

March 2025

Early Years

Professional Development Programme

Early Years Professional Development Programme (Phase Three)

Final Evaluation Report



Funded by



Department
for Education

Delivered by



Education
Development
Trust

In partnership with

Speech and
Language UK 
Changing young lives.



Anna Freud
building the mental
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next generation

About Education Development Trust

Education Development Trust's purpose is to increase the life chances of individuals by improving education and skills outcomes. EDT operates wherever the organisation can have an impact, delivering bespoke solutions to support anyone, anywhere. EDT has over 1,000 team members globally and leverages its strong and dedicated technical expertise to design and implement evidence-led solutions in partnership with clients.



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Executive Summary

The Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP) was the third iteration of a Department for Education-funded programme with the goal of advancing early years practitioners' skills and knowledge. It formed part of the government's Early Years Education Recovery Programme to provide support and guidance to the early years sector to address the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The programme provided support to practitioners to:

- Improve skills to support children's development in Communication and Language.
- Provide an understanding of the theory of child development in Early Mathematics.
- Develop skills to support children's self-confidence, relationships and self-awareness through expertly developed Personal, Social and Emotional Development training.
- Improve engagement with parents and carers to support the home learning environment.

The programme consisted of a blend of online self-study eLearning and facilitated webinars, in which early years practitioners (EYPs) met with a Programme Trainer and other early years professionals on a weekly basis.

Reach

A total of 10,000 EYPs were recruited into the third iteration of the EYPDP programme across four cohorts. EYPs were based in all 153 Local Authorities across England, and worked in a range of settings, from group-based nurseries to individual childminders operating in domestic premises. The EYPs who completed at least one entire module worked with a total of 118,783 children aged two to four, with almost 15,000 of these children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Impact

At the end of each module, EYPs completed a survey providing feedback on their experiences in completing the module, in addition to progress made in knowledge and confidence. EYPs also completed an endline survey once they had completed all content. The feedback from practitioners was overwhelmingly positive in all aspects of the programme, with key highlights from EYP feedback outlined here.

98%

report feeling more
confident

98%

report feeling more
knowledgeable

93%

**achieved or exceeded
expected outcomes**

94%

**enjoyed sharing with
other EYPS**

95%

report being **satisfied** or
very satisfied with the
programme

94%

**feel motivated to
continue working
as an EYP**



About the programme

The Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP3) was a high-quality training programme covering Communication and Language, Early Mathematics and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED). The programme was aimed at the early years workforce on a national scale (England only) as part of the broader Early Years Education Recovery (EYER) package, building on the two earlier phases of the programme.

The overall objective of the programme was to equip participating Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) with the skills and tools they need to provide high-quality support and teaching on Communication and Language, Early Mathematics and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) to the children whose learning has been most impacted by Covid-19, enabling children to catch up when they are in settings and for EYPs to be able to refer children to the right services, if required. This national programme was available in all 153 Local Authority areas, targeting settings with high levels of disadvantaged children aged two to four, whose learning had been most affected by Covid-19. Programme delivery spanned two years, during which time high-quality professional development was delivered to 10,000 EYPs in England over four cohorts. The first cohort of practitioners commenced learning in February 2023 and the final cohort in April 2024.

The programme was available to pre-reception practitioners from schools and private, voluntary and independent settings (PVI), as well as childminders.

The programme consisted of a blend of online self-study eLearning and facilitated webinars, in which practitioners met with a Programme Trainer and other early years professionals on a weekly basis. The programme would take an individual practitioner 60 hours to complete over an eight-month period, with a maximum twelve-month completion period. The content of each module is outlined in the image below. At the end of each module, practitioners also received mentoring support from their Programme Trainer and participated in online webinars to discuss how they would implement and embed what they had learnt.

Communication and Language units	Early Mathematics units	Personal, Social and Emotional Development units
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding typical language development 2. Creating communication supportive environments 3. Achieving high quality interaction 4. Measuring progress, identifying needs 5. How language supports behaviour and wellbeing 6. Building partnerships with parents 7. Embedding good communication and language in your setting 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Counting 2. Cardinality 3. Measurement 4. Pattern 5. Shape 6. Space 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding personal, social and emotional development of children aged 2–4 years 2. Helping children manage emotions and relationships 3. Helping children process trauma, loss and disruption 4. Understanding good practice in engaging with parents 5. Staff wellbeing

Evaluation approach

The internal programme evaluation approach was centred on measuring programme activities and outputs, and short-term outcomes as noted in the Theory of Change below.

Early Years Professional Development Programme: Theory of Change

Aims and objectives

- The programme will be aimed at improving practitioners' understanding and skills in supporting the development of children between the ages of 2 and 4.
- The training ensures broad skills in: 1. Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) 2. Early Mathematics. 3. Personal, Social and Emotional Development of those 2-4 year olds.

Aims and objectives

- Following the initial training, the intent is to expand the reach of the current Early Years Professional Development Programme (EYPDP) by continuing to target those in areas of disadvantage.
- To respond to the impact of COVID-19 by specifically addressing children's personal, social and emotional development (PSED) needs.

Inputs

1. Funding to deliver EYPDP3 programme and agreed activities
2. Content development in early language, mathematics and PSED
3. Marketing and promoting EYPDP to potential candidates via Local Authorities

Activities

1. Online delivery of the programme to 10,000 EYPs
2. All three modules of the CPD programme are delivered in full by end of March 2025
3. Quality assurance monitoring and evaluation

Target Outputs

1. Recruited 10,000 Early Years Practitioners (EYPs)
2. Delivered training in 153 new Local Authorities (LAs)
3. 95% or more of the EYPs complete the training within 12 months
4. Improved knowledge, skills and confidence via self-report measurements (for at least 80% of the EYPs)

Short-term outcomes

EYPs:

1. Improved knowledge and skills
2. Increased motivation and confidence
3. Improved practice
4. Increased collaboration with peers

Long-term outcomes

1. Improved retention of EYPs
2. Improved quality practice in early years
3. Improved children's welfare and learning outcomes

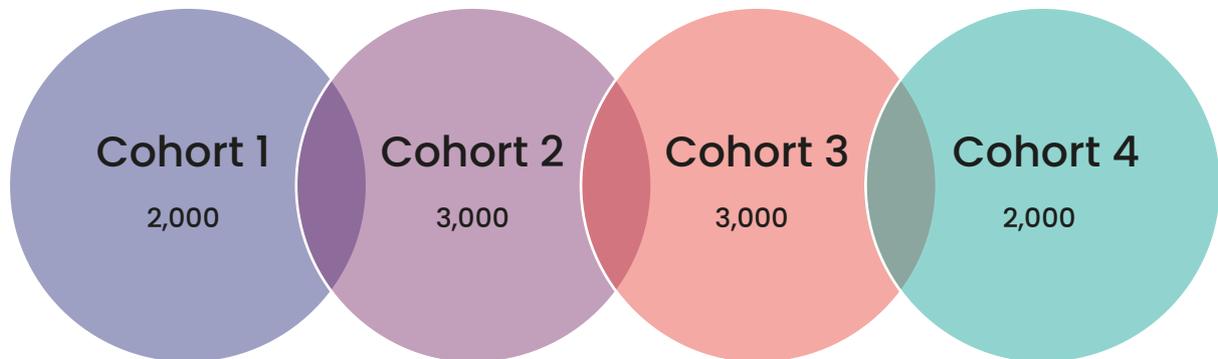
Assumptions and context

- Target settings from more disadvantaged areas via LAs facilitated through LAs
- Access to technology for online modules
- Similar quality training is provided in all facilitated webinars across three subjects

Short-term outcomes were measured through surveys at baseline, at the end of each module, and at the end of the programme. The surveys were embedded into the practitioner learning journey to maximise the data. The surveys asked practitioners to reflect on the knowledge and confidence gained through completing the module, the application of their acquired knowledge and skills, and their experience of participating in the programme.

Key findings: programme reach

The recruitment targets were met for each of the four cohorts, culminating in 10,000 practitioners being recruited onto the programme.

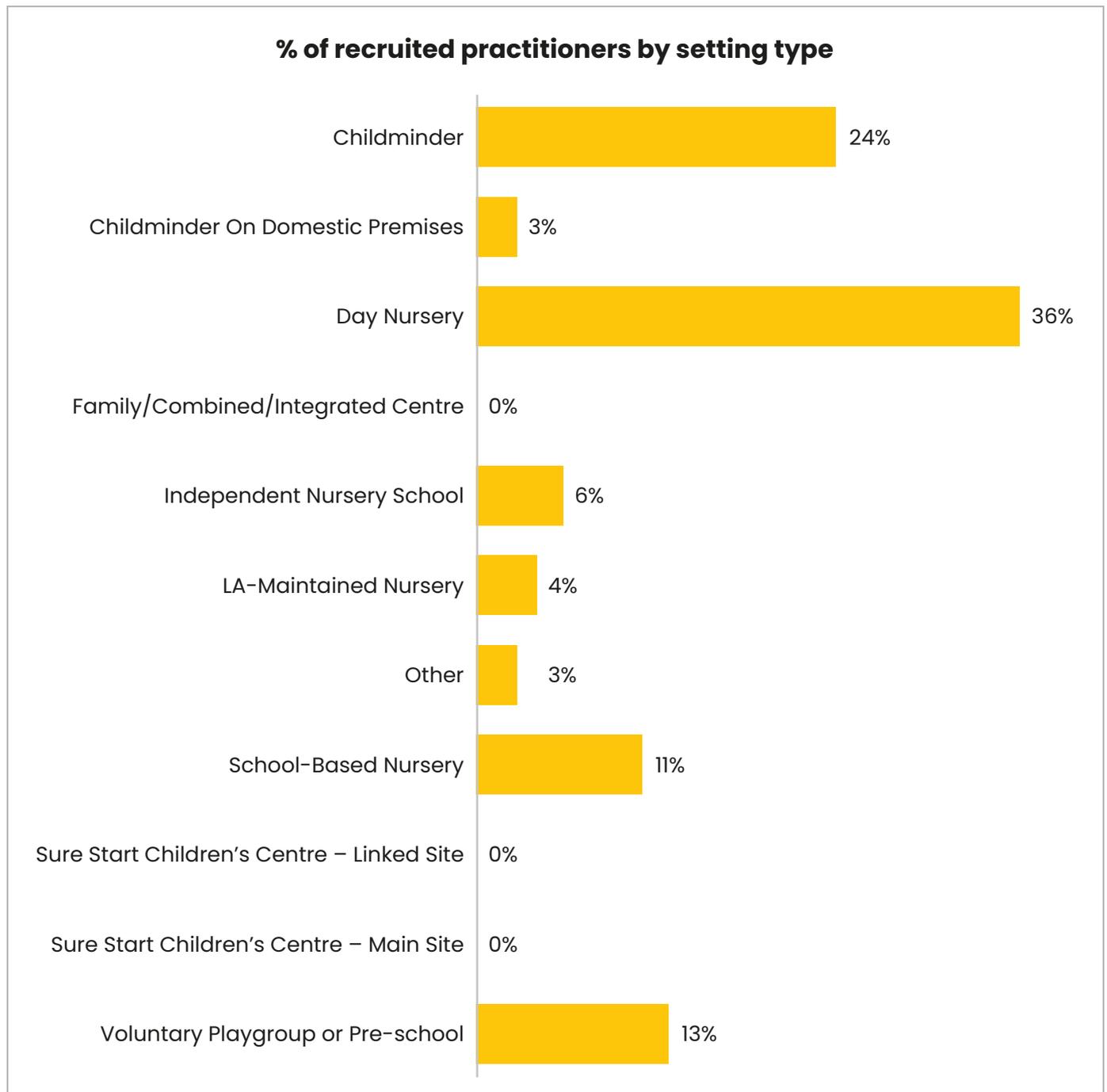


The distribution of recruited participants by region is somewhat balanced. It is important to note here that EDT did not receive the volume of data from Local Authorities that was anticipated. It was necessary to adapt the way in which EYPs were recruited to ensure that the recruitment target was met.

The North West had the highest percentage of recruited participants, accounting for 17% of the total. It is closely followed by the South East with 16% and London with 13%, suggesting these areas have significant engagement. The East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber both contribute 11%, while the South West and West Midlands each provide 10% of the participants. The East Midlands and North East have the lowest percentages, with 7% and 5% respectively.



Practitioners were recruited from various early years education settings. The largest percentage, 36%, came from day nurseries, followed by childminders with 24%. Voluntary playgroups or pre-schools contributed 13%, while school-based nurseries accounted for 11%.



Out of those EYPs who completed at least one module of the programme, a total of 118,783 children aged two to four years were reached and almost 15,000 of these children were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Key findings: programme delivery

Practitioners were overwhelmingly satisfied with the programme, with 93% reporting they would recommend the programme to others. This section outlines the key findings relating to the quality of programme delivery based on EYP feedback.

Quality of the programme

Satisfaction with the programme was high overall, with 95% of practitioners reporting they were either satisfied (34%) or very satisfied (61%). EYPs were particularly positive about their Programme Trainers on the webinars, with many stating they were knowledgeable and helped put them at ease. EYPs also enjoyed the format of the training.

"I really enjoyed this course. It has been a pleasure and I felt comfortable during the webinars even though I don't usually like being on video calls or meeting new people. My trainer is a lovely person and a great trainer. She explains things so clearly and gives examples and I love the breakout rooms and that it gives you the chance to share ideas and experiences. I will miss my Monday meetings."

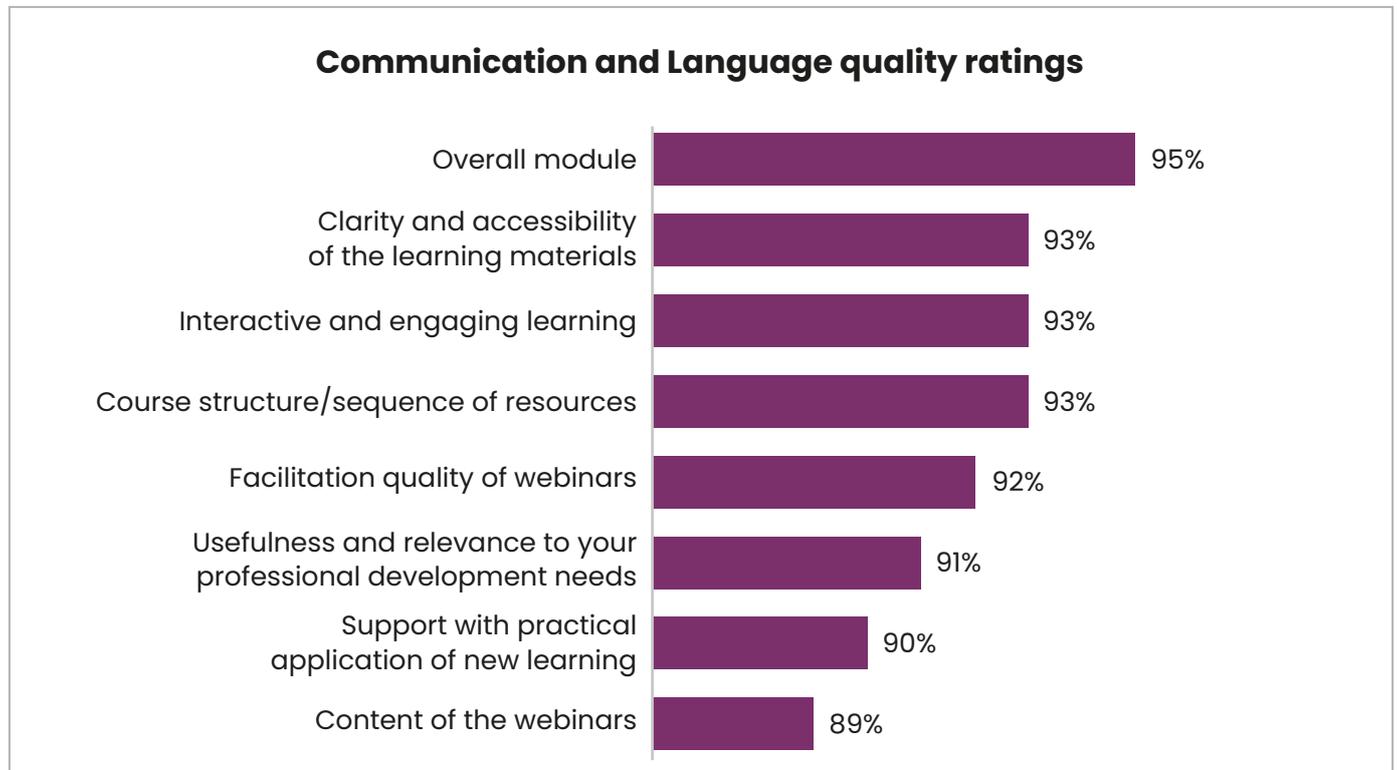
"I loved that the training was split between eLearning and then live webinars. The eLearning enabled me to take time and write notes on the new skills I was learning. The units were so full of information with great resources and handouts to share too. I have saved a lot of the websites shared so that I can hopefully look back to them again and again in the future. The live webinar side of the learning meant that we could all share experience and get new ideas for our settings. It also gave me confidence in talking in larger groups and via a webcam. It is great experience for future meetings too."

"I really like the webinars and having a chance to speak with practitioners from all sorts of different settings, especially in the breakout rooms. I also liked how varied the information in the eLearning is so that it is not just a huge block of text, and that for the audio clips it is also there in written format so it is easier to understand."

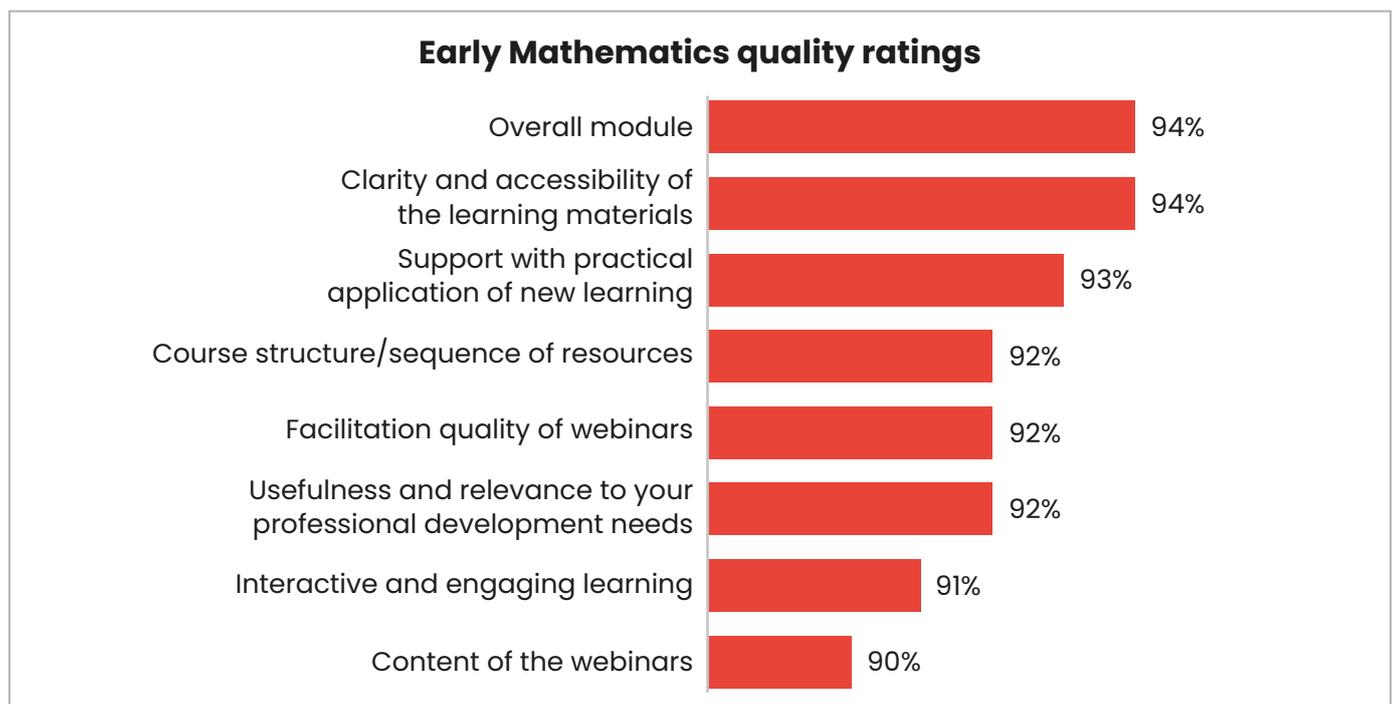
At the end of each module, practitioners were asked to provide quality ratings for the overall module, and for different aspects of the modules.



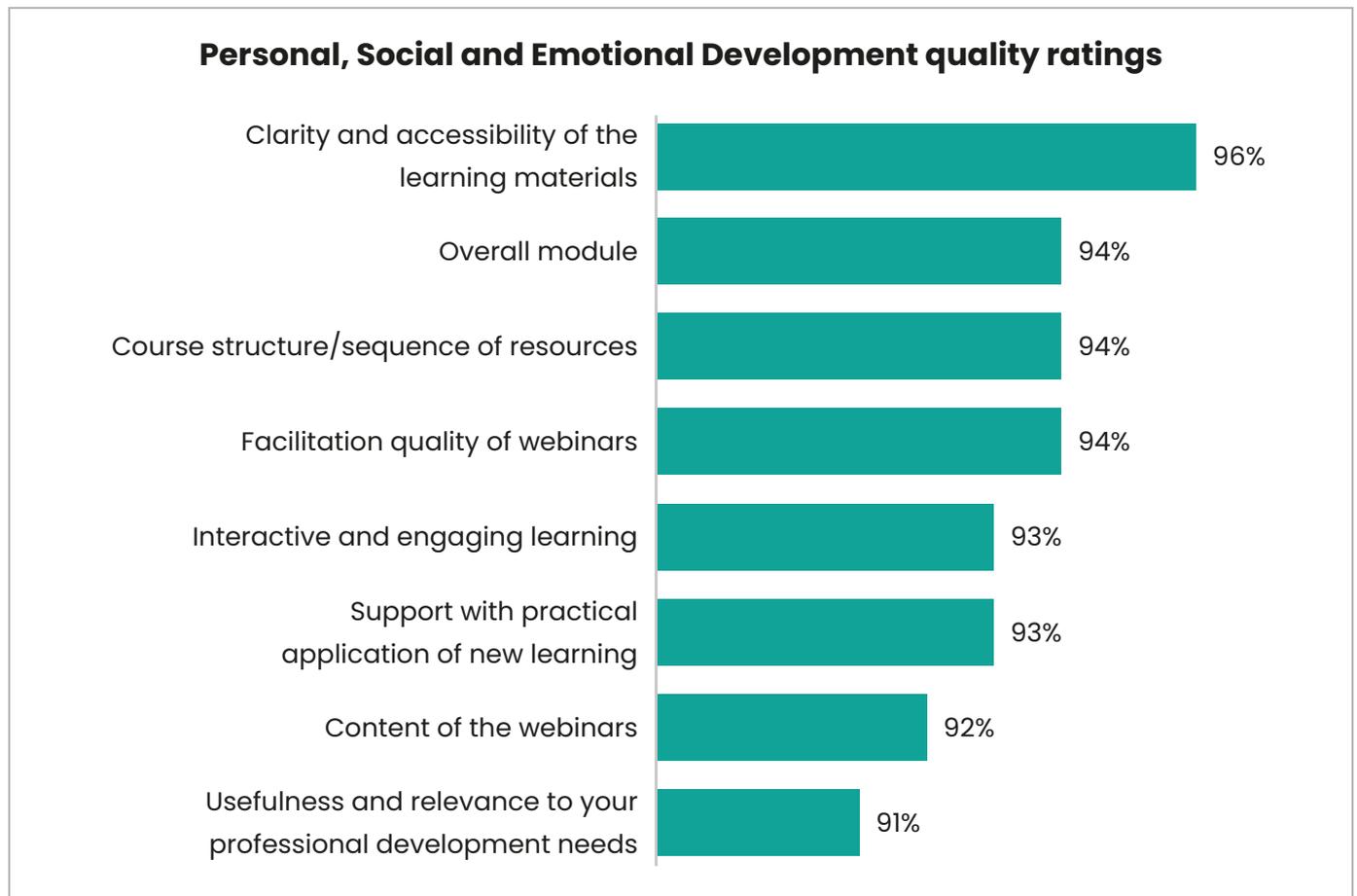
For Communication and Language, 95% of practitioners rated the module as good or excellent (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). The highest quality score was in relation to the clarity and accessibility of the learning materials, the interactive and engaging learning and the course structure/sequence of resources, with 93% of practitioners rating all three of these aspects of the module as good or excellent.



For Early Mathematics, 94% of practitioners rated the module as good or excellent. The highest quality score was in relation to the clarity and accessibility of the learning materials, with 94% of practitioners rating this aspect of the module as good or excellent.



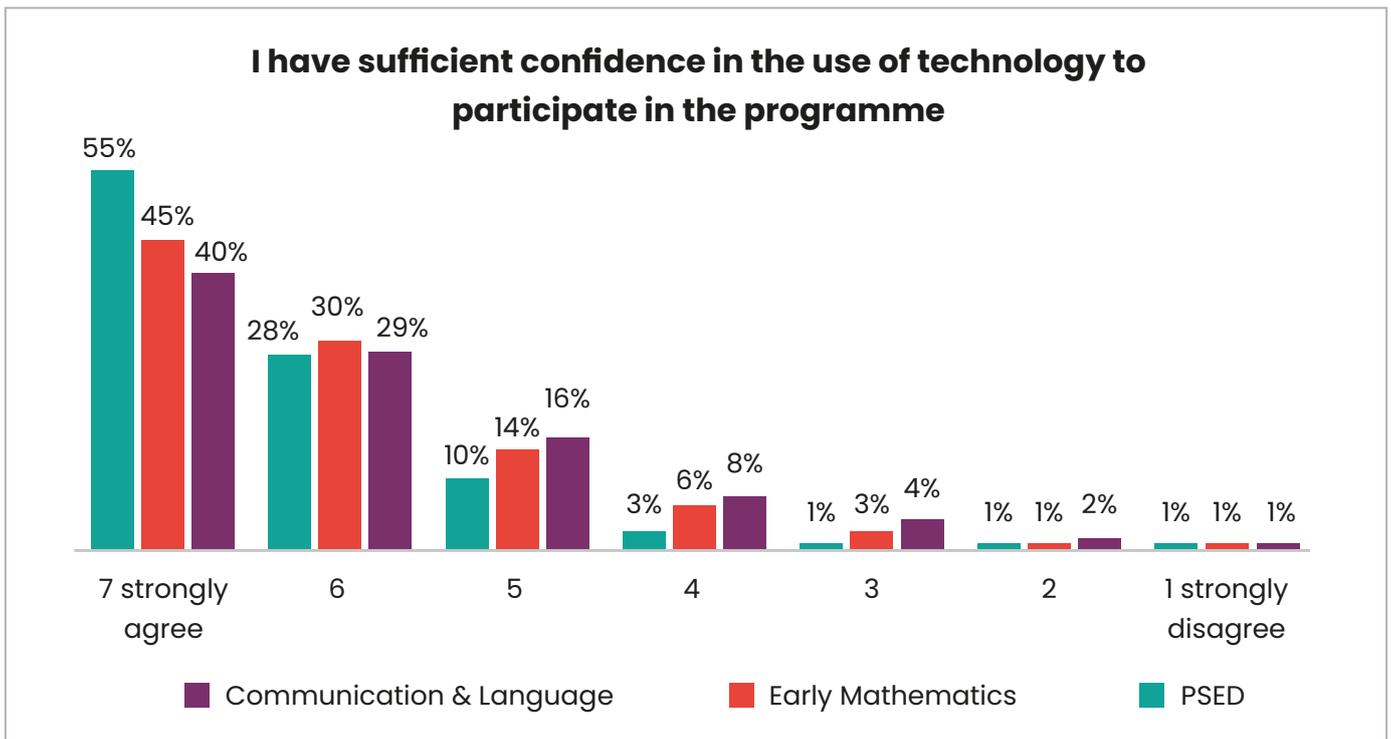
For PSED, 94% of practitioners rated the module as good or excellent. The highest quality score was in relation to the clarity and accessibility of the learning materials, with 96% of practitioners rating this aspect of the module good or excellent.



Ease in using the platform

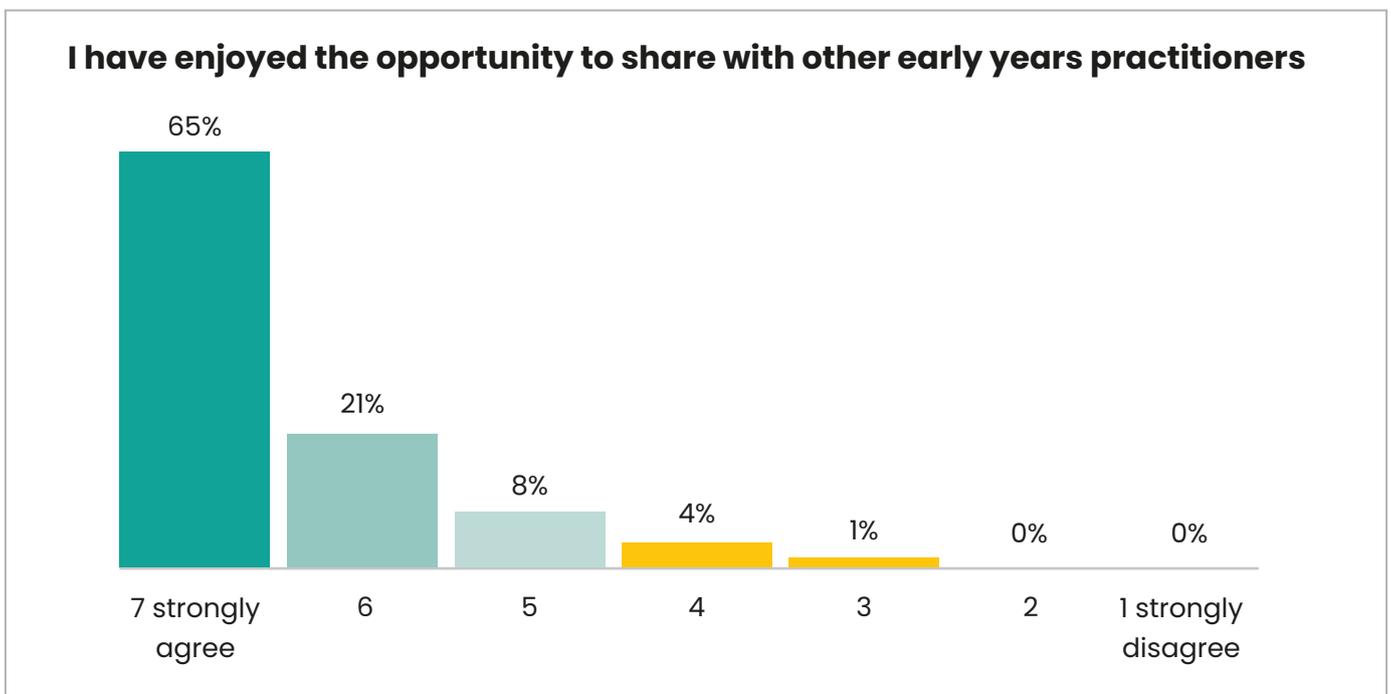
As the programme was delivered via an online-learning platform, data was gathered at the end of each module to identify whether practitioners were comfortable with using the platform, or whether additional guidance was required. The majority of practitioners reported that the platform was easy to use and navigate, though a small number reported that they initially struggled. The chart below shows that between the Communication and Language module and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) module, the proportion of practitioners reporting confidence in being able to use technology to participate in the programme increased from 40% strongly agreeing to 55% strongly agreeing.

Amongst those who reported difficulties in using the platform, reasons most often related to not having appropriate devices.



Working with other practitioners

The majority of EYPs reported the benefits of communicating with other practitioners from different settings. A total of 94% of practitioners reported enjoying the opportunity to share with other EYPs throughout the training.



- “I found the communicating with other practitioners and talking about our real-life scenarios was the best.”
- “Using information from group webinars, useful to bring in ideas from other practitioners.”
- “It was good to talk to other people and share our views and ideas.”
- “The content has been very useful and I have implemented so many of the ideas shared. I found the webinars great as I was able to meet people from across different authorities and childcare contexts. Meeting the same group each week was great too.”

Areas where EYPs wanted more training

Throughout the training practitioners were asked whether there were any topics they would have liked more training on. Practitioners overall found the training included the right level of detail, but there were areas which practitioners felt they would have liked to spend more time on, as they found them particularly beneficial.

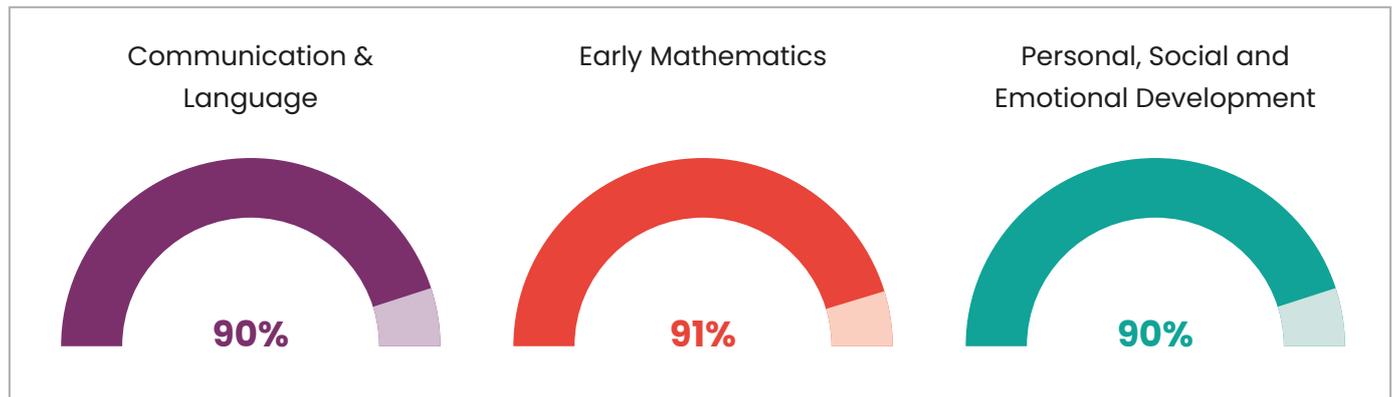
EAL	SEND adaptations	Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)	More strategies generally	Cardinality	Parents and Carers
Some practitioners requested additional training on supporting learners and families with English as an additional language (EAL).	Some practitioners reported that they wanted more examples of how to adapt their practice for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).	Some practitioners would have liked greater depth in learning about child trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).	Some practitioners reported enjoying learning about specific strategies and would have liked some more in-depth content to cover more strategies throughout the modules.	Some practitioners expressed a desire for additional time to explore and deepen their understanding of cardinality.	Some practitioners would have liked more strategies and examples of having difficult discussions with parents and carers.



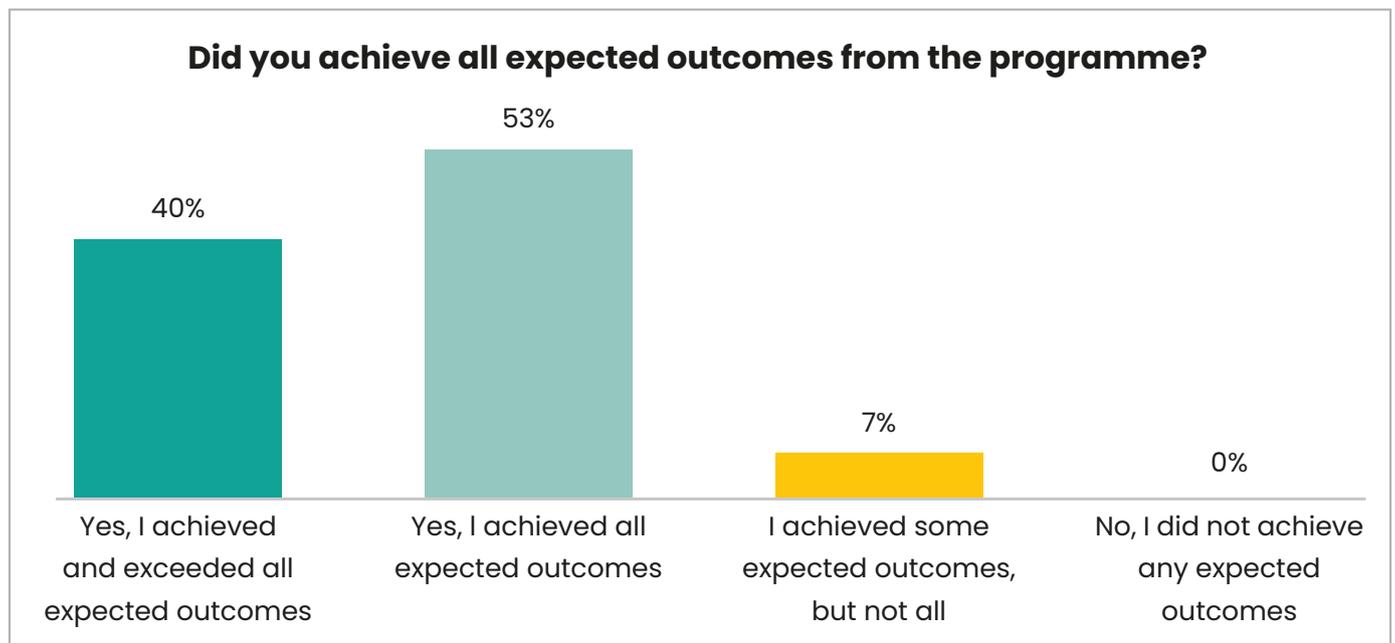
Key findings: programme outcomes

Progress towards learning goals

At the start of the programme, practitioners were asked to consider the type of progress they hoped to achieve. At the end of each module, EYPs were then asked to reflect on the extent to which they had achieved their learning goals. At the end of the Communication and Language module, 90% reported achieving their learning goals, 91% at the end of the Early Mathematics module, and 90% at the end of the PSED module.



At the end of the programme, 93% of EYPs reported achieving or exceeding all expected outcomes from participating in the training. A total of 7% achieved some but not all, with no EYPs reporting not achieving any expected outcomes.



One of the reasons cited for exceeding expectations relates to the positive effect it was felt the programme had on Ofsted inspections. Thirteen respondents in their endline surveys reported the programme had a positive impact on their Ofsted inspections, with additional EYPs reporting the same in their end-of-module surveys.

“My experience in this programme has benefitted my own wellbeing. I was stressed about an impending Ofsted inspection. The inspection took place and I was told that ‘mathematics’ was my strong point on the day! I wasn’t expecting the course to have such an impact on me as a practitioner, but it really has made everything I do for the children clearer and I can explain why to adults.”

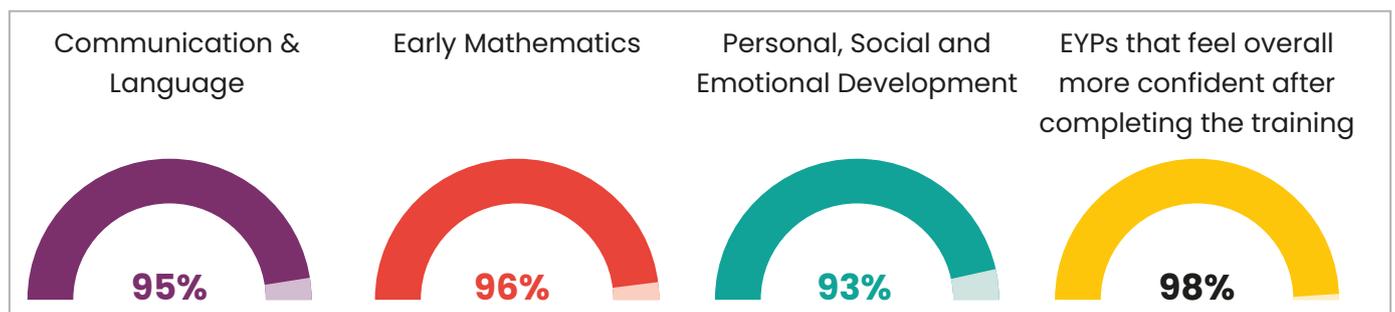
“I liked meeting other practitioners from around the country, it was lovely to catch up with them each week. I learnt so much from them. We had our Ofsted inspection last term and she was impressed by how much impact the course was having in the setting and how the children were benefitting from this.”

“I have recently had my Ofsted inspection. The course gave me the confidence to speak to the inspector in great depth about these three key areas. The displays I had put up around my playroom also proved to the Ofsted inspector that I had a good understanding on how to deliver these areas of the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage).”

“I have really enjoyed learning from the tutor and all the other practitioners. I had my Ofsted inspection midway and she commented that she could see me using what I had learnt on the course. I was definitely more confident during my inspection.”

Confidence gains

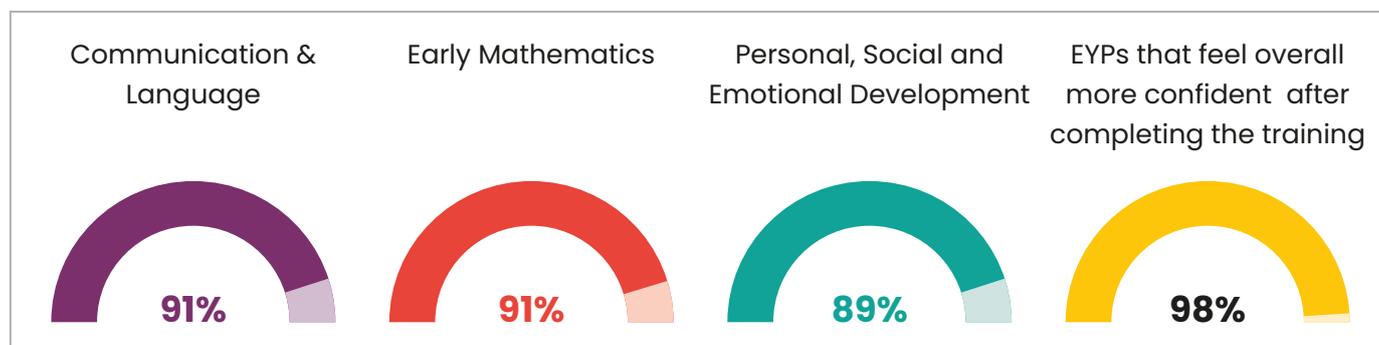
After each module, EYPs were asked to reflect on the extent to which their confidence had grown in supporting children with their Communication and Language development, Early Mathematics and Personal, Social and Emotional Development. A total of 95% of EYPs reported feeling more confident in Communication and Language, 96% in Early Mathematics and 93% in PSED, with 98% reporting an overall increase in their confidence as an EYP.



- “I feel more confident in how to work with children with EAL (English as an Additional Language). Children and parents are commenting more and asking lots of questions, pausing and giving the children time to speak.”
- “I have really enjoyed participating in this course, I have gained so much knowledge and become more confident within myself whilst doing this course. My work colleague and I have become confident enough to apply for the Health and Wellbeing Award from Nursery World which is a big improvement for our setting. I have really enjoyed taking part in the weekly webinars, my tutor was very supportive and made the webinars enjoyable. The group that I was in for webinars was very nice and friendly.
- “I have learnt so much and put so much learning into my work already and it has made me feel very confident in progressing this.”
- “I feel so much more confident in everything I do now and have a greater understanding of why we do things in certain ways to help support each child’s development.”

Knowledge gains

After each module, EYPs were asked to reflect on the extent to which they gained knowledge in the different thematic areas covered in units. A total of 98% of EYPs reported feeling more knowledgeable as an EYP after completing the training. For Communication and Language, 91% of EYPs reported that their understanding of speech and language has improved as a result of the training, and 91% reported that they know more about what they need to do to help children develop their talking and understanding of words. For Early Mathematics, 91% reported that they now know more about what they need to do to help children develop, and 92% reported that their understanding of mathematical concepts and strategies has improved. Finally, after completing the PSED module, practitioners reported on the extent of their knowledge gain as a result of the training. A total of 89% reported knowledge gains in PSED.

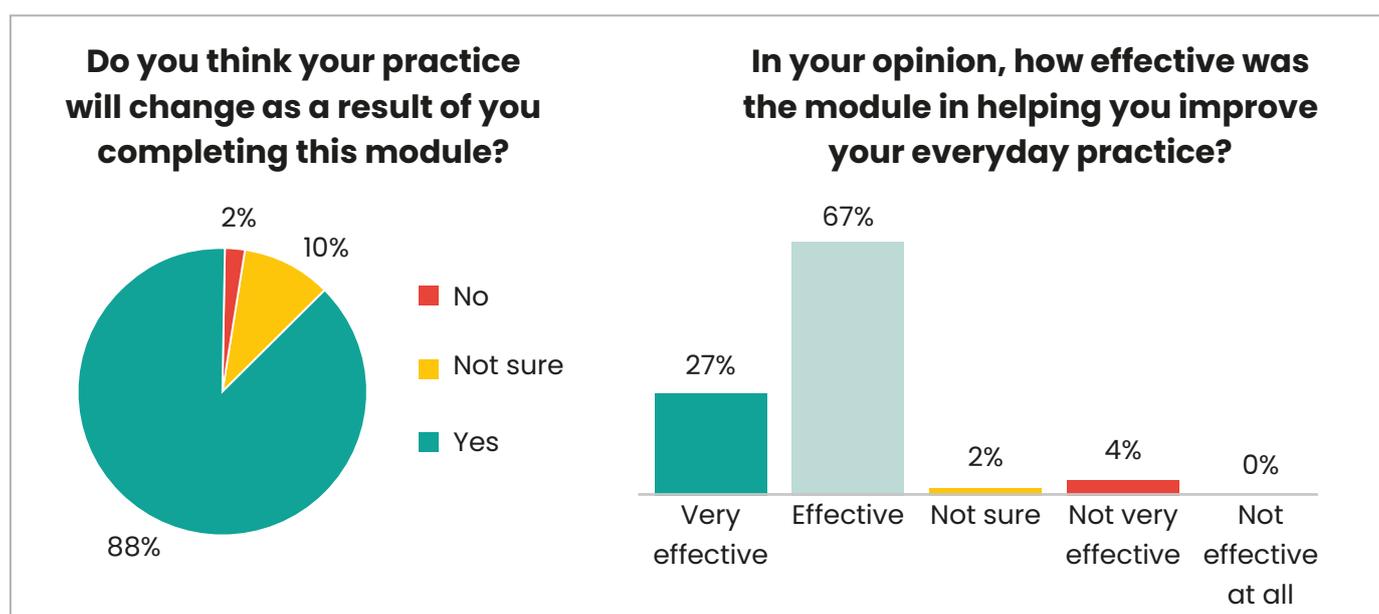


- “The webinars were useful in gaining support and additional knowledge from other practitioners. Our webinar tutor has been amazing and very knowledgeable, supportive and helpful throughout.”
- “Really enjoyed the training. It was very informative. Studying the eLearning and then preparing for the webinar improved my knowledge. It was also really interesting to hear what other practitioners had to say and also be able to have the opportunity to share and learn new things from others. As it was carried out over eight months nothing felt rushed, there were breaks over half-term and therefore the work was achievable.”
- “This was a great opportunity to develop my knowledge on the EYPDP. I believe I can now apply what I’ve learnt to looking after children. I really enjoyed meeting different practitioners across the UK and sharing different experiences and knowledge.”
- “Really pleased with the course, was very apprehensive about doing it at the start but my trainer was a lovely mentor and helped me so much through each webinar, feel like I have a lot more knowledge on how to expand activities and make them more age-range appropriate. Also feel a lot more comfortable speaking to parents and being able to solve difficulties through conversations. Really enjoyed working with childminders as it helped me see how different it is from their perspective to me in a nursery. Just a really enjoyable course that never felt like too much pressure, my trainer was always consistent with praise and never made me feel rushed or confused. This course has completely helped my confidence with speaking to others and being able to share my own ideas. Would recommend any childminder or nursery practitioner to definitely do this course!”
- “I think it would be amazing to offer this course to all newly qualified childminders. I think it has really broadened my overall knowledge and given me more confidence.”

Applying new knowledge to practice

At the end of each module, EYPs were asked the extent to which they have applied their learning into their everyday practice.

After completing the Communication and Language module, 88% stated their practice would change as a result of completing the module, and 94% reported that the module was effective or very effective in helping improve their everyday practice.



EYPs outlined what learning they have applied to their settings, through wide-ranging feedback in open-comment responses. EYPs reported listening more and questioning less, giving children time to reflect and respond to any questions asked. The EYPs also reported identifying hot spots (where communication is strong) and cold spots (where communication is lacking), as particularly useful, and reported improved interactions between EYPs and children and their parents and carers. Outlined below are some of the most common responses on the introduction of new activities and approaches as a result of participating in the training (where 50 or more EYPs reported applying these approaches in open-comment responses).

Less questioning/ more commenting	Hot and cold spots	General communication and language activities	Books	Change to environment	Stories
1,714	769	485	399	360	312
Introducing C&L outdoors	Assessment	General C&L games	Using props	Singing	Rhyming
242	99	66	65	62	57



Not asking too many questions and enhancing listening skills

“ Pausing and allowing the children time to think; commenting on their play more rather than asking questions all the time. ”

“ Learning not to ask too many questions – comment rather than question. Pausing more – giving children time to reply. ”

“ Staff are better trained in giving children a chance to respond, staff have developed better listening skills. ”

“ I now have a full understanding of the importance of waiting and how each of our children will have their own take-up times which allows them to process what you have said and form a response. This is particularly important for our children who use a total communication approach including signing, the use of symbols or eye gaze devices. I have also implemented attention skills development activities, such as ready-steady-go games, attention autism and intensive interaction, with support from the class teachers and child-specific targets from Speech and Language Therapists. ”

Creating different areas and new spaces for children to develop communication and language skills

- “ I applied my knowledge in my everyday practice by improving specific areas in the construction area to increase the use of language and communication skills. To improve this, I used laminated sheets to show arrows in different directions so the child could make a track and a map could be drawn of said track. ”
- “ Providing more written communication and language around our site – signs with steps, labels on trees, a nature-spotter board to write up wildlife we see around the site, a menu chalk board in the mud kitchen, and more individual chalk boards for children to mark on. ”
- “ A big change I am looking at doing is enhancing the storytelling/reading area in the garden, sourcing suitable resources for this may take time. ”
- “ I am making progress with our book areas, less books on each bookshelf, a good variety of fiction and non-fiction. ”
- “ I changed a small area within my garden which had small construction toys in which the children often didn't use. Adding word cards to the fence and adding sand, stones, wood chipping, some pipes has made it much more fun for the children who use it regularly and encourages more imagination and therefore more words, communication and opportunities to share and play together. ”

Hot/Cold spots

“ Hot/Cold spots was a really useful area covered. ”

“ Looking at hot and cold spots within our setting. ”

“ I achieved looking for cold spots within provision, changing them and evaluating outcomes. ”

“ Reviewing practice including looking at hot and cold spots. ”

“ I've learnt about more ways to improve communication by identifying cold spots and improving those parts of the environment. ”

“ The writing table was a cold spot so I went over and said, 'I need a piece of paper'. I got one and then said, 'I need to put my name on it.' A child came and got a piece of paper, got their name card and wrote their name on. I carried on with my commentary when another child approached and the first child said, 'You need to get a piece of paper, find your name card and put your name on.' We sat at the table and we ended up having a lovely conversation while mark-making. ”

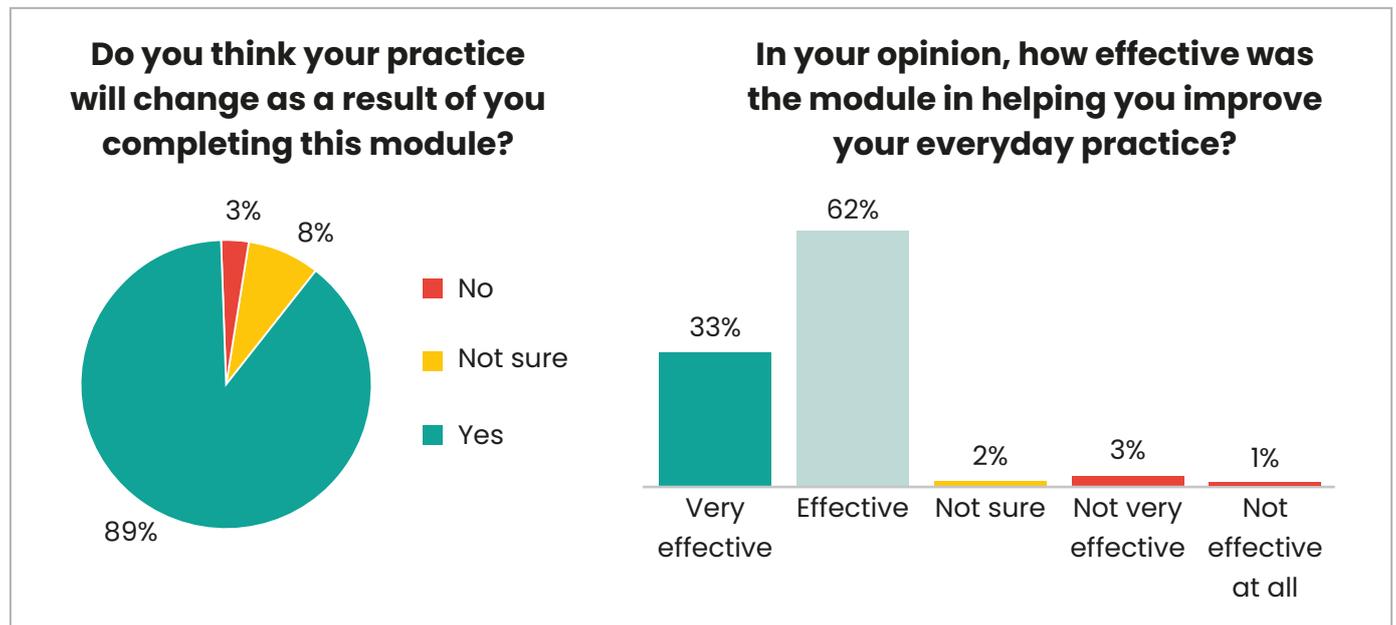
Improving the quality of interactions

“ I have achieved in creating communication-supportive environments and high-quality interactions; I understand how language supports behaviour and wellbeing, how to build partnerships with parents and how to embed good communication and language in my setting. ”

“ I felt interacting with the children became much more productive with the new techniques that were discussed. ”



After completing the Early Mathematics module, 89% stated their practice would change as a result of completing the training, and 95% reported that the module was effective or very effective in helping improve their everyday practice.



By the end of the Early Mathematics module, EYPs were already reporting on the different ways they were applying their learning from the module into their settings. This ranged from using more mathematical language, to ensuring all spaces included mathematics, to different activities involving shapes, patterns and numbers.

The table below outlines the number of practitioners who reported introducing new activities in the top twelve specific interventions raised in open-comment boxes. Over 1,500 practitioners mentioned introducing new general early mathematics activities into their settings. A total of 815 practitioners specifically mentioned introducing new mathematical language.

General new maths activities	Maths language and vocabulary	Patterns	Counting	Shapes	Space
1,543	815	622	701	656	217
Maths games	Cardinality	Maths books	Songs	Maths in outdoor play	Rhymes
207	165	132	126	127	51

Using more mathematical language

“Using more mathematics language when we are out for walks or at forest school.”

“Used a lot more mathematical language and also made us look through the book corner and realised we don’t really have many books on maths so purchased some from the recommended list.”

“I’ve been using mathematical language in majority of activities.”

“Added resources in different areas to encourage mathematical language.”

Changing, embedding or adding physical spaces to include mathematics

“I have changed the room layout and added new mathematical experiences.”

“I have made improvements to our maths area from ideas shared in our webinar group.”

“Embedded maths opportunities in all areas rather than having a maths area that some children may not access.”

“In the maths area have a selection of materials where children can copy a pattern or make up their own pattern.”

“Taking the maths area out of the room which was never used and put maths into all areas of the room in a more fun and inviting way!”

Activities about patterns, shapes and numbers

“I have done more shape activities and the way the children have described the shapes has fit well into what I have learnt.”

“When the children are handling shapes, e.g. a cylinder, in the past I would have pointed out the circles at the end, but now we talk about a cylinder and we look at the circles at the end, the long round edge and the large rectangular area that forms the sides. We have made cylinders, allowing the children to identify the individual shapes that are used to make up the finished shape.”

“I have started to make pattern activities a priority in many areas of the environment and set up pattern tables for children to explore independently and freely.”

“Implement an activity during morning time looking at sequencing patterns, e.g., clap, tap, clap or stomp, jump, stomp – encouraging children to be physical and supporting their recall.”

“More numbers labels around the setting, more fun number games and learning new rhymes and songs that include numbers and visual representation of those numbers.”

“More opportunities for counting in everyday activities such as lunches and hot dinners, registration. More use of shape and pattern when playing outside.”



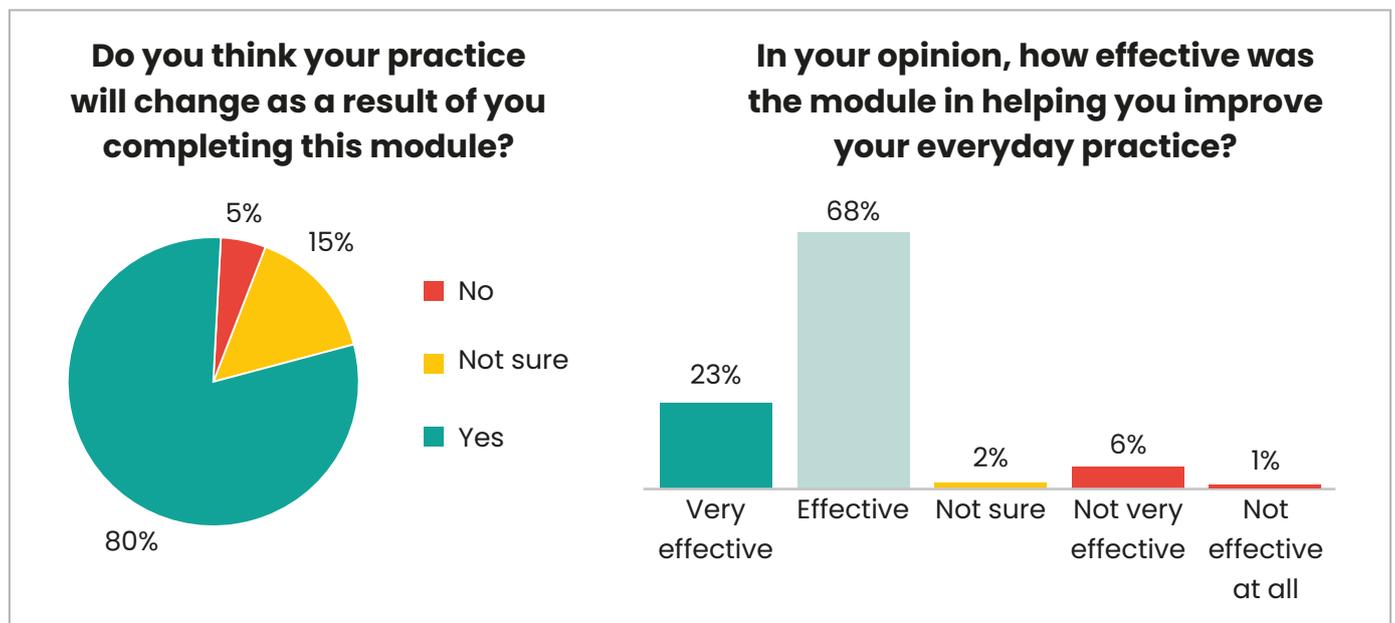
Multiple areas

“The children choose how they would like their toast to be cut (older children can cut it themselves). This incorporates lots of mathematical language, counting and shape recognition.”

“I made fruit skewers with children creating patterns, e.g., apple, banana, apple, banana; we made clocks for telling time and recognizing numbers. We had a toilet roll activity putting numbers in order with seashells, measured the length of children using mathematical language and new vocabulary such as ‘tall’ and ‘short’, and used words like ‘full’ and ‘empty’ whilst doing pouring activities.”

“Introduced more visual aids around the rooms, more mathematics language being used, more opportunities being taken to investigate number, shape, space, etc.”

A total of 80% of EYPs stated their practice would change as a result of completing the Personal, Social and Emotional Development module, and 91% reported that the module was effective or very effective in helping improve their everyday practice.



EYPs also told us what they have been applying to their practice, with EYPs reporting having a better understanding of the emotional needs of the children in their settings, supporting staff wellbeing, and improving their relationships with parents.

The table below outlines the areas which are mentioned most frequently in applying learning from PSED into everyday practice.

More focus on sharing knowledge with staff and staff wellbeing	Relationships with parents	Understanding emotions	Wellbeing generally in the setting	Understanding behaviours	Improving observation
1,473	1,278	891	454	288	272
Reviewing of policies	Mindfulness practices	New approach to supervisions	Understanding trauma	Introducing books	Working with conflict
149	141	112	102	82	54

Providing emotional support to the children and better understanding behaviours

“Daily check-ins, I have been asking children if they are okay and if they feel happy or sad. Although they are young, it’s a good way to get them to talk about how they feel and a great way to let them know we care.”

“Making sure I acknowledge children’s emotions and help them understand them.”

“I validate feelings and emotions in more depth than I did, and I am ensuring more time is being spent supporting children when they are unsettled, comforting then distracting.”

“I have learnt that two-year-olds struggle to control their emotions and this could result in challenging behaviour.”

“Waiting, watching, giving children time to see if they can resolve conflict for themselves before intervening. Strategies for helping children understand their emotions and supporting them. Making sure the children feel that their feelings have been validated.”

“Gaining more information about the children we work with and getting to know our children well makes it easier to care for them in the best way possible.”

“Using different techniques to support children’s emotions. These include using puppets to role-play our emotions, the colour monster toys with the books, emotion balls. For group time we have started to sing a song to find out how each child is feeling at the beginning of the day then again after lunch.”



Working with families

“Since Covid our relationship with parents had dipped slightly as we weren’t allowing parents into the building. However, using this programme has helped lots with building back these relationships, and helped us as a setting know how to entice them to want to come back into the building.”

“Being more confident in ability to be able to speak to parents and more confident to ask for help if needed in having the difficult conversations.”

“I do feel more comfortable and confident when having difficult conversations with parents/carers.”

“We will be restructuring how we do supervision and we will also be looking at how staff handle parents/children who have suffered with loss.”

“I now feel I can understand my children and families in a more thorough way.”

“I give the parents an opportunity to talk to me at the end of a week, to discuss any problem in a quiet room.”

“I have reflected on how I can speak to parents about more sensitive issues by calling them into the classroom and discussing it with them privately as opposed to at the door.”

Understanding trauma

“We have military families who face disruption frequently. This may just be temporary but is just as important for the whole family. Knowing the signs of traumatic stress will enable the staff team to offer support at the beginning before things escalate.”

“I have looked differently at children who have behavioural problems and looked at their home life and sometimes changed the way I help the child, i.e. if they have had an emotional trauma, I try to be more comforting to them as they may not have that at home.”

“I’ve been able to relate my knowledge in the area of emotional trauma with a family in my care at the moment, why and what are the causes of behaviour. I’ve applied behaviour toolkits and I’m also working in collaboration with a family.”

“Speak to staff about adverse childhood experiences and how to recognise trauma.”

Creating a positive environment for both staff and children

“Thought more about the atmosphere we are creating and working patiently with children and their families.”

“Creating a more mindful environment for staff and children, building on our calm area.”

“Making sure all staff are listened to and providing the safe, secure environment for all.”



Improved approach to observations

“Better understanding of what is needed when recording observations.”

“Using more quality observations.”

“I will write clearer more focused observations.”

Supporting staff wellbeing

“How I can help staff to manage their own wellbeing, I especially liked the stress printout and questionnaire.”

“Staff wellbeing, taking into account others’ feelings of stress.”

“We have coffee staff sessions where we can all voice our highs and lows of the week or fortnight.”

“Take more of a hands-on approach with staff in how they feel and although we can’t always do much about the workload or hours of work, we can take five minutes to listen and have a cup of tea.”

“More conscious of staff wellbeing in my team. Happier staff makes for quality teaching and interactions.”

“I will be introducing a questionnaire to all staff to see how we can help their mental health and wellbeing.”

Perceived impact on children in settings

Practitioners reported on the extent to which they felt their learning from the three modules has already had, or would have, a positive impact on learners in their settings. The area where EYPs felt the most positive benefits would be had is in Early Mathematics, with 94% reporting that they have already seen or anticipate a positive impact.



Examples of Communication and Language

"I'm working towards changing my approach when interacting with children by following the ten-second rule when asking questions. Pausing and giving the child more time to respond encourages them to express better, to make the two-way conversation richer while I'm using comments and adding descriptive words."

"We now have sound puzzles to help children's listening skills and use photographs of 'real' items/ routines for our visual timetable as opposed to 'cartoon'-like images we had been given."

Examples of Early Mathematics

"I've noticed maths more in the children's play, this has come from me adding more language and examples in everyday play as well as structured play time."

"I have applied this during snack time where the children are not only given choices but also the opportunity to help themselves to snacks, which opens the opportunities for early maths skills where they are able to count pieces of fruit."

Examples of PSED

"Staff seem happier which in turn has made the children more settled."

"I have adapted my supervisions to include more on wellbeing, that has enabled my team to open up and ask for help with their stress levels. This has impacted on the children as a more motivated practitioner helps the children in the setting too. Happy practitioners, happy, safe and secure children that are nurtured and loved."

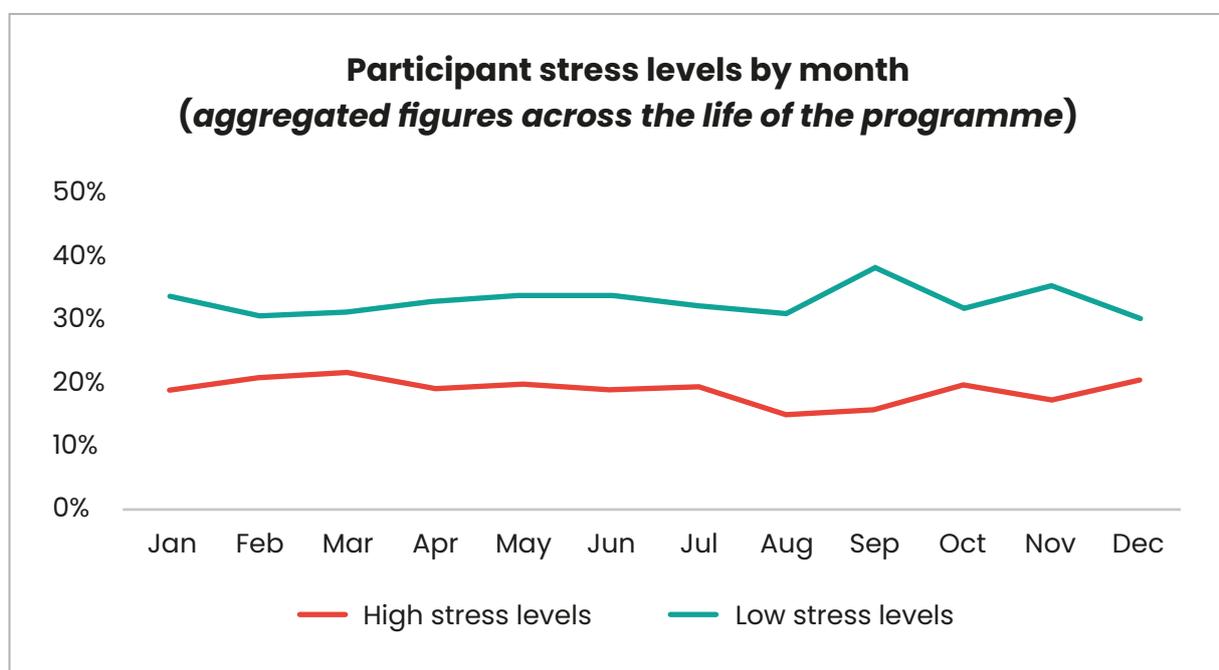
"I am more observant and empathetic to the emotional needs of the children in my care. I am able to relate better with parents and carers, this helps the children to settle in better."



EYP wellbeing and motivation

Throughout the duration of the training, EYPs were asked questions relating to their enjoyment of work, the ability to cope with their role, their general wellbeing and their work-related stress levels.

Participants were asked to evaluate their work-related stress levels on a scale from very high to very low. In December and February, 21% of practitioners reported experiencing high stress levels. March recorded the highest stress levels, with 22% of practitioners indicating they felt high or very high stress, likely linked to the pressures of the new year, including post-holiday stress and new work cycles. Throughout this period, low stress levels remained relatively stable at around 30–31%. In August, stress levels dropped to their lowest point at 15%, possibly due to summer holidays, with 31% of practitioners reporting very low or low stress levels. In September, 38% of practitioners reported having low stress levels, suggesting a resurgence of focus or productivity after the summer. Meanwhile, high stress levels remained modest at 16%. Overall, the data indicates that stress levels tend to be elevated at the start and end of the calendar year, with a significant decline during the summer months.



Practitioners were asked whether or not the programme had impacted on their motivation to stay in the sector. This question was only asked of EYPs in Cohorts 2, 3 and 4, with Cohort 1 EYPs being asked about their motivation to remain in the sector generally, and not whether the programme impacted their motivation. Of the respondents, 46% reported that it has greatly improved their motivation, 41% moderately, 10% stating that they were always motivated to remain in the sector and 3% reporting that they are not motivated.

- “Before starting this course, I felt like things were getting a little bit on top of me at times with workload. Seeing a regular group of Early Years Practitioners weekly and sharing ideas and knowledge has really inspired me.”
- “This course came at a perfect time when I was looking for new ideas/motivation and a place to share ideas and knowledge with other practitioners.”

- “I have thoroughly enjoyed participating in the entire course, which has strengthened my practice and motivated me by offering new and exciting ways to engage the children and extend their learning.”
- “This was a very much-needed course for me, especially from feeling demotivated from the Covid pandemic. Being a childminder, I felt more isolated during these trying times. Thank you so much for this course.”
- “It’s been a great course and it’s helped to enrich my learning and make me more motivated and excited about how important my role is. Thank you.”
- “It has definitely made me more motivated and I do see a difference in my day-to-day planning.”
- “This was absolutely brilliant. The EYPDP team have been so supportive even when I’ve tried to give up or felt overwhelmed, they have contacted me and supported me throughout this journey. I am a more skilful and motivated practitioner and feel so much more confident within my role.”

Conclusions and recommendations

EYPDP has successfully achieved its goal of enhancing the skills and knowledge of EYPs across England. With the recruitment of 10,000 practitioners and a balanced regional distribution, the programme has made significant strides in improving the quality of early years education. The combination of online self-study and facilitated webinars has been a success and fostered an engaging learning environment, leading to high levels of participant satisfaction and knowledge gain.

The programme-level evaluation findings indicate that many practitioners reported substantial improvements in their confidence and knowledge in all key areas of Communication and Language, Early Mathematics and Personal, Social and Emotional Development. The reported application of new skills in everyday practice is notable, with many practitioners implementing innovative strategies to enhance children’s learning experiences. Furthermore, the perceived positive impact on children’s development, particularly in Early Mathematics, underscores the effectiveness of the programme.

While the programme has demonstrated success, it is essential to acknowledge the fluctuations in practitioner stress levels throughout the year and the challenge of maintaining motivation within the sector. The findings suggest that while the EYPDP has positively influenced motivation for many, continued efforts are needed to support practitioners’ wellbeing and job satisfaction.



Recommendations

- 1. Sustain and Expand the Programme** – Given the positive outcomes associated with the EYPDP, it is recommended to continue and potentially expand the programme to reach more practitioners, particularly in regions with lower participation rates. Tailored outreach strategies can be employed to engage these areas.
- 2. Reconfigure the Programme Content** – Feedback from practitioners suggested that programme content for Early Mathematics should be given equitable status and the addition of more focus on early identification and support for children with SEND would be welcome.
- 3. Support for Practitioner Wellbeing** – Develop resources and support systems focused on practitioner wellbeing to address the reported fluctuations in stress levels. This could include workshops on stress management, resilience training and peer-support networks.
- 4. Long-Term Impact Evaluation** – Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of the EYPDP on both practitioners and children. This will help in understanding sustained changes in practice and children’s development over time.
- 5. Mentoring and Support Post-Training** – Extend mentorship opportunities beyond the programme duration to provide ongoing support when practitioners implement new strategies in their settings. Regular check-ins could help reinforce learning and provide additional guidance.
- 6. Future Networking Opportunities** – Early Years Practitioners to be given opportunities to network with one another and share practice.

External Evaluation

An independent, external evaluation of the programme has been undertaken by Cooper Gibson Research. This evaluation has been commissioned by the DfE and the report will be available in June 2025.

