’ in their setting to promote and encourage speech and language even further.

The champions either encouraged their staff or colleagues to attend the training or would share the learning during staff meetings and information evenings. A few settings organised parent coffee mornings or evenings and dedicated time to explain TTO to the parents and why and how their children may be screened. They also use this time to explain the importance of speech and language to the parents.

All champions reported feeling confident in delivering the training after having attended the ‘train the trainer training’. They either already used the PowerPoint presentation provided or intended to use this soon. Champions used staff meetings to deliver the training. Some champions did notice that there were some inconsistencies during the training such as video clips that they were not given. One champion noted how she would have liked an evaluation form to hand out to her staff in order to receive feedback on her delivery of the training.

Some champions pointed out they would have found it beneficial to have practised using the screening tools during the universal training. They mentioned that some staff felt slightly unsure how to use the screening tools and would have liked more guidance and practise working through the toolkit. Some confusion also existed around the materials provided during the training. Some resources were still in draft format and although all attendees received an email explaining this, some noted that they were unsure which materials were in draft version and which ones ready to be used. Some champions, however, noted that the materials provided were easy to follow and did not express the need for more practise or clarification. Full and specific training on using the toolkit will be offered in year two of the project.

Barriers to Talking Takes Off

There was a mixed response regarding the role of parents in the TTO model. It was pointed out by some nursery managers that getting the parents on board can be challenging and that because the children may spend fifteen hours a week at nursery, it is vital that parents share the understanding of the importance of speech and language. Some champions felt that parents see speech and language as the responsibility of the nursery and that this is a barrier in the delivery of TTO. They also noted that parents do not acknowledge a delay in their child's speech because of incorrect beliefs such as 'my child will catch up' or 'boys develop later, it is ok'.

Other champions, on the other hand, noted how parents are often concerned about speech and language and found the TTO resources useful in relieving parental concerns about their child. They used the speech sound wheel to explain what is expected of children at different ages. As mentioned in earlier sections, champions tried to actively engage parents through information evenings or by sending TTO activities home with the children to encourage speech and language activities in the home environment.

The high number of multi-lingual children in Luton was highlighted as a challenge by the champions but all noted that they felt supported by TTO to encourage parents to speak in their native language.

A couple of champions reported that lack of confidence among staff using the toolkit may be a barrier in the delivery of TTO as highlighted earlier. The champions also expressed the need for consistent use of the TTO resources to ensure sustainability of the project.

What we learned

All communication champions are passionate about advocating the importance of speech and language development in young children in Luton. Although speech and language was already on the radar for some, the increased focus and awareness are seen as a positive step towards helping children have a better start in life.

The train the trainer model is proving successful although some confusion exists about earlier versions of the pathway and toolkit. It should be noted that after the interviews were conducted, all finalised material was sent out to those who attended the training. Also, based on the feedback of the champions, future networking meetings are arranged so that champions can share best practise and learn from each other's experiences as well as have the chance to clarify any questions they may have about the resources or TTO in general. This should also support the sustainability of TTO.

Overview of the System Change in Luton over the year

Over the year, we have seen exceptionally strong partnership working and a willingness across the system to focus on the importance of communication and language in the early years both at the strategic level and at an operational level. This work, which we called Talking Takes Off, sits under the Flying Start programme and so had a boost from the established partnership working already in place. Furthermore other local policy drivers included a Written Statement of Action for our SEND inspection which highlighted improvements were needed to support access to Speech and Language Therapy services and a focus corporately on eradicating poverty in Luton by 2040.

Strategic leaders have understood the importance of communication and language as vital skills for all children and we have successfully ensured that this issue is a priority in our new Population Wellbeing strategy 2019-2024 and the forthcoming Children and Young Peoples Plan. We have been able to make significant inroads into upskilling the multiagency workforce based on the Communication Trust Competency Framework and offered universal, targeted and specialist training. The evaluation from our universal training Talking Takes Off Takeaway workshops both immediately post-delivery and 3 months following training shows significant changes to knowledge and skills. Our Talking Takes Off champion model is growing and offering additional capacity to spread the messages across the wider workforce. A new Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit has been developed and launched through the universal training.

We developed a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for speech, language and communication to understand the needs for our children. Working with our Children's Commissioner, we are aligning our Special Educational Needs team who have a speech and language therapy specialism within their workforce with our community provider of SALT services. We have developed a speech, language and communication outcomes framework, which will support commissioning going forward and allow us to understand the impact of our transformational change.

Working with the community and our Parent Carer Forum has meant that we have involved parents in the development of resources and the new pathway in a meaningful way. We have developed and implemented a Talking Takes Off communication and marketing strategy, supporting the importance of the Home Learning Environment and promoting key communication and language messages across the community. Having a diverse community some resources have been developed in multiple languages and we have continued to grow our ICAN Ambassador model of volunteers representing the communities in Luton who provide local people with our key messages.

Sustainability of Talking Takes Off

Partners have considered how to ensure the transformational work that has been undertaken this year can be continued going forward. As well as developing a sustainability plan, which was agreed at the Board, work has been done with partners to consider what elements of the work can be embedded as core business going forward. A year two Talking Takes Off work plan was signed off by the Board and will form the basis for ongoing work during 2020/21.

Additional capacity has been secured to support the programme, which includes a dedicated full time speech and language therapy post for fifteen months. This post has been funded by Flying Start in Luton Council to provide capacity to continue to embed the work started during 2019/20. In particular, the postholder will focus on continuing to deliver the Talking Takes Off training offer alongside other workforce trainers from the early years consultancy team and the Special Educational Needs team. They will also be offering bespoke training to partners who were unable to attend the training including community midwifery, staff from the Child Development Centre and CAMHS practitioners. Furthermore they will lead on work to embed the new Early Years Communication and Language Toolkit in practice and support the delivery of the new targeted interventions as part of the early years communication and language pathway. Work is to continue on providing bespoke training to foster carers and social workers working with children under five years. Our Talking Takes Off Champions, who have been trained to deliver key messages about communication and language in their workplace will be supported through termly network meetings. Building in the key messages into other relevant training across the system is also being explored.

A second post has been secured for one year, to employ a Community Liaison Officer to support Talking Takes Off (with a potential to extend for a further 3 years). This post will primarily engage parents who may not wish to access mainstream services, in the longer term supporting children's speech communication and language development. The post holder will work closely with the Flying Start Volunteer Officer to recruit additional ICAN Ambassadors and encourage translation opportunities for families for whom English is an additional language. This post will also support the work of the two Talking Takes Off Community groups which are developing and will be closely connected with our Flying Start Children Centres.

Our Flying Start Children's Centres remain a central focus for the delivery of the universal and targeted offer to parents and we will evaluate the impact of the new interventions that have been introduced. Working closely with the 0-19 community health services, a key focus will be on working with parents to support the importance of the Home Learning Environment for parents and the value of take up of the two year old offer. Work with our Adult Learning colleagues to support families with Family Learning is being explored and

further opportunities to work with Library Services including the use of apps via the library is to being looked into.

The Community Friendly Award will be rolled out across settings and we already have interest from a number of settings to sign up for 2020/21. We are working with our sponsorship team to explore opportunities to create communication friendly spaces and trails in our parks and open spaces alongside our colleagues in the parks department.

Our Talking Takes Off Communication and marketing strategy will be continued by Flying Start and we will continue to focus on the important use of social media.

Work will continue to improve the strategic use of data across the system with the development of our Citizens Index and the development of Information Sharing Agreements to support this work and help us have better population data to inform our planning needs. Our Luton Assessment Tracking System, which is now much further developed, is now at a stage to share with other Local Authorities who may be interested in purchasing it to help them track children's development at a setting and population level.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Early Intervention Foundation Maturity Matrix For Speech, Language and Communication in the Early Years results from pre EOF and at the end of the year

KEY ELEMENTS		PROGRESS LEVELS			
		① Basic Level	② Early Progress	③ Substantial Progress	④ Mature
PLAN	1. Strategy	Addressing SLCN in the early years is recognised as important but has had little impact on planning	Partners collaborate to analyse data on early years needs and outcomes, including SLCN	A multi-agency early years strategy is in place, with a clear imperative on SLCN	The early years strategy has been reviewed and refreshed, taking account of impact
	2. Commissioning	Single agency commissioning for early years, but commissioners recognise the need to collaborate to impact on SLCN	The local authority and CCG are working towards joint early years commissioning. Work is underway to pool their budgets	Commissioning is aligned to the early years strategy. Investment in early years services is a local priority	Joint commissioning for early years, including SLCN, is extensive and routine. Shifts in investment to early childhood intervention
	3. Workforce Planning	Limited understanding of who in the workforce can impact on SLCN and what their learning needs are	Initial workforce mapping underway. Speech & Language Therapists have key role in training the wider workforce	There is a strategy for building early years workforce capacity & capability including mentoring skills for SLCN development	Workforce development is a priority & supervision on early intervention is the early years, including meeting SLCN
	4. Partnership	Some partnership dialogue on early years & SLCN but no governance	Identified partnership group responsible for early years goals	Partnership group having positive impact & driving social plan	Influential and effective partnership group
	5. Leadership	Increasing awareness of importance of SLCN	Some senior advocates for early years and SLCN	Active buy-in to early years goals at operational & strategic levels	Senior leaders speak with confidence about SLCN
LEAD	6. Community Ownership	Children and families are consulted in general	Family champions involved in advocacy & support	Families engagement strategy and commissioning	Peer support and community delivery are prioritised
	7. Services & Interventions	Some key services are judged to be underperforming	Key services are good & improving. Shared early years pathways for babies developed	All children receive the mandated Healthy Child Programme checks and take-up of entitlements is high	Coherent early years services. Coherent portfolio of evidence-based interventions
	8. Information & Data	Commitment to information sharing but there are gaps	Some information sharing on across key early years services	Information flows routine and timely	Families access up-to-date and accurate service information
	9. Outcomes	Recognised that SLCN are important to measure	Early years (including SLCN) outcomes framework in development	Families generally have a smooth journey through services	Outcomes show consistent improvement
EVALUATE	10. Using & Generating Evidence	Evaluation is recognised as important	Stakeholders are involved in generating evidence on maternity and early child development	Local leaders and decision-makers are skilled and confident users of evidence	A common evaluation framework is used across early years services

Key

Yellow shading was the scores in January 2019

Green shading was the scores in February 2020

Appendix 2

ICAN Ambassadors evaluation

Feedback from ICAN Communication Ambassadors; parents feedback

Do you know more about children learning to talk?		
Yes	132	94%
No	8	6%
Totals	140	100%

Do you know where to find more information if you have concerns?		
Yes	131	94%
No	9	6%
Totals	140	100%

Which resource have you found most useful?		
Chatter Matters	2	1%
Ready Steady Talk	17	12%
First Words	1	1%
Learning to Talk	6	4%
Talk Together	11	8%
Stages of Speech	5	4%
All	32	23%
No comment	66	47%
Totals	140	100%

Do you do anything differently with your child now?		
Yes	93	66%
No	47	34%
Totals	140	100%

If yes, please explain here:		
He was very shy before now he's much better		
Read books		
I'm asking my child more questions		
Wait for a response instead of answering for her		
The examples to encourage language development		
Speak in more than 1 language		
Extra attention		
Reading story books		
Read books		
Play games		

Speak own language
Bengali speak
Speaking more slowly and clearly making sure child understands
Talk to them all the time
Play group
Stay at home mum
Brilliant scheme
Full time employment don't have time
Have to work time is limited
Spend more time
My son is autistic so he needs intense attention
Talk and listen more

Any other comments?
Good books
I now know about this
Good books
I already do many of these things, as that is what is done at school/nursery. It is good to be reinforced that I am doing the right thing
The volunteer was really helpful and easy to talk to, Talking to volunteer about communicating with my child
I know where to go to if I need help
That these resources are available and is helpful
Given some good reading material
Jackie was very helpful
Lovely explanation about the importance of child communication

Information from the ICAN Communication Ambassadors on where they have shared messages

Location	Total	%
Early Education	164	52%
Social	66	21%
Businesses	20	6%
Health	20	6%
Public Spaces	46	15%
Total	316	100%

Who spoken to	Total	%
Family	264	84%
Local Business	3	1%
Settings	40	13%
Health	9	3%
Total	316	100%