August 2024

Phase 2 of the Early Years Special Initiative

Year 1 final report

Final

SQW

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Executive Summary

1. The Early Years Special Initiative, funded by The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington and managed by The Mercers' Company, aims to enhance young children's numeracy, literacy, and language skills and their school readiness through evidence-based interventions in London.

2. Following the success of Phase 1, Phase 2 of the Initiative was launched in January 2023, with two cohorts of grantees receiving funding for four years each. The first cohort, comprising six organisations, began receiving funding in July 2023. The Cohort 1 organisations are: Campaign for Learning, Coram Family and Childcare, Early Education, Fatherhood Institute, National Day Nurseries Association, and Youth Sports Trust.

3. SQW, a public policy and economic research consultancy, was commissioned by The Mercers' Company in August 2023 to be Learning Partner for Phase 2 of the Initiative, to help the grantees to reflect on and develop their work. SQW's approach combines knowledge generation activities (such as light touch monitoring data collection, Special Projects – 'deep dives' into themes identified by grantees, and Action Learning Sets) and knowledge sharing (a Learning Symposium).

4. The light touch monitoring data was collected to provide an indication of the impact of the Initiative so far, focusing on six overarching categories. At the end of June 2024 an estimated 2,790 children had benefited from the Initiative, including 2,160 children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and 113 Early Years practitioners, 153 parents and carers, and 70 settings had been engaged in Initiative activities.

5. The Special Project for Year 1 focused on 'Scalability.' It explored what scalability means to grantees in different contexts and how programmes can scale effectively and sustainably. Two types of scaling – 'Quantitative' scaling and 'Political' or 'Functional' scaling – and two approaches to scaling – a 'tight' approach and a 'loose' approach – were identified. Factors which enable scaling include evidence, demand, capacity, and alignment with policy, while barriers include political uncertainty and wider challenges (such as capacity).

6. The Action Learning Sets took place online in January and May 2024, and in-person in July 2024. Participants discussed challenges and developed solutions to these. Participants found the Action Learning Sets beneficial and felt they built a supportive learning community. The Action Learning Sets influenced their work by encouraging abstract thinking, project redesign, and enhancing questioning skills.

7. The Learning Symposium was held at Mercers' on 4th July 2024, serving as both a knowledge-sharing and celebratory event. Grantees presented on their experiences in Year 1, discussing their biggest successes, challenges, and surprises, and what they were most looking forward to next year. Grantees discussed engaging settings, practitioners, parents and families, as well as innovating, persevering and evaluating. A live illustrator captured the key messages from the presentations in an engaging visual resource.

8. This report outlines recommendations for SQW, Mercers' and the grantees in Year 2, following the Year 1 Learning Partner activities and grantee feedback.

Figure 1: Live illustration of the Learning Symposium

1. Introduction

Overview of the Early Years Special Initiative

1.1 The Early Years Special Initiative Phase 2 (henceforth referred to as 'the Initiative') is funded by The Charity of Sir Richard Whittington for which The Mercers' Company is Corporate Trustee. The Initiative provides grants to organisations in London that use evidence-based interventions to increase young children's numeracy, literacy and language skills, and their school readiness (namely their personal, social and emotional development).

1.2 Phase 1 of the Initiative was launched by The Mercers' Company in 2019. During this first phase, 10 organisations were supported for three years to deliver programmes aiming to improve the educational attainment of children and families facing socio-economic disadvantage. The funded organisations formed three cohorts who came together to share approaches and learning. In addition to their internal evaluation activities, all grantees participated in an evaluation of the Initiative as a whole, led by the Education Policy Institute (EPI), assessing grantees' impact on participating children and practitioners.[1]

1.3 Following the success of Phase 1, Phase 2 of the Initiative was launched in January 2023. In Phase 2, two cohorts of grantees will be funded for four years of delivery each. The first cohort (comprising six organisations) received funding in July 2023. The second cohort will be funded from Summer 2024. As with Phase 1, all grantees will undertake an evaluation of their programme, alongside participating in the Initiative-wide evaluation activities.

Cohort 1 grantees

A summary of the Cohort 1 projects is provided in Table 1-1, below:

Table 1-1: Cohort 1 Early Years Special Initiative projects

Grantee	Description of Early Years Special Initiative project
Campaign for Learning	***'Early Years Maths Through Storytelling'*** This family numeracy programme designed with families, maths experts and Early Years providers seeks to teach parents how to build maths concepts (e.g., numbers, patterns, spatial reasoning) into story telling activities with their children.
Coram Family and Childcare	***'Increasing parental confidence to develop emergent literacy skills in the home environment'*** Working with parents to co-design, co-market and co-deliver a series of fun courses for parents and their children in community settings, the

[1] https://www.mercers.co.uk/young-people-education-evaluating-our-special-initiatives

Grantee	Description of Early Years Special Initiative project
	programme seeks to spark a love of reading so that it becomes a habitual activity in the home.
Early Education	***'Supporting Pedagogy, Arts and Creativity Everywhere (SPACE) to Flourish'*** Early Education provides bespoke coaching and mentoring for Early Years practitioners, inspiring practitioners to incorporate arts-based approaches and creativity into learning and teaching. The programme uses 'Thinking Spaces' to develop a sustained reflective community, alongside the creation of new resources.
Fatherhood Institute	***'FRED: Fathers Reading Every Day'*** FRED will equip Early Years practitioners with evidence-based techniques for successful father-engagement in their child's development, supported by resources, and the training of a 'Dad Squad' of local male volunteers to support settings' promotion, outreach and evaluation activities.
National Day Nurseries Association	***'Early Years Maths and Language & Communication Champions'*** This online training for Early Years Practitioners will help them embed maths and literacy learning into play-based activities and use auditing tools to assess learning. Champions will then use audits to evaluate current practice and the competence levels of staff in their setting. Audit results will be used to create an action plan, which is implemented by Champions with online support.
Youth Sports Trust	***'Healthy Movers'*** This programme seeks to train Early Years practitioners to integrate play-based learning through the delivery of physical activity sessions. In addition, parents will be engaged through 'Stay and Play Clubs', and Healthy Movers Ambassadors (practitioners and local authority staff) will be recruited and trained. Mentoring for practitioners will be delivered in settings to establish and sustain programmes. Virtual networking for practitioners will support cross-setting engagement and identify support requirements.

Source: SQW analysis of programme documentation

Learning Partner for Phase 2

1.4 SQW, a public policy and economic research consultancy, was commissioned by The Mercers' Company in August 2023 to be Learning Partner for Phase 2 of the Initiative. We will work with Mercers' and the two cohorts of grantees for the duration of Phase 2 (until Autumn 2028), helping the grantees to reflect on and develop their work.

Purpose and structure of this report

1.5 This report summaries the headline findings from our work as Learning Partner in Year 1 of the Initiative. The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: Our approach
- Chapter 3: Findings from the "Scalability" Special Project
- Chapter 4: Impact of the Initiative (so far)
- Chapter 5: Insights from the Action Learning Sets
- Chapter 6: Insights from the Learning Symposium
- Chapter 7: Feedback from grantees on SQW's Learning Partner activities
- Chapter 7: Recommendations
- Annex A: Detailed description of Learning Partner activities
- Annex B: Logic model for Phase 2 of the Early Years Special Initiative

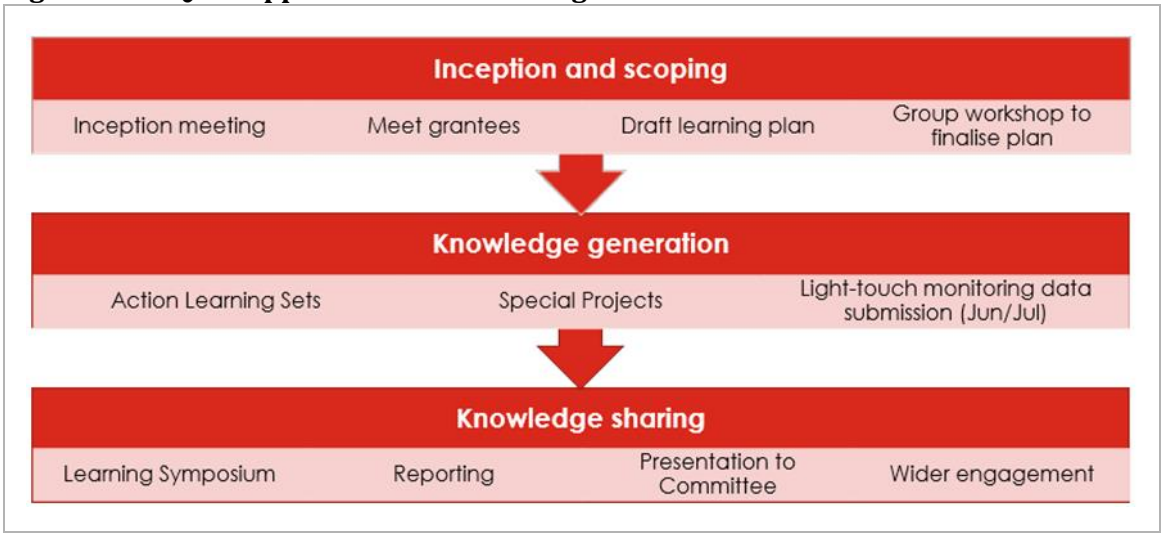
2. Our approach

Summary

- SQW's approach to the Learning Partner role involves three distinct stages.
  - Inception and scoping: introductory meetings with grantees; development of Initiative logic model and data collection framework; Autumn workshop
  - Knowledge generation: Action Learning Sets; Special Project on Scalability; collection of light touch monitoring data
  - Knowledge sharing: Learning Symposium with live illustrator
- Grantees were asked to provide feedback on their experience of SQW's Learning Partner activities in Year 1, to help inform planning for Year 2.

2.1 Our approach to the Learning Partner role is summarised in **Error! Reference source not found.**, below. Each year, it will comprise three distinct stages: inception and scoping, knowledge generation, and knowledge sharing. We provide a brief overview, here, of the activities undertaken in Year 1. A more detailed description is located in Annex A.

Figure 2-1: SQW's approach to the Learning Partner role



Source: SQW

Inception and scoping

2.2 During the scoping phase, we reviewed grantees' application forms and other relevant programme documentation and held introductory meetings with each of the grantees to introduce ourselves and hear more about their work. Using the insights from this, and drawing on Mercers' Philanthropy Impact Framework, we then drafted a high-level logic model for Phase 2 of the Initiative (see Annex B) and light touch data collection framework.

2.3 The scoping phase concluded with a grantee workshop, hosted at Mercers' in November 2023. During the workshop SQW talked through our approach to the Learning Partner role and grantees introduced their programmes and participated in an Action Learning taster session. The main written output of this phase was a learning plan for Year 1.

Knowledge generation

2.4 The knowledge generation phase comprised three activities:

- **Action Learning**: Action Learning is an effective way to help people solve real problems with support from their peers. Each grantee organisation nominated one individual (or two in the case of Early Education) to take part in the Action Learning Sets throughout Year 1 of the Initiative. The Sets followed a specific structure.

- **Special Project**: The Special Projects are 'deep dives' into themes or topics of interest and relevance to the grantees. The theme selected for the Special Project in Year 1 was 'Scalability'. Five research questions were explored through: a review of existing evidence relating to scalability; an interview with a scalability consultant; an interview with Mercers'; and interviews with all Cohort 1 grantees.

- **Light touch monitoring data**: in order to identify the collective impact of the Initiative, light touch data was collected from the grantees via a short online survey in June 2024.

Knowledge sharing

2.5 We hosted the Year 1 Learning Symposium at Mercers' on 4th July 2024, to celebrate the grantees' work on the Initiative and share learning. A live illustrator attended the event to capture the key messages from SQW and the grantees' presentations in an engaging resource, which is presented in the Executive Summary and in Chapter 6.

Additional activities

2.6 We asked grantees to provide feedback on their experience of SQW's Learning Partner activities in Year 1, to help inform planning for Year 2. The feedback was collected via a short online survey in July 2024, and is presented in Chapter 7.

3. Findings from the "Scalability" Special Project

Summary

- The Special Project for Year 1 focused on 'Scalability.'
- It explored what scalability means to grantees in different contexts and how programmes can scale effectively and sustainably.
- Two types of scaling were identified: 'Quantitative' scaling, which means increasing the number of people who benefit from a programme and 'Political' or 'Functional' scaling, which means building momentum for a cause and developing complementary interventions.
- Two approaches to scaling were identified: a 'tight' approach and a 'loose' approach. The most effective and sustainable way to approach scaling will depend on the programme concerned but is often somewhere in between 'tight' and 'loose', using a structured but flexible implementation process.
- Factors which enable scaling include evidence, demand, capacity, and alignment with policy, while barriers include political uncertainty and wider challenges (such as capacity) facing the Early Years sector.

Special Projects and focus in Year 1

3.1 As is explained briefly, above (and in greater detail in Annex A), Special Projects are 'deep dives' into themes or topics of interest and relevance to the grantees. The Year 1 theme was 'Scalability', which we deemed relevant to all grantees (albeit in different ways).

3.2 The Special Project on 'Scalability' was structured around the following research questions:

1. What does 'scalability' mean in the grantees' different contexts?
2. To what extent – and how – do programmes on the Initiative seek to scale?
3. What are the factors that enable or impede programmes on the Initiative to scale?
4. How can programmes on the Initiative scale effectively and sustainably? What makes scaling 'stick'?
5. How does the Initiative support its grant holders to scale?

3.3 These research questions were explored through: a review of existing evidence relating to scalability; an interview with a scalability consultant (Janet Grauberg); an interview with Mercers'; and interviews with all Cohort 1 grantees.

To what extent is scaling programmes a focus for Mercers'?

3.4 For Mercers', scaling is an implicit rather than explicit consideration for the Initiative. Scaling was not an explicit focus when the Initiative was being designed; grant applicants were not required to address scaling in their proposals and are not required or expected to scale to be deemed 'successful'. Instead, Mercers' priority was to *"trial things…and take a bit of a risk on some organisations in terms of what they're delivering and pilots"*.

3.5 Scalability has been identified as a focus for the Special Project, even though it is not something Mercers' has focused on before now. Mercers' is interested in using the findings from this study to judge the extent to which scaling can and should be a focus for this and other Initiatives in future.

What is 'scaling'?

3.6 The literature identifies two types of scaling:[2]

1. **'Quantitative' scaling.** This means increasing the number of people who benefit from a social intervention, for example through replicating a programme in new settings or getting a set of principles or a methodology adopted more widely.

2. **Political' or 'functional' scaling.** This means 'building momentum' for a particular issue or cause and developing complementary interventions that address the same or similar issues. For example, in the name of improving outcomes for families, this might involve establishing an early literacy programme alongside health and wellbeing interventions.

What does 'scaling' mean to grantees?

3.7 We explored during interviews what 'scaling' means for the grantees in relation to their individual projects. They said it can mean one or more of the following:

- **Increased adoption of whole intervention**. All grantees, to varying degrees, thought that scaling means having their intervention adopted in more settings and reaching more beneficiaries ('quantitative' scaling):

  "In relation to our Mercers' programme it basically means increased sessions, increased workshops and increased numbers of parents and children that can access the project."

  Grantee

- **Increased adoption of intervention principles at a grassroots (practitioner/parent) level.** For example, one said that they were seeking to scale the storytelling element of

[2] Making It Big: Strategies for scaling social innovations | Nesta

their intervention, which is currently focused on maths, to support other outcomes: *"We are targeting maths through storytelling, but actually everything can be delivered through storytelling".* Specifically, four grantees wanted to influence people's behaviour and attitudes, such as those of parents or practitioners.

- **Increased adoption of intervention principles by policymakers.** Two grantees said that scaling means advocating for their interventions' principles. This can mean seeking to influence public policy:

  "It means partly policy change and having that influence from the top so that you can embed and have the funding to embed it more widely."

  Grantee

To what extent do programmes on the Initiative seek to scale?

3.8 Several grantees explained that scaling is **central to their organisational or programme ambitions** while on the Initiative:

"It is probably in the top three things that we want to achieve is as a charity… We have some really good models of practice about how you leave a legacy to embed our programmes locally and develop that systems approach."

Grantee

"It is one of our strategic objectives [for the programme]. We know that it delivers an evidence-based result – one of our goals is to ensure that it is rolled out as widely as possible."

Grantee

3.9 However, over and above scaling, all grantees said **their priority was ensuring that their programmes have an impact** on intended beneficiaries:

"We have ambitious targets and we have built in scalability…[but] the key objective is to create something that is useful and addresses need locally and works with our target audience…Reaching those [target] families [are] the number one priority. Secondary is reaching more families."

Grantee

How does scaling occur?

3.10 Approaches to scaling vary and must balance preserving the characteristics of the original intervention while adapting it to fit within a new context. The evidence conceptualises this balance as a choice (or combination) or 'tight' and 'loose' scaling:[3]

- **A 'tight' approach** focuses on an intervention's individual components, sticking closely to their original form. This helps ensure quality is maintained although effectiveness may be limited if the intervention does not translate well into different contexts.
- **A 'loose' approach** focuses the underlying principles of an intervention and provides flexibility in how these are translated into action across contexts.

3.11 Whether a 'tight' or 'loose' approach is more appropriate will depend on factors including:

- **The 'core' components of the intervention** and what scaling might mean for these;[4]
- **The complexity of the intervention**. The more complex the intervention, the more difficult it may be to replicate in its original form;[5]
- **The potential for quality adoption and embedding within new settings** and how the intervention might need to be adapted to achieve this;[6]
- **The intended pace of scaling**. If the ambition is for scaling to happen quickly, it may be more difficult to embed interventions into adoptive settings.[7]

3.12 As part our research into scalability, we spoke with Janet Grauberg, a scalability consultant. Janet emphasised that scaling must take context into account, and that scaling should emphasise 'adaptation' over 'replication'.

3.13 It is not a case of 'either/or' with 'tight' and 'loose' scaling. Indeed, Janet said the most effective and sustainable way to approach scaling may be somewhere in between these, using what she described as a "live template". In other words, there should be a framework for scaling an intervention, based on the intervention's 'core' features, but this framework should be flexible and guided by the adoptive settings' contexts (including their physical layout, delivery model, target beneficiaries and staff capacity).

3.14 Implementation is a vital piece of the puzzle; without it, programmes/interventions will not be effective. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) outlines recommendations and

[3] Making It Big: Strategies for scaling social innovations | Nesta
[4] Making It Big: Strategies for scaling social innovations | Nesta
[5] The spread challenge - The Health Foundation
[6] Achieving scale and spread: Learning for innovators and policy-makers | Nuffield Trust
[7] Making It Big: Strategies for scaling social innovations | Nesta

steps that schools can take to improve the quality of implementation of new programmes.[8] The guidance is targeted at schools but may still be useful to an Early Years audience. Table 3-1 summarises the guidance, below.

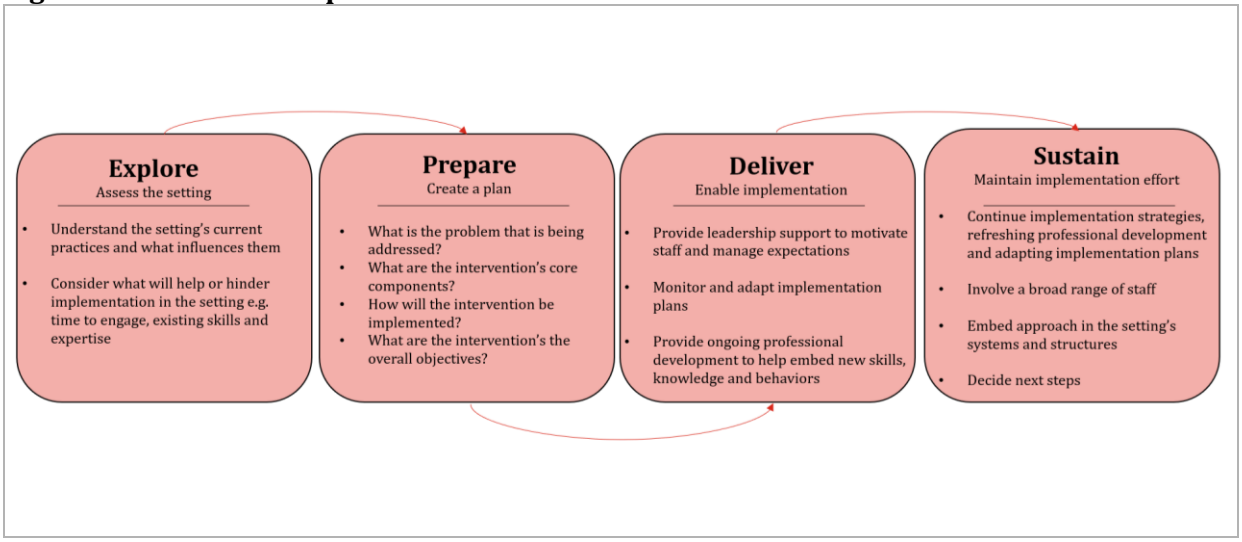
Table 3-1: A summary of the Education Endowment Foundation's guidance for implementation

Recommendation	Key steps
1. Adopt the behaviours that drive effective implementation	• Engage people so that they can shape what happens • Reflect, monitor and adapt to improve implementation
2. Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation	• Consider whether the approach is evidence-based, right for the setting and feasible to implement • Develop an infrastructure that supports implementation, e.g., time, roles, logistics • Ensure people are in place who can support, lead and positively influence implementation
3. Use a structured but flexible implementation process	• Use a structured process to apply the behaviours and contextual factors to day-to-day work • Adopt a practical and tailored set of implementation strategies organised into manageable phases: Explore, Prepare, Deliver and Sustain (See Figure 1, below) • Treat implementation as a process of ongoing learning and improvement

Source: Education Endowment Foundation, A Schools Guide to Implementation

[8] A School's Guide to Implementation guidance report | Education Endowment Foundation (d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net)

Figure 3-1: Phases of implementation



Source: Education Endowment Foundation, A Schools Guide to Implementation

How are programmes on the Initiative scaling?

3.15 The literature on 'scalability' highlights that an important consideration in deciding how to scale is understanding what the 'core' elements of the intervention are. Grantees said the following constitute the 'core' of their programmes:

- **The practicalities.** For example, parental engagement, face-to-face teaching and individualised visits to Early Years settings.
- **The principles,** for example supporting Early Years outcomes through physical education or storytelling.
- **The evidence.** One grantee said that their delivery approach is rooted in empirical evidence, and this was what was at the 'core' of their intervention's success.
- **The impact**. One grantee felt that a 'core' component of their programme is the programme's impact. The programme *"gives practitioners their 'why' – it empowers them to be able to think differently and go wider than the programme, thinking how they can use environment in a different way".*

3.16 Grantees were asked if they had undertaken any activities linked to scaling so far. A range of activities were highlighted, which we classify as the 'Four 'P's':

- **People**. One grantee said that they had recruited more staff to enable them to roll out their programme more widely. Another said that they were seeking to understand local systems and were tapping into their existing networks locally to identify the people who can support, lead and positively influence implementation. One grantee said that they were appointing 'deputy' leads within settings, to protect programme delivery in the

event of staff turnover. One grantee, for whom scaling is embedded within organisational objectives, already had a plan in place:

"Generally, the approach we take to scaling is we develop an innovation and train other people to embed it in their local area so that it can be scaled locally by professionals within the local community, who know their families and have connections, etc.."

Grantee

- **Provision.** At this stage, grantees said they have focused primarily on modifying resources for scaling. However, they said they have been considering 'what next?' in terms of funding after the Mercers' Initiative ends. One grantee said that they are creating a resource bank so that settings can 'pick and choose' resources responsive to their needs. Another said they were working to create online resources so the programme could be accessed by Early Years settings that have not previously interacted with it, for example in other localities.

- **Proof.** One grantee has conducted evaluations of their intervention in partnership with UK universities. Another said that they were continually embedding learning from early delivery into their programme:

"We have embedded within our project plan lots of communication with partners, e.g., parents, libraries. So we are building in a lot of their feedback. We are ready to be flexible."

Grantee

- **Policy.** Several grantees said they have already engaged in advocacy activities for issues relating to their programme. For example, one grantee has been involved in dialogue with policy leaders about issues relating to their programme, whilst another has published its 'Five Asks for Government' calling for changes to family learning policy.

How can programmes on the Initiative scale effectively and sustainably? What makes scaling 'stick'?

3.17 The literature on scaling, interviews with grantees, and feedback from Janet Grauberg, all indicated that interventions need adapting – to greater or lesser extents – to be implemented effectively in new settings. With this in mind, grantees were asked to consider whether the 'core' elements of their programme would need to be adapted to enable scaling.

3.18 Views differed among grantees about the extent to which their programmes could be adapted for adoption in other settings. In some cases, grantees felt elements of delivery – such as whether training takes place online or in-person – would allow flexibility. Generally, grantees considered that providing broad principles and letting other settings 'translate' these into practice (i.e., a 'loose' approach) is easier and less resource intensive than dictating rigid delivery through training and resources (i.e., a 'tight' approach). However, others said their

approach is grounded in evidence and were worried that any changes in how the programme is implemented would impede impact:

"Thinking about scalability, [online] group settings are cheaper but may not have the same impact as face-to-face. Is that more impactful or is it working and going into settings with the whole staff or is it a mixture of the two?"

Grantee

3.19 A summary of the different approaches to scaling effectively and sustainably is set out in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2: A summary of the different approaches to scaling

Type of scaling	Risks	Approach	Enablers	Examples of grantee activity
'Quantitative' scaling. Increasing the number of people who benefit from a social intervention. All grantees expressed ambitions for this type of scaling.	Loss of quality/fidelity to original intervention. Loss of impact. Loss of embeddedness in context. More staff resource required. Intervention fatigue.	The research suggests that a 'structured but flexible' approach is most suited to 'quantitative' scaling (i.e., an approach somewhere in between 'tight' and 'loose'). The EEF's process for implementation 'Explore, Prepare, Deliver and Sustain' sets out how this approach might look in practice (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).	**People.** The support of local decision-makers. Practitioner capacity. Skills. Engagement. **Provision.** Funding to support widespread implementation. Resources for delivery. **Proof.** Evidence of impact. Continuous monitoring to support effective and sustainable implementation. **Policy.** Alignment with national/local policy to support other enablers (i.e., 'People' and 'Provision').	Creation of a resource bank to support a 'pick and choose' approach. Identifying efficiencies to reduce staff resource, e.g., moving to online delivery. Documenting processes to enable replication. Tapping into local connections and networks. Recruitment of additional staff. Embedding, e.g., deputy leader. Continuous monitoring and evaluation.
'Functional' or 'Political' scaling. Building momentum for a particular cause or developing complementary interventions, using the intervention's key principles, to support a desired outcome.	Limited ex ante 'buy in' for the intervention's principles.	A 'loose' approach is most conducive to 'functional' or 'political scaling'. Flexibility is lower risk because the focus of this type of scaling is not on the intervention itself, but the intervention's broad principles.	**People.** The support of key policy makers to take intervention principles forward. **Provision.** Resources to advocate for intervention principles. **Proof.** Evidence of the intervention principles'	Campaigning, e.g., securing public commitment from policy leaders in the sector. Creation of promotional materials e.g., publications campaigning for change, promotional films.

Type of scaling	Risks	Approach	Enablers	Examples of grantee activity
Several grantees expressed ambitions for this type of scaling.			importance, urgency and impact. **Policy**. Political attention towards Early Years issues.	

How does the Initiative support grantees to scale?

3.20 Grantees and Mercers' highlighted a number of ways in which the Initiative supports its grantees to scale. These were not always explicitly linked to scaling, but could support scaling ambitions nevertheless:

- **Marketing and communications support** is offered through the Media Trust. Grantees apply for this support, which is made available to ten organisations across Mercers' Young People and Education Initiatives. If grantees are successful, the Media Trust helps them produce a short film on their Initiative. Mercers' has also added some additional support around training in communications that is open to all grantees. Four Cohort 1 grantees have received support from the Media Trust to produce a film of their Initiative, and other grantees have been involved in the training.
- **Business mentoring and consultancy** is offered through the Cranfield Trust. The support is bespoke, and it is down to individual grantees to approach the Cranfield Trust if they would like to access it.
- **Hire of the Mercers' Hall at no cost to grantees** to host events to promote and advocate programme principles or partnerships with national organisations
- **Action Learning Sets,** facilitated by SQW, have included discussions about how grantees scale their support (alongside other elements of their programmes). All Cohort 1 grantees have been engaged in this activity.

3.21 Grantees have only recently begun accessing these forms of support and said it is too soon to say what the impact of these has been.

3.22 Mercers' described the examples of support listed above as part of their 'funder plus' model: *"The offer is there but it's down to the organization to use it how they see fit … take up that offer".*

3.23 Grantees said Mercers' funding helps them to scale. In particular, the longevity of the funding is enabling grantees time to think about scaling and *"what comes next"* after the Initiative ends.

3.24 Grantees were asked to consider how Mercers' could provide further support in relation to scaling. Suggestions included: facilitating connections with other funders (in response to this Mercers' said that there will be opportunities for grantees to meet other funders at the Learning Symposium EPI are running in 2025); facilitating further connection with other grantees on the Initiative (networking opportunities will continue to be facilitated by SQW through Action Learning Sets and annual Learning Symposium events); and capacity building within grantee organisations with regards to scaling, such as training sessions.

3.25 Receiving support for scaling was generally considered to be a priority because, as one grantee said, *"the thinking needs to happen now".*

What are the factors that enable or impede programmes on the Initiative to scale?

Enabling factors

3.26 The literature highlights that sustainable and effective 'quantitative' scaling may be enabled by the following factors:

- **Evidence.** This underpins key stages of the scaling process through: helping to clarify the 'core' elements of an intervention to inform how scaling might occur; creating 'buy in' from key stakeholders to support initial adoption; and supporting learning as scaling takes place to ensure quality adoption.[9]
- **Demand.** There must be a demand or 'buy in' for the intervention.[10]
- **Capacity.** Scaling relies on the ability of adopters to implement the intervention in relation to skills set, time and resource. Capacity building and training may be useful activities to embed interventions properly into adoptive settings.[11]

3.27 Grantees considered scaling to be enabled by factors that we summarise as the four 'Ps':

1. **Policy.** In 'quantitative' scaling, programme objectives need to align with national and/or local policy.

   "The big drivers are external to us. I think it's more about policy, the political landscape, funding generally.

   Mercers'

   In 'functional' or 'political' scaling, the objective is often to influence policy. Therefore, the support of key decision makers is more of an enabler (see 'People' section, below) than policy itself.

2. **People.** People are critical at every stage of 'quantitative' scaling. At the outset people need to, (a), believe in the programme and, (b), want to adopt it and encourage others to do so: *"It is dependent on passionate individuals and their capacity to influence systems."* Practitioners need the capacity to deliver the programme: *"The biggest thing is resource. Without staff you can't do anything."* Then, to embed the programme in the longer term, staff need skills, confidence and willingness to do so. One grantee commented more generally that understanding the local context within which key people operate, including their roles,

[9] Achieving scale and spread: Learning for innovators and policy-makers | Nuffield Trust
[10] Making It Big: Strategies for scaling social innovations | Nesta
[11] The spread challenge - The Health Foundation

is also an enabler. 'Functional' or 'political' scaling also requires support of key policy makers towards the intervention principles.

3. **Provision.** Having the resources to scale is critical. This includes having sufficient funding and appropriate tools, such as accessible materials to deliver the intervention (quantitative scaling) or promotional materials to advocate for the intervention's principles ('functional' or 'political' scaling) to scale.

4. **Proof.** Grantees highlighted that, with 'scalability', generating and using evidence is important to, (a), monitor implementation and impact on an ongoing basis to make refinements to day-to-day delivery and, (b), understand impact and how the programme/intervention principles supports Early Years outcomes.

3.28 Grantees said the four 'Ps' are interlinked. However, in some cases, one may come before another: for example, policy priorities may drive funding which might then unlock capacity and resource.

Barriers

3.29 The most commonly cited barrier by grantees was political uncertainty around the election and what a change in government might mean for the policy and funding environment. Although a change in government *might* lead to changes that grantees see as advantageous to their programmes (for example, increased capacity within the Early Years and education sectors), the uncertainty made organisations reticent to take risks prior to the election.

3.30 The wider Early Years sector faces considerable challenges in terms of funding, staffing and time. For example, many Early Years settings face staffing pressures (including ratios and turnover) which can negatively impact appetite and ability to implement new interventions:

"The biggest risk is that the sector is going through a staffing crisis with the increase in funded hours so there are more pressures and the feedback from settings is that they don't have time to take part."

Grantee

3.31 Mercers' also noted that *"intervention fatigue"* may potentially be a barrier to scaling. Programmes Mercers' funds, generally seek to target the many of the same London boroughs which are those that are the most deprived and similar demographics of children and families within these boroughs.

4. Impact of the Initiative (so far)

Summary

- Light touch monitoring data was collected to provide an indication of the impact of the Initiative so far, focusing on six overarching categories: Early Years practitioners; families, parents and carers; children; settings; the Initiative; and resources.
- At the end of June 2024:
  - An estimated 2,790 children had benefited from the Initiative, including 2,160 children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
  - 113 Early Years practitioners, 153 parents and carers, and 70 settings had been engaged in Initiative activities.

4.1 This chapter presents the headline findings from the analysis of the light touch monitoring data, which provides an indication of the impact of the Initiative so far. The data is presented in line with the overarching categories in the data collection framework (see Table A-1) and summarised in an Initiative-level infographic (see, below).

4.2 The purpose of this exercise is to capture the Initiative's high-level impact; it is not to compare the grantees or 'judge' performance. We acknowledge that the grantees' work is very different, and that more is not necessarily better. Rather, the measures are designed to capture cumulative and aggregated impact across the board.

Early Years Practitioners

4.3 At the end of June 2024, **67 practitioner sessions** had been run**, engaging 113 practitioners.** The types of sessions included, but were not limited to, training and coaching sessions, workshops and in-setting visits. All sessions were delivered in-person.

Families, parents and carers

4.4 Three of the six programmes in Cohort 1 incorporate sessions specifically for families, parents and carers in their delivery model. At the end of June, these programmes had delivered **39 sessions** of this nature, **engaging 153 parents and carers.** One grantee organisation said that parents and carers were involved in co-production and pilot sessions at the project development stage, in addition to sessions during core delivery.

4.5 Two of the organisations collect data on a more granular level, in terms of the number of mothers, fathers, carers and family units engaged. At the point when grantees submitted their data, **10 mothers, 73 fathers, two carers, and eight family units** had attended sessions.

4.6 Another organisation said that they do not collect data on whether attendees were parents or carers, but they did record gender, and that 28 females and one male had attended their sessions.

Children

4.7 At the end of June, an estimated **2,790 children** had benefited from the Initiative, including **2,160 children from disadvantaged backgrounds**, based on data from four of six organisations. Two organisations who reported lower numbers of children benefiting explained that this was because they are still in the early stages of delivery and that the number will increase in future years.

Settings

4.8 In total **70 Early Years settings** had been engaged by the Initiative up to the end of June, as well as **three community settings**, including a local library which is promoting and providing resources for one of the programmes.

Initiative

4.9 **15 individuals attended the Learning Symposium** that was held in-person at Mercers' on 4th July. There was representation from across the grantees.

4.10 **Seven individuals took part in the Action Learning Sets across Year 1**. Again, there was representation from across the grantees.

Resources

4.11 All organisations created new resources in Year 1 of the Initiative. At the point when grantees submitted their data, a total of **53 new resources had been created**. This included: websites, reading logbooks, resources to support educators incorporate the use of creative practices[12] into their work with children, customer journey documents[13], information sheets, training session plans, handouts, facilitator guides and slides, videos, marketing flyers and a Media Trust film.

4.12 Including existing resources, **503 copies of resources (some physical, some electronic) had been disseminated**. One organisation did not provide a number as they were still testing their resources.

[12] Specifically drawing with charcoal and collaging

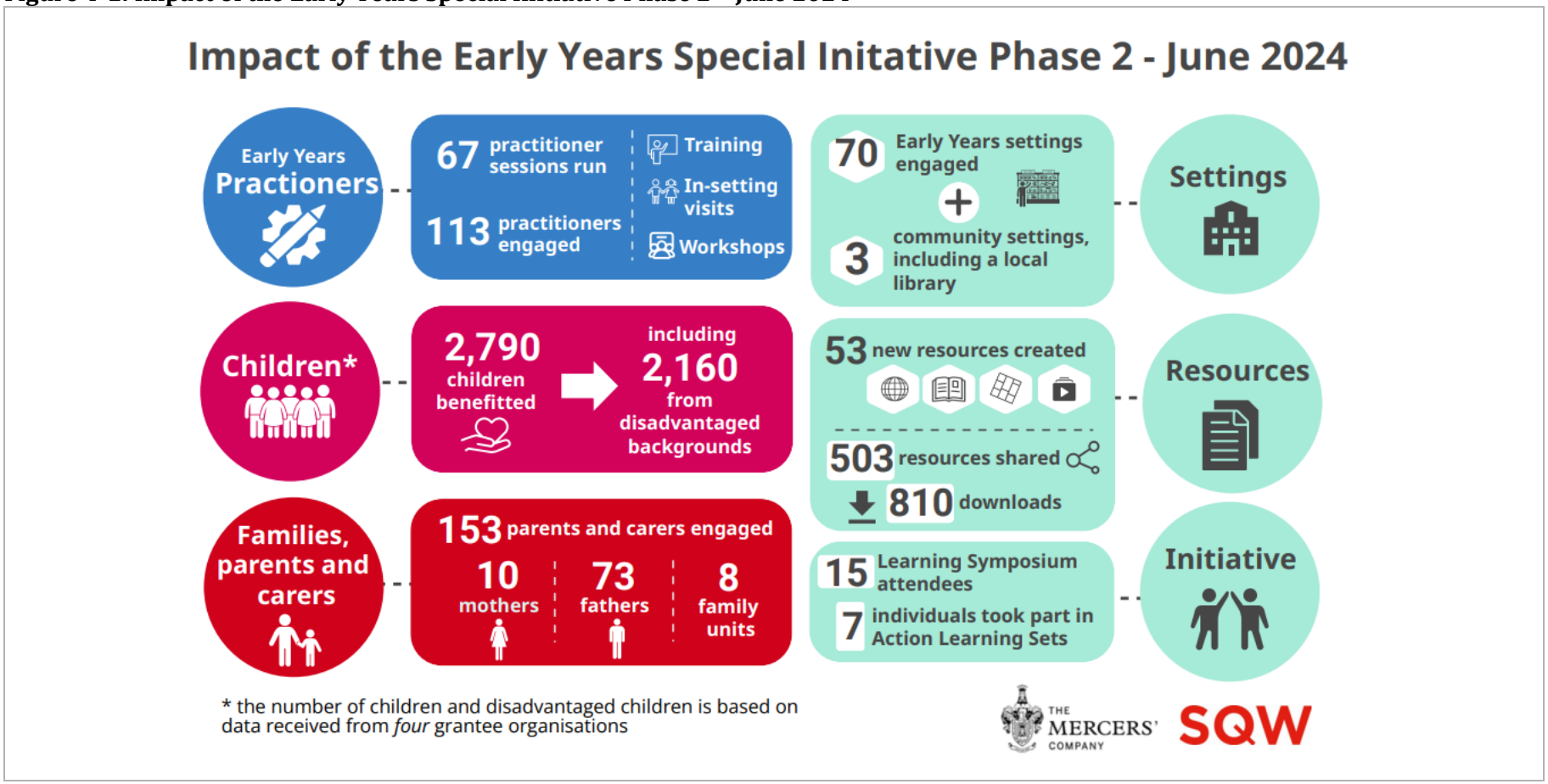
[13] In this instance customer references to the person who experiences the training programme, this could be an Early Years practitioner in a setting, an Early Years advisor, a family hub staff member or a childminder.

4.13 With regards to resources accessed (in terms of page views and downloads), one organisation said they had **810 downloads across various resources**, whilst another organisation said the project page on their website had **80 views**.

Infographic

4.14 An infographic summarising the analysis of the light touch monitoring data is included in **Error! Reference source not found.**, below.

Figure 4-1: Impact of the Early Years Special Initiative Phase 2 – June 2024



Source: SQW graphic created using analysis of light-touch monitoring data

5. Insights from the Action Learning Sets

Summary

- The Action Learning Sets took place online in January and May 2024, and in-person in July 2024. Participants discussed challenges and received peer support to develop solutions to these.
- Participants found the Action Learning Sets beneficial and felt they built a supportive learning community in which they could share their experiences and generate insights relevant to their work.
- Participants said the Action Learning Sets influenced their work by encouraging abstract thinking, project redesign, and enhancing questioning skills.
- Participants said they felt increasingly comfortable in the Sets as the year went on and said the 'Origins' exercise was particularly effective at building trust and openness.
- Participants valued having an external facilitator deliver the Sets and wanted this to continue in Year 2.
- Participants noted challenges with fitting the Action Learning Sets into busy schedules. They suggested meeting online where possible, and continuing to get plenty of advanced notice for scheduling, would be helpful.

5.1 This chapter presents the insights from the Action Learning Sets, which took place online in January and May 2024, and in-person in July 2024.

5.2 The Action Learning Sets themselves are confidential. However, we asked participants for feedback they would be happy for us to share, as part of the Year 1 report.

Topics discussed

As explained in Chapter 2, Action Learning is an effective way to help people and organisations develop and solve real problems with support from their peers. At each Action Learning Set, one or two participants presented on a situation or challenge of their choosing. Examples of topics discussed included:

- How can you enable all children to have a valuable home learning experience and support parents to engage in home learning?
- How can a national organisation recruit a local workforce to deliver and coordinate an Early Years programme in London?

- What are the different ways to motivate practitioners to progress through an Early Years programme?
- What can scalability look like when the work you are doing is very relational?
- How can we secure buy-in to our project at different levels (e.g., practitioners, senior leaders, policy makers)?

Reflections on the process

5.3 In the final Action Learning Set in July, participants shared feedback about their experience of the Sets in Year 1, to help inform delivery in Year 2. Participants were also asked about their experience of the Sets in the feedback survey.

In what ways did participants find the Action Learning Sets beneficial?

5.4 Participants said that taking part in the Action Learning Sets had enabled them to get to know the other grantees and their projects, share experiences, bounce ideas off one another, and feel part of a supportive learning community:

"I felt we created a trusting, empathetic environment/space where we could be challenged and work out issues. It validated our missions and provided us an opportunity to work with people with similar aims but who we might not have met in our day-to-day work"

Action Learning Set participant

5.5 One participant said that a lot of the topics discussed in the Action Learning Sets had been relevant to their work and provoked them to reflect on similar issues they were experiencing in their own projects:

"I am not sure whether I would have delved in the ways I have delved had it not been for some of the conversations in the Action Learning Sets."

Action Learning Set participant

5.6 Participants spoke of a strong connection between the members of the group and attributed this to the "Origins" exercise that the Action Learning Set facilitator ran in the first session:

"There has definitely been a build-up of trust and connectivity and knowing you're not in it alone… the most powerful space I can remember vividly was the session on identity that La Toyah did, I found that a really powerful and empowering learning experience and a professional and personal development experience. It showed me our internal drivers and that all of us had the best interest of children at heart and personal stories that aligned, and that made us advocates for children."

Action Learning Set participant

How, if at all, have the Action Learning Sets influenced participants' work?

5.7 Participants gave examples of the ways in which the Action Learning Sets had influenced their work:

- One participant said that they now try to think about issues in more abstract ways, which often opens the door for different solutions
- One participant said that taking part in the Action learning Sets had led to them being more reflective about their project, re-designing elements of it, and gaining more confidence in themselves and their work
- One participant said they had developed their skills in asking questions, rather than just giving advice.

Was there anything that participants did not like about the process? Why?

5.8 Participants said they felt increasingly comfortable in the Sets as the year went on, and in comparison with the first Set during the Autumn workshop, where grantees did not know each other and had not yet built trust and rapport. The 'Origins' exercise was particularly effective at building trust and openness.

5.9 Participants also said that fitting the Action Learning Sets into busy work schedules and diarising the Sets at a time that worked for everyone was challenging, but that they always appreciated being there when the Sets were taking place.

Looking ahead to next year, is there anything that could be changed or improved?

5.10 Participants said that meeting online is preferable for the majority of the Sets, but that meeting one in person would be valuable.

5.11 Participants value having an external facilitator deliver the Sets (as opposed to self-facilitating them). This provides additional accountability to attend and actively participate in the sessions.

5.12 Finally, participants said they find it easier to manage the practical arrangements when they have plenty of notice of when the Action Learning Sets will be taking place.

6. Insights from the Learning Symposium

Summary

- The Learning Symposium was held at Mercers' on 4th July 2024, serving as both a knowledge-sharing and celebratory event.
- At the event, grantees presented on their experiences in Year 1, discussing their biggest successes, challenges, and surprises, and what they were most looking forward to next year.
- Participants discussed their experiences in Year 1 of engaging settings, practitioners, parents and families, as well as innovating, persevering and evaluating their work.
- A live illustrator captured the key messages from the presentations in an engaging visual resource.

6.1 This chapter presents the insights from the Learning Symposium, which was held at Mercers' on 4th July 2024. The Learning Symposium was both a knowledge sharing event and celebration of grantees' achievements in Year 1 of the Initiative.

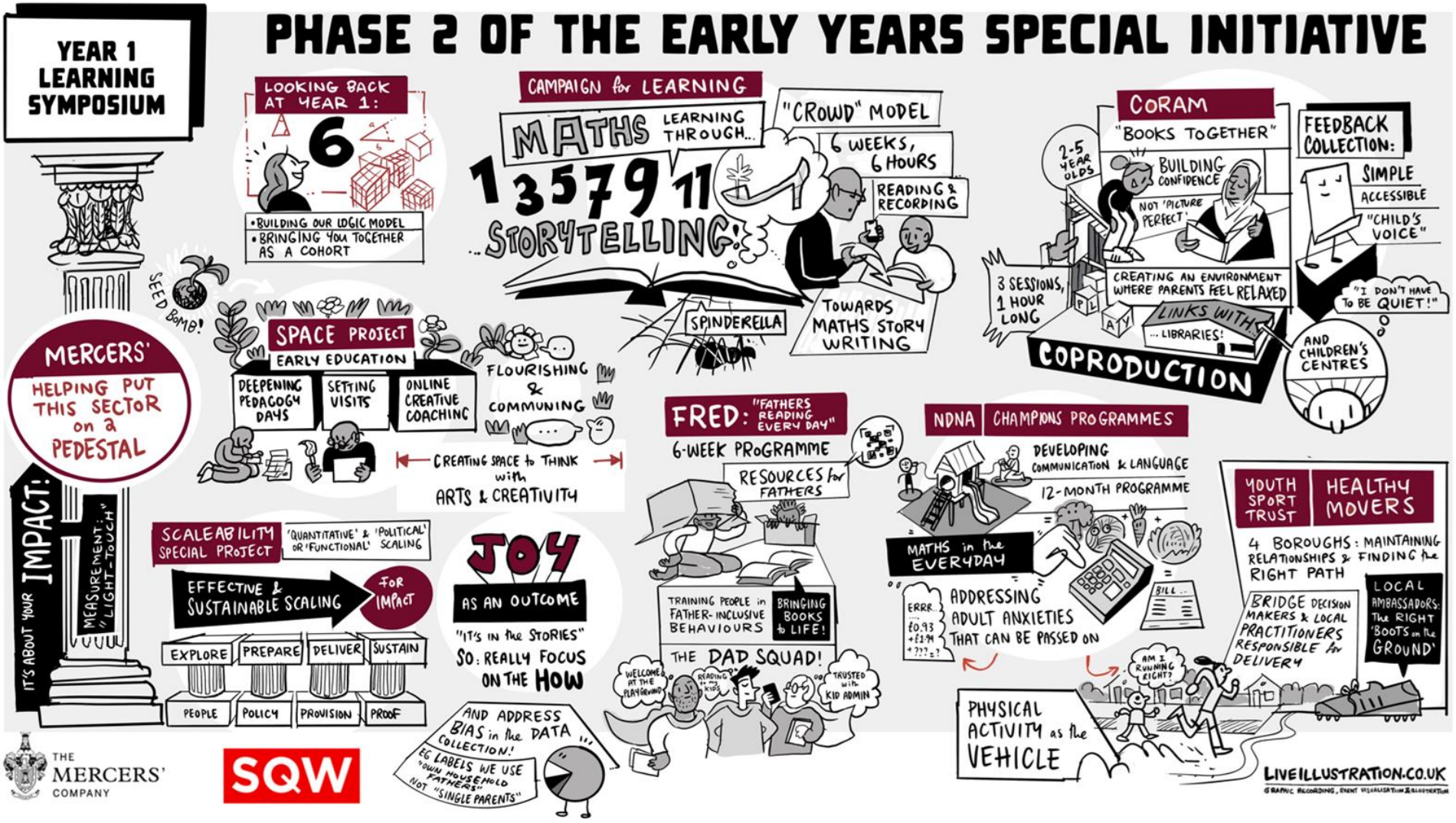
Figure 6-1: Year 1 Learning Symposium at Mercers'

Source: SQW

Live illustration

6.2 The grantees' and SQW's presentations at the Learning Symposium included a review of activities in Year 1 and the headline findings from the Special Project and analysis of light touch monitoring data. The presentations were captured by our live illustrator in the following image:

Figure 6-2: Live illustration of the Learning Symposium



Grantee presentations

6.3 The grantees' presentations were about their experience of the Initiative in Year 1. The presentations were structured around four questions and a summary of the grantees' answers to each of these questions is detailed, below.

Table 6-1: Matrix summarising grantees' Learning Symposium presentations

Question / Response theme	Engaging settings	Engaging practitioners	Engaging parents and families	Innovating	Persevering, perceptions and priorities	Evaluating
What was your biggest success this year?		Being part of the Initiative and supporting the development of practitioners.	Adopting a parent-led co-production approach, leading to better designed marketing and delivery activities. Consulting with parents to choose the books for one of the programmes.	Developing resources, e.g. course materials and digital information packs.	Persevering, despite difficult setbacks, to secure a local borough contact.	Receiving feedback from parents that was so positive team members cried.
What was your biggest challenge?	Recruiting settings, which are often experiencing intervention fatigue. Navigating different types of settings (e.g. public vs private, voluntary and independent).	Negotiating limited practitioner capacity and, in some cases, restricted practitioner knowledge e.g. in relation to pedagogy and children's development.	Struggling with high parental dropout rates (this was subsequently addressed through personalised invites from the child to their parents and recording sessions).		Changing attitudes and perceptions, e.g. around the role of fathers in children's development and the integration of physical activity into teaching and practice.	Getting the design of evaluation activities 'right', e.g. ensuring that the timing, length and messaging of surveys do not create barriers to engagement.
What was your biggest surprise?		Openness of practitioners to	Resistance from some mothers to fathers being more involved		Difference in practitioner vs parental priorities (i.e. practitioners	

Question / Response theme	Engaging settings	Engaging practitioners	Engaging parents and families	Innovating	Persevering, perceptions and priorities	Evaluating
		challenge their own beliefs. High levels of practitioner anxiety, specifically in relation to maths.	in children's development.		prioritise reading, parents prioritise wellbeing). Parental perceptions around the suitability of libraries to hold activities –libraries not child-friendly due to restrictions on noise; children's centres more suitable.	
What are you most looking forward to about next year?	Working in new settings.	Reaching more practitioners.	Engaging more children and families.	Updating communication and marketing materials.		Collecting more data and developing evaluations – e.g. piloting new surveys, support for parents with English as an additional language, experimenting with incorporating child's voice. Implementing learning from Year 1.

Source: SQW

7. Feedback from grantees on SQW's Learning Partner activities

Summary

- **Events:** Grantees appreciated meeting each other and representatives from Mercers' and SQW in-person at a central London venue. They valued sharing ideas and experiences with other organisations and using the space to think of solutions to challenges. Grantees praised the work of the live illustrator.
- **Special Project**: Grantees found the scalability theme relevant and liked the methodology. They said they would be interested in understanding the concrete implications arising from the Special Projects and would welcome the opportunity to explore complex issues further. They also requested timely sharing of findings to shape planning.
- **Light touch data collection:** Grantees liked the light touch approach to data collection, and felt it effectively illustrated the Initiative's scale and reach. They appreciated the amount of time given to submit data and suggested that a separate document outlining each data category would help with compiling responses.

7.1 This chapter summarises the feedback from grantees on SQW's Learning Partner activities in Year 1. This includes the Learning Partner events in Year 1 (Autumn Workshop and Learning Symposium), Special Project, and light touch data collection. Feedback on the Action Learning Sets is included in Chapter 5.

Feedback on the Learning Partner events in Year 1

7.2 The grantees who responded to the feedback survey valued being able to meet each other and the representatives from Mercers' and SQW in-person at a ("beautiful") venue in Central London. They said it was good to hear what the other grantees were planning to do at the Autumn workshop, and then hear them reflect on their experiences of Year 1 at the Learning Symposium (see Table 6-1). They said they liked sharing ideas and experiences with other organisations and using the space to think of solutions to challenges. Furthermore, they felt the live illustrator was did a great job of capturing the key messages.

7.3 With regards to next year, grantees said they would like any Learning Partner-related dates (e.g., for the in-person events) as soon as possible to aid planning and budgeting. One grantee felt the Learning Partner events could be more focused on action – using the time to understand how they can work together to emphasise the importance of work in the Early Years. Another grantee said they would value sharing ideas and practice relating to common challenges. This feedback will be incorporated into the next Learning Symposium.

Feedback on the Special Project

7.4 The grantees who provided feedback on the Special Project felt that the topic of scalability was relevant and of interest to all organisations and liked how the methodology incorporated interviews with each of the grantees to capture what scalability meant to them.

7.5 One grantee noted the challenge in striking a balance between finding a theme that relates to all grantees to at least an extent, and something that directly connects with individual grantees' priorities at that point in time. Relatedly, one grantee said they would have welcomed the opportunity to explore some of the more complex issues or perspectives regarding scalability in the context of the funded projects in an extended slot at the Learning Symposium.

7.6 Grantees said that they would be interested in understanding concrete implications arising from the Special Projects, in terms of delivery and practice. They said that the sooner that SQW can share findings from the Special Project, the better, as this will enable them to shape subsequent planning (although acknowledging the wider timelines SQW is working to).

Feedback on the light touch data collection

7.7 The grantees who responded to the feedback survey said they liked that the data collection was light touch, while sufficient to illustrate the Initiative's scale and reach. One grantee said they appreciated that the organisations were given plenty of time to compile and submit their data.

7.8 Grantees said they would like a separate document outlining each data category, as well as the online survey link, to aid them in compiling their responses.

8. Recommendations

8.1 This chapter outlines recommendations for SQW, Mercers' and the grantees in Year 2, following the Year 1 Learning Partner activities and feedback.

- Grantees value consistent, open and proportionate communications throughout the year. SQW will continue to communicate regularly with grantees, while striking a balance so as not to 'overload' inboxes.
- Grantees need to diarise events – Learning Symposium, Action Learning, etc. – as soon as possible. SQW will continue to liaise early with grantees about dates and locations.
- Cohort 1 would find attending three (rather than four) Action Learning Sets easier to diarise in Year 2, and SQW will arrange the Sets accordingly (with one in person Set at the end of Year 2).[14]
- SQW will ensure that grantees have space and time at the Learning Symposium to discuss broader ideas relating to good practice and concrete implications arising from Special Projects.
- Grantees will be cognisant of the Special Project findings on scalability – specifically, the degree to which scaling is an objective in Year 2 and, if so, what degree of 'tight' and 'loose' support is required.
- Wherever possible SQW will share insights from the Special Project and other Learning Partner activities early so that grantees can incorporate insights into future planning. Specifically, in Year 2, SQW will experiment with a 1-hour Special Project emergent findings workshop, to take place online after the fieldwork is completed and before the report is written, giving grantees an opportunity to explore findings and implications.
- SQW will request information about grantees' targets for the year and the extent to which these targets have been met through the survey.
- The grantees valued having La Toyah facilitate the Action Learning Sets in Year 1. SQW will retain La Toyah for Cohort 1 in Year 2 (with a view to the grantees facilitating their own sets in Year 3 onwards).
- SQW will provide a 'code book' to accompany the light touch data collection exercise.

[14] Cohort 2 will attend four Action Learning Sets during their first year on the Initiative.

Annex A: Detailed description of Learning Partner activities

Inception and scoping

Review of application forms and introductory meetings

A.1 At the start of the scoping phase, we reviewed grantees' application forms and held introductory meetings with each of them. This was an opportunity for us to introduce ourselves, and learn about grantees' work, their plans for their internal evaluations, and their reflections on our role as Learning Partner, including potential ideas for the Special Project in Year 1. We also requested access to any relevant programme documentation, such as theories of change or internal programme and evaluation documents.

Development of logic model

A.2 Using the insights from the introductory meetings and review of programme documentation, and drawing on Mercers' Philanthropy Impact Framework, we drafted a high-level logic model for Phase 2 of the Initiative. We shared the logic model with grantees for review and finalised it using their feedback. The logic model is attached in Annex B. The 'outputs' section of the logic model informed the development of the light touch data collection framework, which is discussed in more detail, below.

Grantee workshop

A.3 A grantee workshop, hosted at Mercers' in November 2023, concluded the scoping phase. Grantees introduced themselves and their programmes. SQW then talked through our approach to the Learning Partner role, covering the details of the knowledge generation and sharing activities in Year 1. Our Action Learning facilitator, La Toyah McAllister-Jones, ran a 'taster' Action Learning session for grantees.[15]

Learning plan for Year 1

A.4 The main output of the inception and scoping phase was a proposed learning plan for Year 1, which was shared with, and signed off by, Jane Samuels at Mercers' in early December 2023.

[15] Two grantees were unable to attend the workshop, and we met separately with these grantees.

Knowledge generation

Action Learning Sets

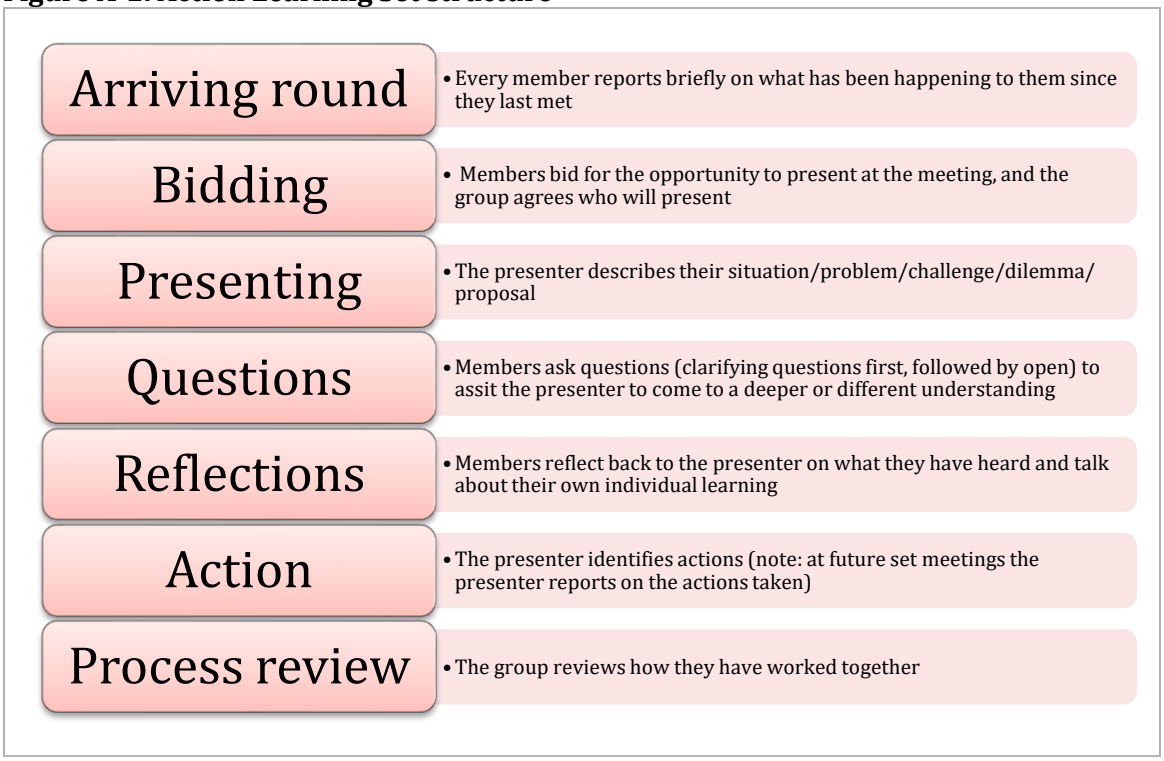
A.5 Action Learning is an effective way to help people and organisations develop and solve real problems with support from their peers.

A.6 Each grantee organisation nominated one individual (or two in the case of Early Education) to take part in the Action Learning Sets throughout Year 1 of the Initiative. We liaised with the participants and our Action Learning facilitator La Toyah to diarise the Sets, which took place online on 30th January 2024 and 2nd May 2024, and in-person at Mercers' on 5th July 2024.

A.7 At the start of the first Action Learning Set, participants were asked to spend five minutes talking about their origins, and sharing with the group what they had been influenced by and what mattered to them. This aim of this exercise was to build trust amongst participants, and create a safe space to share challenges.

A.8 The Sets followed a specific structure, as outlined in Figure A-1, below.

Figure A-1: Action Learning Set structure



Source: Action Learning Associates

A.9 All participants had the opportunity to present on a situation or challenge of their choosing.

A.10 In the first meeting of the group, participants were asked what they wanted to get out of the Action Learning Sets in Year 1; in the final meeting participants reflected upon this, and shared feedback about their experience of the Sets to help inform delivery in Year 2.

Special Projects

A.11 The Special Projects are 'deep dives' into themes or topics of interest and relevance to the grantees. One Special Project will be conducted per year of the Initiative, in the Spring.

A.12 The theme selected for the Special Project in Year 1 was 'Scalability', which we identified as a 'best fit' theme that was relevant to all grantees (albeit in different ways). The Special Project on 'Scalability' was structured around the following research questions:

1. What does 'Scalability' mean in the grantees' different contexts?
2. To what extent – and how – do programmes on the Initiative seek to scale?
3. What are the factors that enable or impede programmes on the Initiative to scale?
4. How can programmes on the Initiative scale effectively and sustainably? What makes scaling 'stick'?
5. How does the Initiative support its grant holders to scale?

A.13 These research questions were explored through: a review of existing evidence relating to scalability; an interview with a scalability consultant, Janet Grauberg; an interview with Mercers'; and interviews with all Cohort 1 grantees.

Light touch monitoring data

A.14 We collected light touch monitoring data from grantees to identify the collective impact of Initiative. The metrics map onto the outputs listed in the logic model and were finalised in dialogue with the grantees at the workshop in November 2023. The data collection framework is presented in Table A-1, below.

Table A-1: Framework for light touch data collection

Categories	Metrics
Early Years Practitioners	• Number of practitioner training/networking/mentoring/support sessions run • Number of practitioners who have attended training/networking/mentoring/ support sessions

Families, parents and carers	• Number of family/parent/carer training/support/guidance sessions run
	• Overall number of people (parents/carers) who have attended the training/support/guidance sessions
	• Of those who have attended the training/support/guidance sessions, the number of:
	  ➢ Mothers
	  ➢ Fathers
	  ➢ Carers

Categories	Metrics
	➢ Family units
Children	• Number of children benefiting from the programme • Number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefiting from the programme
Settings	• Number of Early Years settings engaged • Number of community settings engaged (e.g. libraries)
Initiative	• Number of (and attendance at) Learning Symposia • Number of (and attendance at) Action Learning Sets
Resources	• Number of new resources created • Number of resources disseminated • Number of resources accessed (e.g. page views, downloads etc)

Source: SQW

A.15 The data was collected via a short online survey that was live for three weeks between Monday 3rd June 2024 and Friday 21st June 2024. Where grantees did not have data or a metric was not relevant to their work, they were not expected to submit data. Following each question there was an open text box for grantees to provide additional information or context for their data entry, if they so wished. The data was analysed in Excel.

Knowledge sharing

Learning Symposium

A.16 We hosted the Year 1 Learning Symposium at Mercers' on 4th July 2024. 15 people attended the event, which ran from 10am to 1pm, followed by a networking lunch.

A.17 At the Learning Symposium, we presented the headline findings from the Special Project and analysis of light touch monitoring data, and the grantees presented on their experience of the Initiative in Year 1. The grantee presentations were structured around the following questions:

1. What was your biggest success this year?
2. What was your biggest challenge?
3. What was your biggest surprise?
4. What are you most looking forward to next year?

A.18 Grantees had 10 minutes to present, and then took 5 minutes of questions from the audience.

A.19 The Learning Symposium ended with a look ahead to Year 2.

A.20 A live illustrator attended the event to capture the key messages from SQW and the grantees' presentations in an engaging resource, which is presented in the Executive Summary and in Chapter 6.

Additional activities

A.21 We asked grantees to provide feedback on their experience of SQW's Learning Partner activities in Year 1, to help inform planning for Year 2. The feedback was collected via a short online survey that was live for 1 week, between Monday 8th July and Monday 15th July. The survey included specific questions for individuals who had taken part in the Action Learning Sets.

Annex B: Logic model for Phase 2 of the Early Years Special Initiative

Context: The Mercers' Company's Early Years Special Initiative provides grants to organisations in London that use evidence-based interventions to increase young children's numeracy, literacy and language skills, and their school readiness (personal, social and emotional development). Phase 2 of the Initiative was launched in 2023 and will run until 2028. During this time two cohorts of grantees will receive funding for four years of delivery.

Inputs

The Mercers' Company
Grant funding
Staff time
Committee time

Grantee organisations
Staff time
Equipment and resources

Other partners involved in delivery (not directly receiving Mercers' grant funding) *(includes organisations delivering or supporting the delivery of the intervention, local evaluators, Early Years settings, etc.)*
Staff time
Equipment and resources

Other
'In-kind' support (including volunteer time and Early Years provider time)

Activities

Coram Family and Childcare
'Increasing parental confidence to develop emergent literacy skills in the home environment'
Working with parents to co-design, co-market and co-deliver a series of fun courses for parents and their children in community settings, to spark a love of reading so that it becomes a habitual activity in the home.

Campaign for Learning
'Early Years Maths Through Storytelling'
Family numeracy programme designed with families, maths experts and Early Years providers that seeks to teach parents to build maths concepts (e.g. numbers, patterns, spatial reasoning) into story telling activities with their children.

Early Education
"Supporting Pedagogy, Arts and Creativity Everywhere (SPACE) to Flourish"
Bespoke coaching and mentoring for early years practitioners, inspiring practitioners to incorporate arts-based approaches and creativity into learning and teaching. Uses 'Thinking Spaces' to develop a sustained reflective community, alongside the creation of new resources.

Fatherhood Institute
'FRED: Fathers Reading Every Day'
Equipping Early Years practitioners with evidence-based techniques for successful father-engagement in their child's development, through the creation of resources to support annual implementation of FRED, and the training of a 'Dad Squad' of local male volunteers to support settings' promotion, outreach and evaluation activities.

National Day Nurseries Association
'Early Years Maths and Language & Communication Champions'
Online training for Early Years Practitioners on embedding maths and literacy learning into play-based activities and using auditing tools to assess learning. Champions then use audits to evaluate current practice and the competence levels of staff in their setting. Audit results are used to create an action plan, which is implemented by Champions with online support.

Youth Sport Trust
'Healthy Movers'
Training Early Years practitioners to integrate play-based learning through the delivery of physical activity sessions. In addition, parents will be engaged through 'Stay and Play Clubs', and Healthy Movers Ambassadors (practitioners and local authority staff) will be recruited and trained. Mentoring for practitioners will be delivered in settings to establish/sustain programmes. Virtual networking for practitioners will support cross-setting engagement and identify support requirements.

Outputs

Early Years Practitioners
Number of practitioner training/networking/mentoring/support sessions run
Number of practitioners who have attended training/networking/mentoring/support sessions

Families, parents and carers
Number of family/parent/carer training/support/guidance sessions run
Number of people (mothers, fathers, carers) and family units who have attended the training/support/guidance sessions

Children
Number of children benefiting from the programme
Number of children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefiting from the programme

Settings
Number of Early Years settings engaged
Number of community settings engaged (e.g. libraries)

Initiative
Number of (and attendance at) Learning Symposia
Number of (and attendance at) Action Learning Sets

Other
Number of new resources created
Number of resources disseminated
Number of resources accessed (e.g. page views, downloads etc)

Outcomes

For Early Years Practitioners
Improve practitioner understanding of Early Years pedagogy
Improve practitioners' motivation to deliver effective pedagogy
Improve practitioners' confidence in delivering effective pedagogy
Improve practitioners' ability to reflect/evaluate own work
Improve relationships with parents

For parents and carers
Increase parental/carer understanding of the role they can play in children's learning
Increase parents'/carers' confidence in supporting their children's learning
Increase parental/carer engagement in children's learning
Improve relationships with EY setting

For children
Increase children's engagement in learning
Increase children's engagement in learning in community settings
Increase children's access to quality arts-based learning
Increase children's access to quality play-based learning
Improve children's health and wellbeing

For settings
Increase breadth of pedagogy in Early Years setting
Improve quality of teaching in Early Years settings
Improve cross-organisational partnerships

For grantee organisations
Increase the resilience of grantee's programmes
Increase the scale of grantee's programmes
Increase grantee's ability to identify and incorporate ongoing improvements to delivery

For the wider Early Years sector
Increase awareness of effective models for supporting children's literacy and numeracy
Increase understanding of how the strategies in the Initiative can influence outcomes of children's development and practitioners in Early Years settings

Assumptions:
- Children and families are able to engage in the programme
- The individual programmes have strong theoretical grounding and can reasonably be expected to lead to impact
- The individual programmes will broadly be delivered as planned throughout the Initiative, acknowledging adjustments in light of feedback and experience
- The programmes require initial buy-in from target beneficiaries and then ongoing, sustained engagement by these groups

Impacts

For children

Increase in children's numeracy skills

Increase in children's literacy and language skills

Improvements in children's school readiness (personal, social and emotional development)

For grantee organisations

Organisations in receipt of Mercers' funding are better able through improved knowledge and capacity to deliver high impact work

SQW

Contact

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About us

SQW Group

SQW and Oxford Innovation are part of SQW Group.
www.sqwgroup.com

SQW

SQW is a leading provider of research, analysis and advice on sustainable economic and social development for public, private and voluntary sector organisations across the UK and internationally. Core services include appraisal, economic impact assessment, and evaluation; demand assessment, feasibility and business planning; economic, social and environmental research and analysis; organisation and partnership development; policy development, strategy, and action planning.
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Oxford Innovation

Oxford Innovation is a leading operator of business and innovation centres that provide office and laboratory space to companies throughout the UK. The company also provides innovation services to entrepreneurs, including business planning advice, coaching and mentoring. Oxford Innovation also manages investment networks that link investors with entrepreneurs seeking funding from £20,000 to £2m.
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