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# **Evaluation of Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) – Year 2**

## **Supplementary Evaluation Report of the Local Authority Development projects and National Rollout**

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# Executive Summary

## Background to Making it REAL

This supplementary report presents the findings from the second year of Making it REAL 2013-2015, and adds to the comprehensive evaluation of Year 1<sup>1</sup>. Making it REAL is an evidence-based family literacy intervention for two to five year olds. The evaluation was carried out by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre on behalf of the NCB Early Childhood Unit (ECU) and the Department for Education (DfE).

Making it REAL 2013-2015 is funded under the DfE National Prospectus Grant and aims to provide a replicable scalable model of Making it REAL and embed it nationally through two strands:

- Local Authority Development projects involving eight local authorities delivering a prescribed programme over a two-year period. Each year practitioners receive two days of training on the Making it REAL approach and deliver the project to a number of families, primarily disadvantaged families<sup>2</sup> and families where children might be considered in need of additional support for their early literacy development. The Making it REAL programme model consists of two home visits per family and three literacy events (group activities including trips).
- A National Rollout of one-day Making it REAL training to early years settings across England.

## Evaluation aims and methodology

The aim of the Year 2 evaluation is to provide a supplementary report building on the findings from the Year 1 evaluation. The evaluation focused on:

- project delivery and the degree to which delivery targets have been met in terms of the number of settings, practitioners, children and families engaged in the project,
- perceived outcomes achieved by the project, specifically:
  - early literacy outcomes of children aged two to five years
  - parents' skills, confidence and behaviours in supporting their children's early literacy development
  - the skills, knowledge and practice of practitioners working with parents and children in early years settings
- understanding the role of the project in the early identification of additional needs of children.

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[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making\\_it\\_real\\_evaluation\\_report\\_final\\_version\\_230914\\_2.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making_it_real_evaluation_report_final_version_230914_2.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents who were less engaged with the setting.

- perceptions of what contribution the introduction of volunteers has had on the effectiveness of the project.

For the Local Authority Development projects data was collected through a post training evaluation form, a three-month follow up practitioner survey of those who attended the two-day training, pre- and post-project observation forms completed by practitioners about the children involved in the project and a parent postal self-completion feedback form. For the National Rollout data was collected from practitioners only via a post training evaluation form and a three-month follow-up online survey.

## Key findings

### Delivery outputs

#### *Local Authority Development projects*

The eight Local Authority development projects were broadly successful in meeting overall targets set for levels of involvement and delivery work with families. In Year 1 there were 64 settings with 135 practitioners delivering the project and in Year 2 projects were delivered in 79 settings by 136 practitioners. The original target had been 128 settings and 256 practitioners.

Over the two years there were a total of 1,132 children and families engaged in the project (537 in Year 1 and 595 in Year 2), of which 337 children were two-year olds (91 in Year 1 and 246 in Year 2). The target had been eight families per setting, with the achieved average for the two years being 7.9 families per setting, just short of the target. A further 1,149 additional<sup>3</sup> children attended at least one literacy event or activity over the two years (534 in Year 1 and 615 in Year 2).

Over the two years a total of 1,925 home visits were carried out by practitioners, of which 1,004 home visits were completed in Year 2 between October 2014 and March 2015 (an average of 1.69 visits per family). The aim had been for two home visits for each family involved, and it is likely that further home visits were carried out after March 2015 in Year 2 falling after the cut-off date for data collection and therefore this data is not included in this report.

There were 427 group trips and events over the two years, 240 of which happened in Year 2 (an average of 3 events per setting) which was the original target. Attendance levels by parents was good, as three out of five families (62%) attended two or more events in the second year.

Since one of the main criteria for children and families to be involved in the project was for them to be less engaged with the early years setting, these findings highlight the success of Making it REAL in terms of engaging these families. With the targeted number of home visits almost being met and good

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<sup>3</sup> These additional children were not part of the targeted families who were fully engaged in the project.

attendance at group trips and events by parents the findings show that practitioners who have received the training are able to engage disadvantaged families in the Making it REAL project.

### **National Rollout**

A total of 144 local one day training courses were held over the two years (72 courses in each year) and six regional training events (four in Year 1 and two in Year 2). This exceeded the target of 140 training courses over the two years. The total number of practitioners trained through the National Rollout over the two years was 2,789.

### **Perceived outcomes for children aged two- to five-years**

Practitioners involved in both the Local Authority Development projects and the National Rollout one-day training provided positive feedback on the outcomes for all children consistent with Year 1 findings. The Local Authority Development project settings noted improvements in the pre- and post-project child observations that measured outcomes covering all four key strands of literacy:

- **engaging with and sharing books:** increased from 45% of children to 72% of children doing this most days and the number of children who were members of a library had increased from 30% to 73%,
- **engaging with environmental print:** practitioners documented an increase from 19% to 46% of children identifying at least one letter or word,
- **drawing and mark making:** the proportion of children who made marks most days went from 38% to 65%,
- **development of oral language:** the percentage of children who knew at least some words or parts of rhymes increased from 43% to 75%.

Year 2 of the project also saw an increased focus on two-year olds. The numbers participating increased from 91 two-year olds taking part in Year 1 to 246 two-year olds taking part in Year 2, and there were similar positive findings in terms of improvements to their outcomes.

Practitioners were specifically asked to document any changes in the oral language of two-year olds. Nearly three out of five (58%) two-years olds were able to use three or more words at the end of the project compared with just two out of five (41%) at the start of the project.

Since Year 2 had an increased focus on two-year olds, practitioners were also asked about the suitability of the approach for two-year olds: nine out of ten practitioners thought it was suitable either a fair amount (47%) or a great deal (41%).

Nearly seven out of ten practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects thought that the predicted outcomes measured against EYFS early learning goals for participating children had improved with Making it REAL either having a great deal (22%) or a fair amount (47%) of impact on this. Practitioners attributed this difference to the project improving children's ability to learn and parents feeling more involved in their children's development.

*The key element has been the confidence in children to express and demonstrate what they know, as well as practitioners having a greater and stronger understanding of what is expected and when, and how to move the children along in their development.*

Manager / Deputy Manager of a private setting

*Making it REAL has provided a key to getting parents involved in and talking about their children's progress and learning, this additional support has given the children more opportunity to progress.*

Teacher

Nine out of ten practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects also thought that the home visits had increased children's learning, development and confidence either a great deal (44%) or a fair amount (43%). Siblings were also seen to have directly benefitted from the project, due to their presence during home visits and engagement in project activities by parents and practitioners, as one practitioner commented:

*The REAL project encourages the older sibling to involve more in reading and want to find out what their younger sibling is doing.*

Manager / Deputy Manager of a voluntary setting

Eight out of ten practitioners thought siblings' learning and confidence had improved a great deal (26%) or a fair amount (45%) as a result of home visits.

In terms of contributing to identifying additional needs, the evidence shows the majority of practitioners (four out of five) felt the project had some (57%) or a great (24%) impact on being able to identify additional needs of participating children and three out of five practitioners believed that as a result of Making it REAL additional needs of younger siblings were more likely to be identified. These findings were slightly more positive than Year 1 when just over half of practitioners felt that the project had some (37%) or a great (18%) of impact in helping to identify additional needs in younger siblings.

Closely related to this is being able to link families with services and support mechanisms to help their children with any additional needs they may have. Eighty-five percent of practitioners from the Local Authority development projects thought that the Making it REAL events and activities had some (52%) or a great (33%) impact on this. Again, this showed an increase from Year 1 where 71% of practitioners stated that the project had some or a great impact on linking children and families with services.

There were also improvements for other children not directly involved in the project with practitioners making changes benefiting the wider setting. Nine out of ten practitioners noted that being involved in the Local Authority Development project had some (49%) or a great deal of (42%) impact on the literacy practices at the setting.

## Perceived outcomes for parents

Parents highlighted how their involvement in the Local Authority Development projects had benefitted them in terms of increasing their confidence and doing new activities with their children to help them develop and learn.

*I learned how to make book reading more fun, to use some little tricks to make my kid listen to the story. I learned how to point him to the object or picture and how to learn him to read that word.*

Parent of a boy aged 3

*It has made me realise that you can start early with teaching literacy to young children. It has made me aware of how to help young children learn about literacy.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

At least three-quarters of parents said Making it REAL had made a great deal of difference in terms of them:

- learning about books (75%),

*Sitting down and looking at a book with my child, even if it is just for five minutes.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

*He reads with me, rather than just me reading to him.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

- encouraging their child to do drawing and mark making (76%),

*It helped me to make playdough and I have learned how you can make mark using various materials.*

Parent of a girl aged 3

- using environmental print (74%),

*When unpacking the shopping we get son to tell us what things are. We point out numbers and letters more often now, when we get the chance to do so.*

Parent of a boy aged 2

- singing songs and rhymes with their child (83%).

*We sing lots of songs using our instruments.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

One in eight parents also highlighted an increased awareness of the activities and routines they could involve their child in, such as cooking and shopping, to provide new learning opportunities for their child. Using everyday items from around the house was also seen by a quarter of parents (27%) as a new way to engage their child in learning.

There were several aspects of Making it REAL that parents found particularly helpful. These involved the new ideas for low cost activities (56%), the home visits (17%), learning about literacy and how to make learning fun (15%) and the events and trips (15%).

*Home visits have been helpful. I was able to see how to interact with my child when he is doing activities, this has helped to build my confidence. Home visits have also helped to build more relationship with the pre-school staff.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

*The events and activities were most helpful as we were able to bond with our children, put into practice what we have learnt and see how the child is progressing. Also you are able to talk to other parents and see how they have developed their child.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

Practitioners involved in both strands of the project (Local Authority Development projects and the National Rollout) reported an increased awareness and understanding by parents about what their child was able to do and how, as parents, they can best support their child's development and learning. For example, nine out of ten practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects thought Making it REAL had a great deal (41%) or a fair amount (47%) of impact in increasing parents' confidence to support their child's learning. Similarly, practitioners reported parents being more likely to ask questions to staff about their child.

Findings from Year 2 suggest a slightly more positive outcome for parents compared with Year 1 in terms of the parent-setting relationship. For example, 82% of practitioners in Year 1 reported that Making it REAL had either some or a great impact on improving parent-setting relationships. While in Year 2, 99% of practitioners felt that the project had some or a great impact. This suggests that the project has managed to build on knowledge gained in the first year around supporting parents. As one parent describes the importance of having this stronger relationship with the setting:

*I have really enjoyed the whole project. It has helped both me and my child. I feel I have made a stronger relationship with the staff and can talk to them when I need to. I have also learnt new ways to communicate with my child and new activities.*

Parent of a girl aged 4

Local Authority Development project practitioners believed that there was a positive effect on the involvement of fathers and male carers in helping their children learn. Eighty-five percent of practitioners felt Making it REAL had a great (24%) or some (61%) impact in increasing father/male carer involvement. The same practitioners also thought that the project had a positive impact on supporting parents of two-year olds accessing free early education places, with 26% saying a great impact and 38% some impact.

For the National Rollout, as expected, when compared to the Local Authority Development project, the benefit for parents is less, but still showing positive

effect. Practitioners who responded to the follow-up survey thought that there had been an increase in the number of parents attending activities (17%) and asking questions (46%).

## **Outcomes for practitioners and early years practice and quality**

Practitioners of both the Local Authority Development projects and the National Rollout reported increased knowledge and confidence in using REAL and the ORIM Framework<sup>4</sup>, supporting children with their early literacy and engaging parents and disadvantaged parents to help them to support their children's learning and development. For example, 85% of practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects stated Making it REAL had made a great deal (46%) or a fair amount (39%) of difference to increasing their knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework.

When asked about their confidence in engaging parents to help them support their child's learning and development findings for the Local Authority Development projects are similar to those in Year 1 of the evaluation. In Year 2 88% of practitioners expressed a fair amount or a great deal of confidence in engaging parents compared with 93% of practitioners in Year 1. This suggests a slight decrease in confidence levels between the two years of the project, but this can most likely be attributed to the difference in reporting timescales. In Year 1 the practitioners had a six-month follow-up survey, allowing them more time to embed practice and therefore have increased confidence levels. However, in Year 2 the follow-up survey was only three-months after the training, possibly leading to lower self-reported confidence levels as they had less project time to engage parents.

Changes were made to practices as a result of Making it REAL, and these included running more literacy events and workshops for parents (75% of practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects and 34% of practitioners who attended the National Rollout); and an increase in the amount of books and literacy resources being lent to families (64% of practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects and 44% of practitioners from the National Rollout). Other changes reported by practitioners included changes to curriculum planning, supporting two-year olds with early literacy and tracking children's literacy progress.

Enablers that encouraged these changes in practice included the resources provided at the training and staff motivation from attending the training. Barriers for National Rollout participants who were not undertaking funded projects included a lack of staff time to work on implementing REAL activities and a lack of awareness amongst other staff and managers who had not received the training and were therefore less aware of the benefits of the approach.

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<sup>4</sup> See Section 1.1 of this report for further information about the REAL approach and ORIM Framework.

Generally, practitioners involved in the Local Authority Development projects felt that the materials and approach used by Making it REAL were suitable and effective for use with three- to five-year olds and two-year olds. Ninety-four percent of practitioners thought that the materials had a fair amount (45%) or a great deal (49%) of suitability for three to five year olds and 88% thought the materials had a fair amount (47%) or a great deal (41%) of suitability of two-year olds.

Most of the settings in the Local Authority Development projects and some of the settings involved in the National Rollout described how they plan to continue with certain aspects of the Making it REAL approach, highlighting that it is embedded, to some extent in these settings and there is significant intention to sustain REAL activity beyond the Making it REAL funded project. For example, 96% of respondents to the Local Authority Development project follow up survey said that they were certain (30%), very likely (46%) or fairly likely (20%) to continue to use the REAL and the ORIM Framework in their day-to-day practices. When asked about specific activities 95% said they were certain (40%), very likely (37%) or fairly likely (18%) to continue to run literacy events and activities and 84% thought they were certain (19%), very likely (51%) or fairly likely (14%) to organise home visits in the future.

Year 2 also saw the introduction of parent volunteers in the Local Authority Development projects, mostly parents who had received REAL support in Year 1. Fifty-eight percent of practitioners reported that their setting had a volunteer connected to Making it REAL, with the majority (84%) of those reporting having one or two. Practitioners were asked their views around what impact having volunteers involved in the project had made. Findings showed that there were positive impacts on:

- new parents for Year 2 who were engaged and encouraged to take part by the volunteers. Parents commented on how helpful it was to have the volunteers as they had been part of the project in the first year so could truly relate to the parents.

*Talking to other parents helped us understand more of what was expected/ what we were to do and how others were interacting with their own children - giving us more tools to use at home to broaden and to help son's learning*

Parent of boy aged 5

- settings and practitioners: specifically, additional support was provided in the setting to allow more activities to happen more frequently, for example one volunteer would help young children to read and to assist at events

*As there was only two members of staff that done the 'making it REAL' project the volunteers went around to the other parents to make sure all parents had help and support in the activities we were doing*

Parent of boy aged 3

# 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the second year of Making it REAL (2013-2015) which delivers an evidence-based family literacy intervention for two- to five-year olds. This is a supplementary report, building on the findings from the Year 1 evaluation<sup>5</sup>. The evaluation was carried out by the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) Research Centre on behalf of the NCB Early Childhood Unit (ECU) and Department for Education (DfE).

## 1.1 Background to Making it REAL 2013-2015<sup>6</sup>

Making it REAL builds on an evidence-based programme *Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)*<sup>7</sup> which involves practitioners working with parents<sup>8</sup> to help them support their children’s literacy development in four key strands of literacy: environmental print, books, early writing and oral language. The intervention uses the ORIM Framework, which is based on the idea that there are four main ways in which parents can help support their children’s literacy development relating to: Opportunities for literacy; Recognition of children’s literacy development; Interaction around literacy; and Models of literacy users<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making\\_it\\_real\\_evaluation\\_report\\_final\\_version\\_230914\\_2.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making_it_real_evaluation_report_final_version_230914_2.pdf)

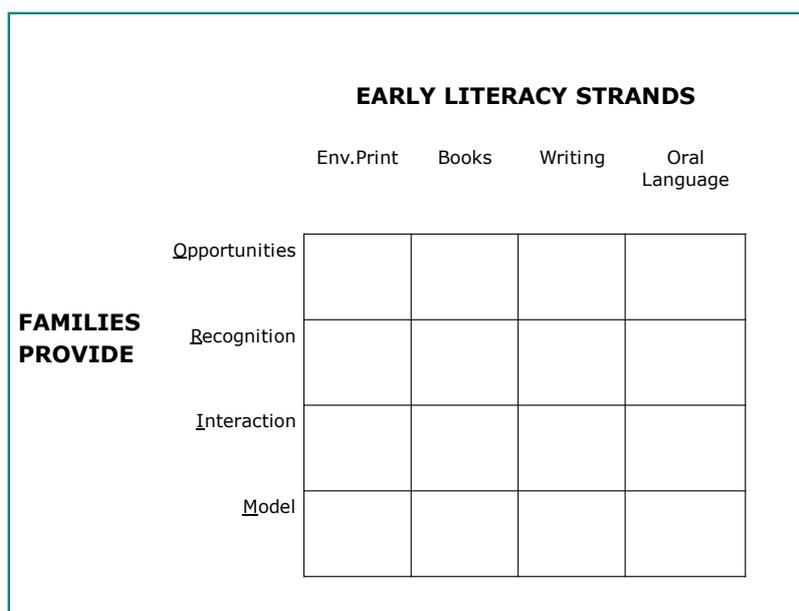
<sup>6</sup> For more in-depth information about Making it REAL please refer to the Year 1 evaluation report.

<sup>7</sup> The original model was developed and tested by two projects: (i) Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project – for details see: Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P. and Morgan, A (2005) *Early Literacy Work with Families: research, policy and practice*. London: Sage. <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ecu/making-it-real-2009-12>. And (ii) NCB Making it REAL Lottery project (2009-2012). For details see: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ecu/making-it-real-2009-12>

<sup>8</sup> For brevity the term ‘parent’ is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers.

<sup>9</sup> Further details on the ORIM Framework <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf>

**Figure 1.1: The ORIM Framework**



## 1.2 Making it REAL project design and approach

Making it REAL 2013-2015 is funded under the DfE National Prospectus Grant and aims to provide a replicable scalable model of the Making it REAL approach and embed it nationally through two strands: Local Authority Development projects led by ECU and a National Rollout of one-day Making it REAL training to early years settings across England.

The **Local Authority Development projects** involve eight local authorities delivering a prescribed programme over a two-year period. Each year a group of practitioners receive the two days of training on the Making it REAL approach and deliver the project to a number of families by providing home visits, group activities and trips.

The **National Rollout** provides free one-day Making it REAL training sessions to early years practitioners working with children aged two- to five-years old in, statutory and private, voluntary or independent (PVI) settings and childminder groups.

## 1.3 Evaluation aims and methodology for Year 2

The Year 2 evaluation provides supplementary findings that build on the Year 1 reporting. This evaluation will focus on the following areas:

- project delivery and the degree to which delivery targets have been met in terms of the number of settings, practitioners, children and families engaged in the project,
- perceived outcomes achieved by the project, specifically:
  - early literacy outcomes of children aged two to five years

- parents' skills, confidence and behaviours in supporting their children's early literacy development
- the skills, knowledge and practice of practitioners working with parents and children in early years settings
- understanding the role of the project in the early identification of additional needs of children.
- perceptions of what contribution the introduction of volunteers has had on the effectiveness of the project.

Data has been collected through the following means (for further information about the methodology and achieved sample please see Appendix A):

- **Post training evaluation forms** completed by practitioners that attended the two-day training for the Local Authority development projects and the one day training for the National Rollout.
- **A three-month follow up practitioner survey** distributed to those who attended either the one-day or two-day training courses for Making it REAL.

The evaluation of the Local Authority Development projects was designed to be more in-depth, and included additional data being collected via:

- **Pre- and post-project observational measure forms** to be completed by practitioners for each child / parent.
- A parent postal self-completion feedback form distributed to all participating parents designed to gain a broad range of parents' views on the programme and self-report on impact.

### 1.3.1 Interpretation of the findings

Data on outcomes of Making it REAL relies mainly on the self-report of practitioners and parents, rather than objective measurement. There is a potential risk of bias towards positive reporting. In terms of the follow-up practitioner surveys, parents' postal self-completion feedback forms and the pre- and post-child observation forms there is some level of non-response which may indicate that the responses are from those practitioners and parents who are more involved. However, the consistency of findings between the different strands of data mean that we can be fairly confident that the overall positive direction of change emerging from the findings is accurate.

When analysing data on changes in child and parent outcomes measures as reported by practitioners in the pre and post-project observation forms, as in Year 1, statistical tests have been applied to assess the statistical significance of the changes and only changes that are significant have been referred to in the discussion (although full data may be presented in charts and tables). Given that children's development is rapid during the early years, initial analysis was carried out to explore the extent to which there was a significant relationship between age and the outcomes of interest, and whether it would be meaningful to control for age as a potential confounding factor during analysis. Based on this analysis, age was found to have only a weak or no relationship with children's outcomes when statistical tests were carried out on two key

measures. As such, age was not controlled for and can be largely ruled out as a likely confounding factor in these cases<sup>10</sup>.

Data has been presented in tables and charts. Note that where percentages do not sum to 100% this is due to rounding, the existence of a proportion of 'not stated' answers, or because respondents could choose multiple items.

## 1.4 Report structure

**Chapter 2: Local Authority Development projects:** this chapter provides a brief overview of the eight local authorities involved in the project and the children and families for which data was collected. Findings are presented on the outcomes and perceived outcomes for children, parents, and practitioners and any changes made to practice as result of the project. Using the findings from the practitioner follow-up survey there is a discussion around the role of the project in early identification of need, the impact of volunteers and the future plans of the setting to continue with REAL activities.

**Chapter 3: National Rollout:** this section provides findings on the impact of the National Rollout training in terms of the outcomes on children and parents and the outcomes on practitioners including their confidence and knowledge around implementing REAL activities and any changes to practice at their setting.

**Chapter 4: Practitioners feedback on Making it REAL training:** this chapter briefly discusses the two-day Making it REAL Local Authority Development project training and the National Rollout one-day training. It presents feedback on practitioners overall assessment of the training.

**Chapter 5: Conclusions:** this chapter considers the overall success of Making it REAL focusing on the Year 2 evaluation aims. Where applicable reference is also made to the findings from the Year 1 evaluation.

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<sup>10</sup> Parametric and non-parametric tests were carried out on two measures: joins in with songs and rhymes, and uses environmental print, to consider if there was a significant relationship between age and the outcome measures to decide if age should be controlled for during analysis. There was found to be a significant but very weak relationship for singing songs at both the first and second observations and no significant relationship for uses environmental print at either observation.

## 2. Local Authority Development projects

This chapter explores the reported outcomes of the Local Authority Development projects. Data has been collected from the following sources:

- follow-up practitioner survey for those who attended the two-day training course,
- a postal self-completion feedback form for parents involved in the project,
- pre- and post-project observational data collected by practitioners about children involved in the project.

### 2.1 Project design and approach

The same eight local authorities that took part in the first year of the Making it REAL Development projects took part in the second year. In Year 2 a total of 66 settings took part; 47 of which had taken part in Year 1 and 19 were new settings. These 66 settings are described as the 'main settings' as they had practitioners who attended the training, received £500 of project funding and were required to submit monitoring information and child data. There were also an additional or 'extra' 13 settings in Year 2. Extra settings had practitioners attend the two-day Making it REAL training course and they carried out the project work either voluntarily or with a smaller amount of funding being provided by the Local Authority<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, a total of 79 settings were involved in the project in Year 2.

As in Year 1 practitioners were invited to attend the training course (for further details about what the training involved please see Chapter 4). For new main settings to Year 2 two practitioners attended the training and for most of the main settings who were involved in both years of the project only one practitioner attended. This allowed additional spaces in the training course to be offered to other settings, which became the extra settings in Year 2.

Specifically, the project involved the following activities for each participating main setting:

**Table 2.2: Outline of Making it REAL activities**

Activity	Timeframe
One or two practitioners from each setting attended a two day Making it REAL training.	September to October 2014
Settings identified and engaged eight families with children aged two- to five-years old to take part in the project	October to November 2014
Practitioners undertook at least two home visits with each family and ran three literacy events for core and additional families	October 2014 to February 2015

<sup>11</sup> Data has been included from the extra settings where they have undertaken the monitoring and provided ECU with the data.

Two project network meetings provided support to practitioners	November 2014 to February 2015
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The second year of the project also involved the gradual introduction of parent volunteers – generally, parents who had participated in the project in Year 1. Some of the settings recruited volunteers; there were a total of 63 volunteers across the 79 settings and the original target was for each of the main settings to recruit one volunteer. Their role was to engage and support families involved in the second year of the project.

## 2.2 Project delivery outputs

### Summary

- **The eight development projects were broadly successful in meeting overall targets set for levels of involvement and delivery work with families.** Projects were delivered in 79 settings by 136 practitioners.
- **A total of 595 children and families were engaged in the project in Year 2 and a further 615 additional children attended a literacy event or activity.** There were slightly more boys involved (55%) and a variety of ethnic backgrounds were represented. The majority of children were aged two (44%) or three (40%).
- **Practitioners carried out a total of 1004 home visits,** an average of 1.69 visits per family.
- **A total of 240 group trips and events** (a mean of 3 per setting) were delivered. Attendance levels were good, as three out of five families (62%) attended two or more events.

### 2.2.1 Project participants

#### *Settings and participants*

From the 79 settings involved in Year 2 a total of 136 practitioners attended the training. This exceeded the targets of eight settings in each local authority with one practitioner trained from settings involved in both years of the project (47 practitioners) and two practitioners from settings involved in the second year of the project only (a total of 38 practitioners). The remaining 51 practitioners either came from the extra settings, or more than one practitioner attended from settings involved in both years.

Table 2.3 shows, as in Year 1, there was a range of settings that were involved in the project with private, voluntary and independent settings and primary schools both accounting for 38%.

**Table 2.3: Profile of settings**

Setting type	Total	
	%	N
Private, Voluntary and Independent setting (PVI)	38	30
Primary school	38	30
Children's Centre	16	13
Nursery school	6	5
Childminder network	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>79</b>

(Data supplied from ECU monitoring forms)

### **Children and families**

Settings were asked to use their own judgement in deciding which families to engage in the project, with a focus on children considered in need of more support for early literacy and / or general confidence, as well as parents who were not already engaging confidently with the setting; who were classified as disadvantaged families<sup>12</sup>.

In total **595 children and families** from the 79 settings were recruited to take part in Making it REAL. The main 66 settings managed to exceed their target of eight families per setting with 532 children and families being involved in the project. Although, in practice two local authorities had settings with more than eight children participating and another local authority had one setting with only seven children. The extra settings were free to set their own numbers as they were undertaking the project voluntarily and on average they engaged between four and five children and families.

A total of 426 child observation forms were received in Year 2 and Table 2.4 shows the gender, age and ethnicity of the children who participated in Making it REAL. As in Year 1 of the project, there were slightly more boys who participated in the project (55% compared with 46%) and a wide range of ethnic groups were represented. The majority of children were aged two-years old (44%) closely followed by three-year olds (40%).

<sup>12</sup> For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents who were less engaged with the setting.

**Table 2.4: Gender, age and ethnicity of children who participated in Making it REAL**

		%	n
<b>Gender</b>	Boy	55	232
	Girl	46	194
	<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>426</b>
<b>Age</b>	One and under	3	13
	Two-year old	44	181
	Three-year old	40	164
	Four-year old	11	44
	Five-year old	3	12
	<b>Total</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>414</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White (White British/ Irish/ Gypsy or traveller/Other)	56	232
	Asian / Asian British	21	87
	Black / Black British	6	25
	Mixed	9	36
	Other	8	34
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>414</b>

## 2.2.2 Delivery of Making it REAL

### *Home visits*

Practitioners were required to undertake home visits as part of Making it REAL. These involved planning activities to suit a child's development levels and known interests and visiting the child in their home to engage both them and their parents in activities based on the four strands of literacy.

The expectation in the project design was that two home visits would be delivered to each family. Based on monitoring data collected by ECU, a total of **1004 home visits** were completed by the 79 settings, an average of 1.69 visits per family between October 2014 and March 2015. This is slightly lower than the target of two home visits per family although the majority of settings managed to carry out at least one home visit per family.

### *Group trips and events*

Settings were asked to carry out three literacy events for families. Based on ECU monitoring data, for the most part **settings have met their target of three events each as 240 events were held with a mean of 3 per setting.**

Literacy events were required for the eight main children plus at least eight additional children. There were **615 additional children who participated in at least one literacy event or activity.**

The expectation was that families would be encouraged to attend as many of their setting's project events as possible. On the post-project child observation form practitioners were also asked to indicate how many events the parent had attended. Most parents (62%, n=408) attended two or three events and seven percent attended no events.

## 2.3 Outcomes for children

### Summary

- **Children's outcomes, as observed by practitioners, improved in a number of key areas** with a significant increase observed for all participating children (including two-year olds) in the following areas:
  - **Engaging with and sharing books:** the number of children who were members of a library had increased from 30% to 73%, while sharing books 'most days' had increased from 45% to 72%.
  - **Engaging with environmental print:** the proportion of children who could identify at least one letter or word rose from 19% to 46%
  - **Drawing and mark making:** the proportion of children who made marks 'most days' went up from 38% to 65%
  - **Development of oral language:** the percentage of children who knew at least some words or parts of rhymes increased from 43% to 75%. For **two-year olds** there was also an increase in two-year olds who could use at least two words together rising from 59% at the start of the project to 81% at the end.
- **There was a positive impact on participating children's confidence and learning** with improved predicted outcomes – 99% of practitioners believed that REAL had some impact on improving outcomes (29% a little, 47% a fair amount and 22% a great deal).
- **Practitioners also believed that there had been a positive impact on siblings learning and development** with 94% of practitioners saying that REAL had made some impact (26% a great deal, 45% a fair amount and 23% a little).

### 2.3.1 Engaging with and sharing books

Visiting the library was a key aspect of the Making it REAL project. The pre- and post-project child observations completed by practitioners indicate **a significant increase in the number of all children who were members of the library** at the end of the project (73%) compared to the start (30%) (Table 2.5). Similarly, there was a significant increase in the number of two-year olds who were members of the library.

**Table 2.5: Is the child a member of a public library?**

		Yes (%)	No (%)	n
Pre-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>406</b>
	Two-year olds	27	73	169
	Three- to five-year olds	29	71	218
Post-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>392</b>
	Two-year olds	72	28	166
	Three- to five-year olds	72	28	207

The frequency with which **children share a book showed a significant increase between the first and second observations**<sup>13</sup> (Table 2.6). At the post-project observations 72% of children were noted as sharing a book most days which was an increase from just under half (45%) of children at the pre-project observations. Again there was a significant increase for two-years sharing books<sup>14</sup> most days (73% at the post-project observation compared with 45% at the pre-project observation).

**Table 2.6: How often does the child share a book?**

		Never (%)	Once a month (%)	Once a week (%)	Most days (%)	n
Pre-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>421</b>
	Two-year olds	15	11	30	45	179
	Three- to five-year olds	14	9	31	46	221
Post-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>395</b>
	Two-year olds	1	3	24	73	166
	Three- to five-year olds	1	4	24	71	210

### 2.3.2 Awareness of and engaging with environmental print

A comparison of the pre- and post-project observations indicates **a significant increase in children's use of environmental print**<sup>15</sup> including identifying

<sup>13</sup> All children sharing book: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.66, SD=0.59) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=3.05, SD=1.04). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

<sup>14</sup> Two-year olds sharing books: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.68, SD=0.56) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=3.01, SD=1.07). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

<sup>15</sup> All children using environmental print: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.28, SD=1.31) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=2.11, SD=1.27). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

letters, words, signs and logos (Table 2.7). At the post-project observation practitioners reported that 22% of children were able to identify one or two letters or words and 24% were able to identify more than two letters of words. This was an increase from 11% and eight percent respectively. There was a similar significant increase for two-year olds<sup>16</sup>, although there was still a higher proportion of two-year olds that identified just one or two letters at the end of the project (19%) than those who could identify two or more letters (13%).

**Table 2.7: How often does the child recognise environmental print?**

		Doesn't appear to notice print (%)	Stops to look / points to print (%)	Points to print and comments (%)	Identifies one or two letters, words or logos (%)	Identifies more than two words, letters or logos (%)	n
Pre-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>406</b>
	Two-year olds	45	29	14	8	5	168
	Three- to five-year olds	41	27	11	12	11	217
Post-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>385</b>
	Two-year olds	13	24	28	19	13	157
	Three- to five-year olds	8	19	18	24	31	210

### 2.3.3 Drawing and mark making

As outlined in Table 2.8 practitioner observations of children indicated a **significant increase in how often children made drawings and mark making and says what they mean**<sup>17</sup>. At the post-project observations nearly two thirds (65%) of all children drew or made marks and said what they meant most days compared with just over a third (38%) of all children at the pre-project observation. Two-year olds also showed a very similar significant increase in the frequency with which they drew or made marks and said what

<sup>16</sup> Two-year olds using environmental print: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=2.95, SD=1.23) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=1.94, SD=1.10). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

<sup>17</sup> All children drawing and mark making: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.51, SD=0.78) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=2.85, SD=1.13). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

they meant<sup>18</sup> as this increased for most days from 40% to two-thirds of the two-year olds (67%).

**Table 2.8: How often does the child draw / make marks and say what they mean?**

		Never (%)	Once a month (%)	Once a week (%)	Most days (%)	n
Pre-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>418</b>
	Two-year olds	23	9	28	40	178
	Three- to five-year olds	16	20	26	38	220
Post-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>392</b>
	Two-year olds	3	4	26	67	164
	Three- to five-year olds	3	10	22	65	209

### 2.3.4 Development of oral language

Analysis showed that there was **a significant increase in the number of children who knew one or two rhymes** between the pre- and post-project observations<sup>19</sup> (Table 2.9). Over half (55%) of all children knew at least one rhyme by the post-project observation compared with just a quarter (25%) of children at the pre-project observation. There were similar significant results<sup>20</sup> for two-year olds with the percentage of those knowing one or two rhymes rising from 22% to 50%.

<sup>18</sup> Two-year olds drawing and mark making: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.58, SD=0.71) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=2.89, SD=1.15). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

<sup>19</sup> All children join in with songs: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=4.21, SD=1.00) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=3.34, SD=1.20). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

<sup>20</sup> Two-year olds join in with songs: A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=4.15, SD=0.99) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=3.19, SD=1.21). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**Table 2.9: How often does the child join in with songs and rhymes?**

		Shows no / little interest in rhymes (%)	Listens to rhymes and watches others sing (%)	Joins in with rhymes (%)	Knows some words / parts of rhymes (%)	Knows one or two rhymes (%)	n
Pre-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>413</b>
	Two-year olds	5	26	30	18	22	177
	Three- to five-year olds	4	17	32	20	28	215
Post-project observation	<b>All children</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>393</b>
	Two-year olds	0	8	18	25	50	163
	Three- to five-year olds	1	5	17	16	60	213

Practitioners were also asked to consider the extent to which two-year-olds, specifically, vocalised and used words (Table 2.10). There was **a significant increase in two-year olds oral language**<sup>21</sup>. Nearly three in five children (58%) were able to use three or more words by the time of the second observation compared with just two in five (41%) children at the pre-project observation.

**Table 2.10: How often does the two-year old talk / communicate?**

	Babbles (%)	Uses a range of single words (%)	Uses two words together (%)	Uses three or more words together (%)	n
Pre-project observation	13	28	18	41	142
Post-project observation	4	15	23	58	134

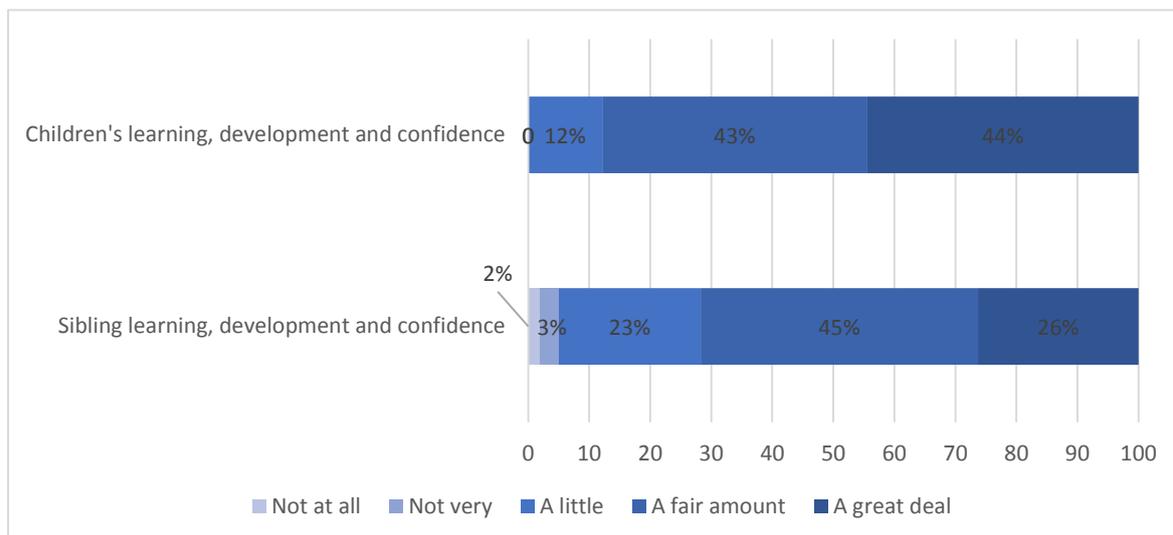
### 2.3.5 Children's and sibling's learning, development and confidence

Practitioner views were sought about the difference home visits had made to a child's and their sibling's learning, development and confidence. Figure 2.11 shows that all respondents felt that the home visits had a positive impact, to

<sup>21</sup> A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M=3.33, SD=0.90) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M=2.81, SD=1.10). This was further confirmed with a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

some degree, on a child’s learning, development and confidence with four out of five respondents reporting that it had a fair amount (43%) or a great deal (44%) of impact. While still positive the impact on siblings was felt to be less with seven out of ten respondents believing that the home visits had a fair amount (45%) or a great deal (26%) of impact.

**Figure 2.11: Impact of the home visits on children’s learning, development and confidence; and on sibling learning, development and confidence**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=99 for child’s learning and for siblings’ learning)*

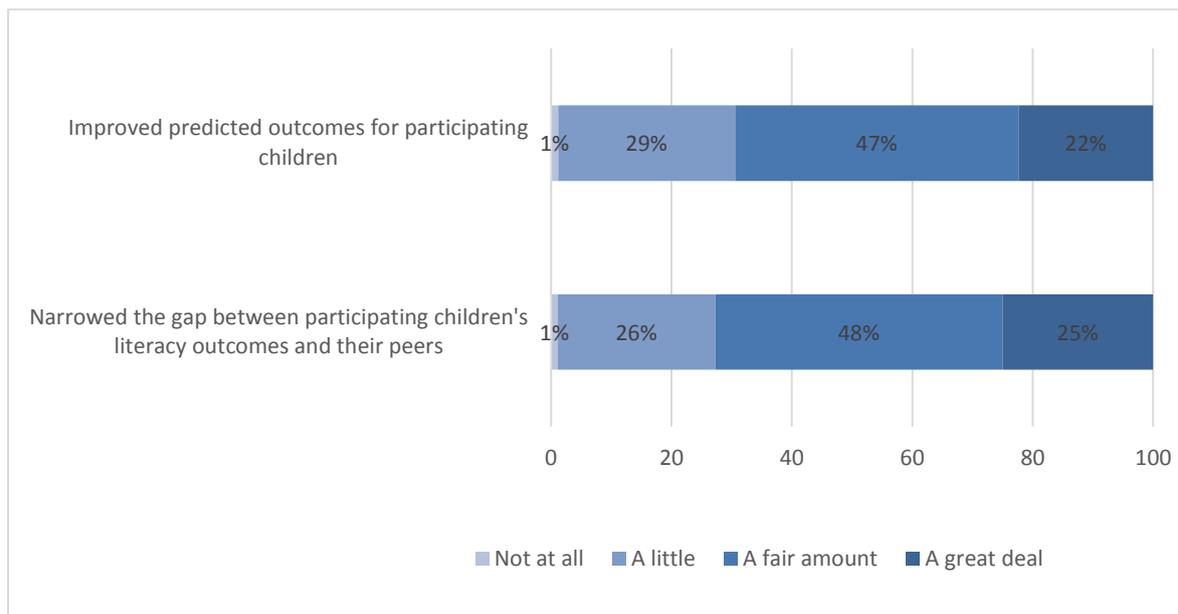
One practitioner commented on how Making it REAL impacts on siblings:

*The REAL project encourages the older sibling to involve more in reading and want to find out what their younger sibling is doing.*

Manager / Deputy Manager of a voluntary setting

As shown in Figure 2.12 overwhelmingly, respondents felt that Making it REAL had made a difference to the predicted outcomes of participating children, measured against the EYFS early learning goals and narrowed the gap between them and their peers with only one percent saying that it had not made any difference.

**Figure 2.12: The extent Making it REAL has improved predicted outcomes measured against EYFS early learning goals and narrowed the gap between participating children and their peers**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n= 85 improved predicted outcomes, n=88 narrowed the gap)*

Practitioners were asked to describe how REAL had improved the predicted outcomes for children. Two-thirds of respondents (67%, n = 36) felt that the project had improved children’s learning and progress.

*The key element has been the confidence in children to express and demonstrate what they know, as well as practitioners having a greater and stronger understanding of what is expected and when, and how to move the children along in their development.*

Manager / Deputy Manager of a private setting

*Children who were reluctant to take part in songs and rhymes and writing are now participating in these activities much more than before.*

Childcare / teaching assistant at a private setting

Many respondents (50%, n = 36) also felt that parents were more involved in their children’s development.

*Making it REAL has provided a key to getting parents involved in and talking about their children's progress and learning, this additional support has given the children more opportunity to progress,*

Teacher

*By encouraging disengaged parents to become more involved in their child, and learning possibilities that are simple, everyday, free activities*

Teacher

Others commented on improvements to practice (11%, n=36) and improvements in relationships between practitioners and families (eight percent, n=36).

## 2.4 Outcomes for parents

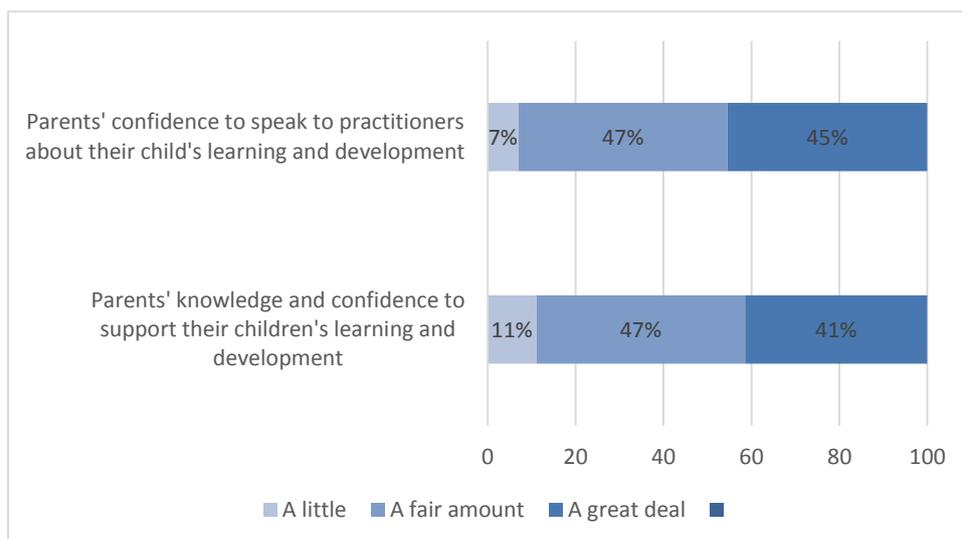
### Summary

- **Parents benefited from their involvement** in Making it REAL. Both parents and practitioners noted an increase in parents' confidence in terms of helping their child with learning and engaging with staff. **Parents described how being involved in the project had made a 'great deal' of difference to their involvement of their child's development** in the following areas: learning about books (75%); drawing and mark making (76%); using environmental print (74%); and singing songs and rhymes (83%)
- In line with these four areas, **parents also described doing new, different activities with their child**, for example reading more books; identifying and using environmental print; singing more songs; and counting and identifying numbers. Parents also highlighted how the project had helped them to encourage their child's learning through the home environment either through using a variety of items that would be found around the house or through involving their child in everyday activities and routines.
- **Practitioners believed that the project had a positive effect on the involvement of fathers and male carers** in helping their children learn with 85% of practitioners saying Making it REAL either had a great (24%) or some (61%) impact in this area.
- Similarly, **two thirds of practitioners thought that Making it REAL had a positive impact on parents of two-year olds.**

### 2.4.1 Parents' confidence and engagement with staff

As a result of Making it REAL the majority of practitioners felt that parents' confidence to speak with them about their child's learning and development had improved (Figure 2.13) with more than nine out of ten practitioners saying that the home visits had a fair amount (47%) or a great deal (45%) of impact. The home visits were also seen to have an impact on parents' knowledge and confidence to support their children's learning and development.

**Figure 2.13: Impact of the home visits on parents’ confidence to speak to practitioners and their knowledge and confidence to support their child’s learning and development**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=99 for parents’ confidence to speak to practitioners and parents’ confidence to support their child’s learning)*

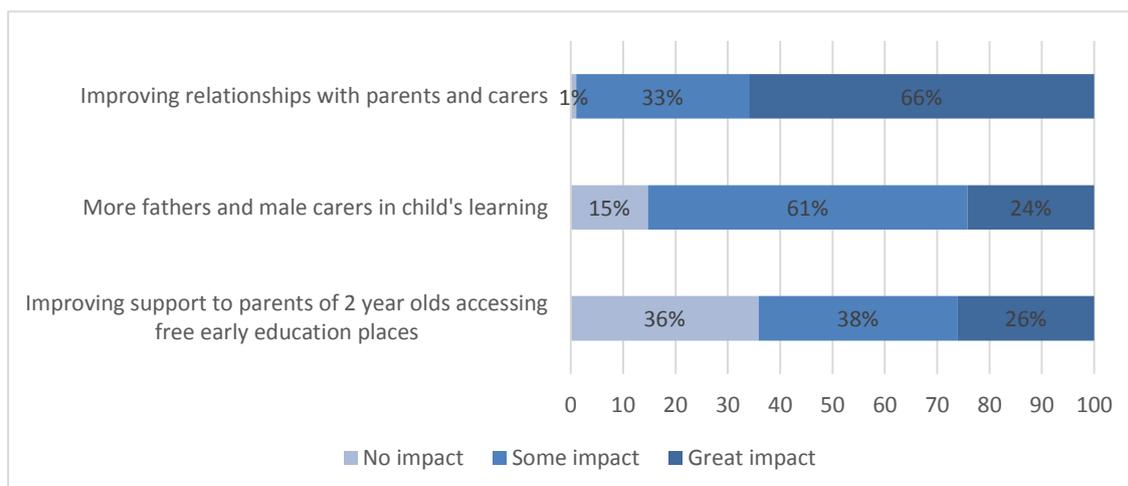
Figure 2.14 highlights that almost all practitioners believed that the project had some (33%) or a great (66%) impact on improving this relationship. As one practitioner explained:

*It has just brought us (parents and practitioners) together we are a close knit unit and conversations are easy for both parties and we feel we are a team.*

Nursery officer / Nursery nurse at school

Four out of five practitioners felt that the project had some (61%) or a great (24%) impact on encouraging fathers and male carers to be involved in their child’s learning. Nearly two thirds of practitioners thought that Making it REAL had some (38%) or a great (26%) of impact on improving support to parents of two-year olds accessing free early education places.

**Figure 2.14: Impact of Making it REAL: improving relationships with parents and carers, more fathers and male carers involved in children’s learning and improved support to parents of two-year olds**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n= 94 for relationship between parent and carers, n=95 for fathers and male carers becoming more involved and n=92 for support to parents of two-year olds).

## 2.4.2 Parents’ understanding and confidence in their educational role

From the postal self-completion feedback forms all parents reported either being very confident (76%) or quite confident (24%, n=222) talking about their child’s development. Parents described how their knowledge and confidence had increased through taking part in the project.

*I learned how to make book reading more fun, to use some little tricks to make my kid listen to the story. I learned how to point him to the object or picture and how to learn him to read that word.*

Parent of a boy aged 3

*It has made me realise that you can start early with teaching literacy to young children. It has made me aware of how to help young children learn about literacy.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

*I have really enjoyed the whole project. It has helped both me and my child. I feel I have made a stronger relationship with the staff and can talk to them when I need to. I have also learnt new ways to communicate with my child and new activities.*

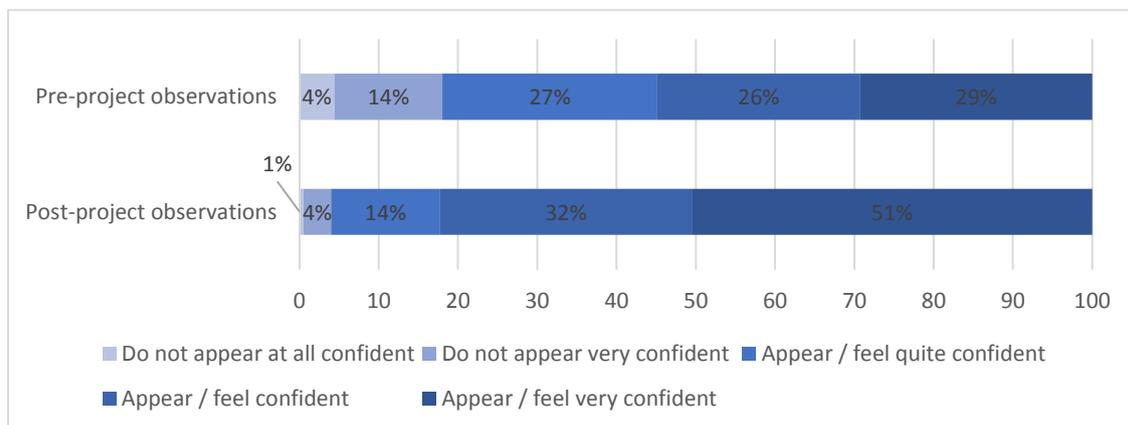
Parent of a girl aged 4

*Using environmental prints such as signs, logos and notices as well as packaging of every day shopping and grocery. Why? Because they help the children to learn things in an informal way. There are some logos they come across often without knowing their meaning.*

Parent of a girl aged 5

On the pre- and post-project child observation forms, practitioners noted the confidence of the parents to ask questions and start conversations about their child (Figure 2.15). Practitioners believed that parents generally appeared very confident (51%) or confident (32%) at the end of the project compared with just 29% and 26% of parents respectively at the start of the project.

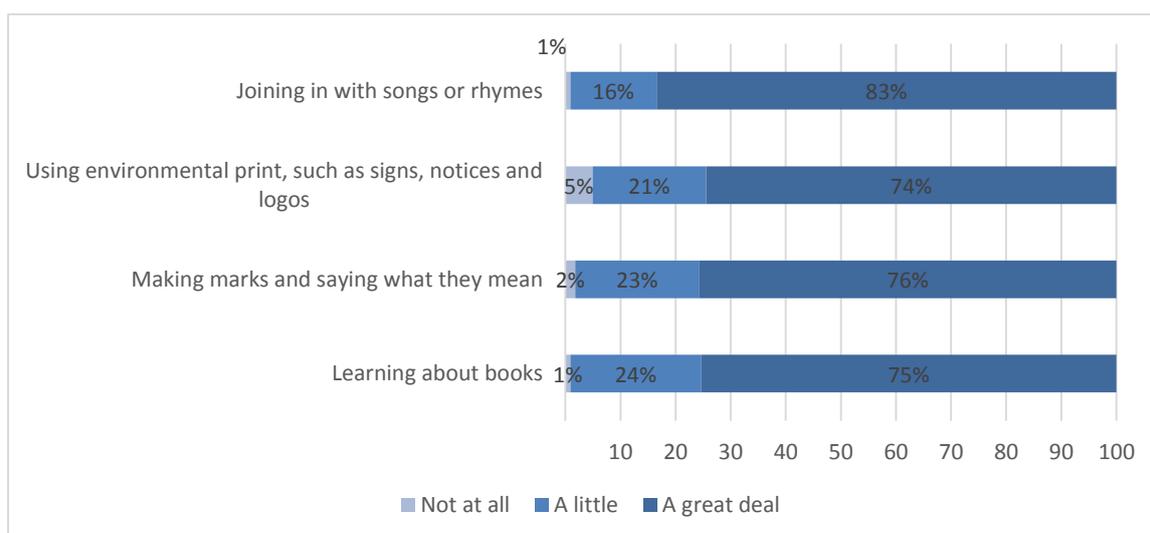
**Figure 2.15: Practitioners views on the confidence levels of parents at the start and end of the Making it REAL project**



(Matched sample for the pre- and post-project child observation forms, n=410 for pre-project observations and n=400 for post-project observations)

In the postal self-completion feedback form parents were asked how much Making it REAL had helped them to support their child (Figure 2.16). Three-quarters of parents reported it had made a great deal of difference to learning about books (75%), mark making (76%) and using environmental print (74%). For joining in with songs or rhymes four out of five parents (83%) said the project had helped a great deal.

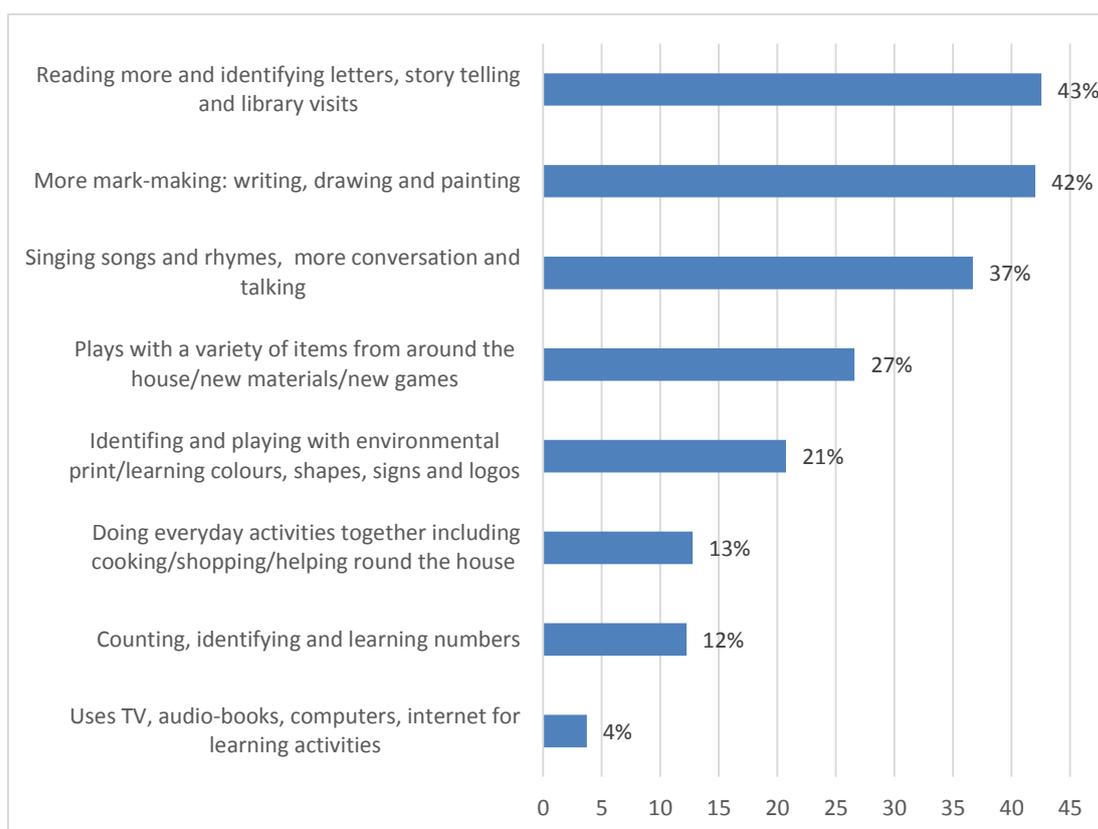
**Figure 2.16: Impact of the Making it REAL project on learning about books, making marks, using environmental print and singing songs and rhymes**



(Parent postal self-completion feedback forms, n=223 for learning about books, n=222 for mark making, n=223 for environmental print, and n=223 for joining in with songs or rhymes)

Nine out of ten parents (90%) reported doing new things at home to help their child learn. Parents most frequently reported doing more reading, story time and visiting the library with their children (43%), closely followed by parents saying they did more mark making with their child including writing, drawing and painting (42%) (Figure 2.17). Several parents (13%) also highlighted how Making it REAL encouraged them to use everyday activities and routines such as cooking, shopping and helping around the house to help their child to learn in relation to the four strands of literacy. Learning through the home environment was seen as important by a quarter of parents (27%) who reported using items from around the house to encourage learning.

**Figure 2.17: Types of new activities undertaken at home by parents**



*(Parent postal self-completion feedback forms, n=188, this has been coded from an open question and parents could have said they were doing more than one activity)*

**Engaging with and sharing books**

Parents commented on how they now visited the library, read more frequently with their child and made reading time more interactive.

*After making the library membership card, I visit the library more often with my child, which he really enjoys.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

*Sitting down and looking at a book with my child, even if it is just for five minutes.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

*He reads with me, rather than just me reading to him.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

### **Engaging with environmental print**

Parents said that using everyday packages and signs was an easy and cheap way of engaging their children in developing their literacy skills.

*When unpacking the shopping we get son to tell us what things are. We point out numbers and letters more often now, when we get the chance to do so.*

Parent of a boy aged 2

*When we are outside I point things out to her like signs or shops and question her about her surroundings*

Parent of a girl aged 2

### **Drawing and mark making**

Some parents explained how they encouraged their children to do more drawing and mark making.

*It helped me to make playdough and I have learned how you can make mark using various materials.*

Parent of a girl aged 3

*The girls do a lot of mark making with crayons, pencils and paints. They play with play-doh.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

### **Development of oral language**

Finally, parents also described how Making it REAL had given them ideas on how to develop their child's oral language.

*We use a lot of props when telling stories or make story characters out of play-doh and act out the story with them.*

Parent of a girl aged 3

*We sing lots of songs using our instruments.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

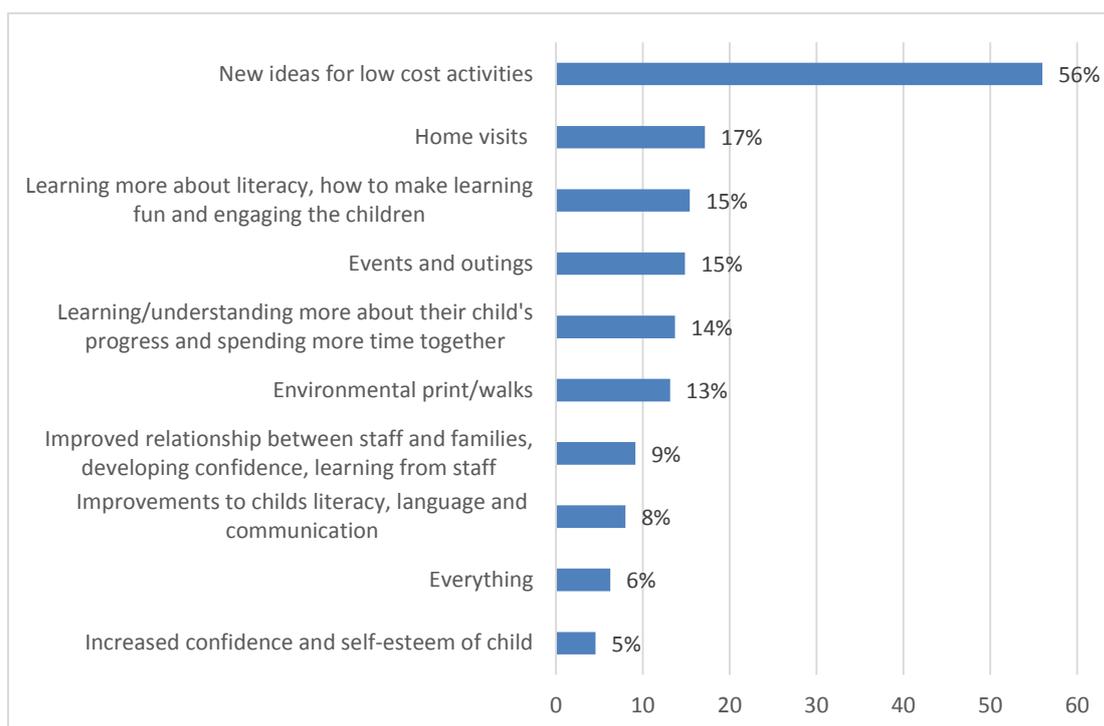
## **2.4.3 Benefits of Making it REAL for parents**

When asked what they had found most helpful about Making it REAL, over half (56%) of parents stated that the new ideas for low cost every day activities was helpful (Figure 2.18).

*Staff have given more ideas and activities that I can do with my child. So I do more.*

Parent of a girl aged 4

**Figure 2.18: Aspects of the Making it REAL project that parents found most helpful**



*(Parent postal self-completion feedback forms, n=175, please note this has been coded from an open question and parents could have said more than one factor was helpful)*

Other factors that parents found helpful included the home visits (17%), learning more about literacy and making learning fun (15%) and the events and outings organised by the setting (15%). In particular, many parents commented on the home visits and events of the project being helpful in supporting them.

*Home visits have been helpful. I was able to see how to interact with my child when he is doing activities, this has helped to build my confidence. Home visits have also helped to build more relationship with the pre-school staff.*

Parent of a boy aged 4

*The events and activities were most helpful as we were able to bond with our children, put into practice what we have learnt and see how the child is progressing. Also you are able to talk to other parents and see how they have developed their child.*

Parent of a girl aged 2

*The initial home visit. They brought round a box of stuff for home (e.g. paper, books, pens, stickers). They explained I should keep containers of everyday household items and let him explore with them. I thought this was a brilliant idea. On the visit, they read a book to him. Ever since then he has shown a keen interest in books. Before then, he didn't want to know about books. I regularly read to him.*

Parent of a boy aged 2

*I found the home visits wonderful and very reassuring. The most helpful part was watching my child learn and how I can help understand him the right way.*

Parent of a boy aged 5

## 2.5 Outcomes for practitioners and early years practice and quality

### Summary

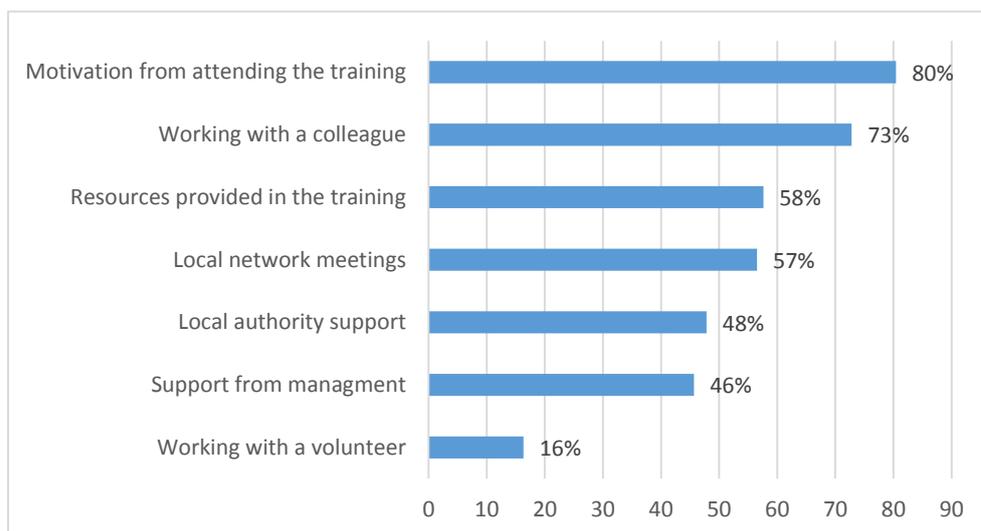
- **Generally, practitioners believed that the REAL approach was suitable for three- to five-year olds and two-year olds.**
- **Practitioners' knowledge, confidence and practice improved** in a number of key areas:
  - **Increased knowledge of REAL and ORIM Framework and how to apply it with families:** with 46% of practitioner believing their knowledge increased a great deal and 39% a fair amount
  - **Increased knowledge in supporting children with early literacy:** 79% of practitioner thought that the Making it REAL project had a great deal (40%) or a fair amount (39%) of impact in increasing their knowledge in this area.
  - **Practitioners felt increased confidence in engaging with parents, and disadvantaged parents, to help them to support their children's learning and development.**
- **Practitioners also reported some notable changes to practice,** including running an increased number of literacy events and workshops for parents (75%), an increase in the amount of books and literacy resources being lent to families and changes made to the wider setting benefitting all children not just those participating in Making it REAL.
- **Four out of five practitioners reported the project had some (57%) or a great (24%) impact on identifying additional needs of participating children. Three out of five practitioners felt the project had some (50%) or a great (12%) impact on identifying additional needs of younger siblings.**
- **Generally practitioners planned to continue with at least some aspects of the Making it REAL project.** For example, 77% were very likely to run family literacy activities, 70% were very likely to continue with the home visits and 76% were very likely to use REAL and the ORIM Framework in their practice.

### 2.5.1 Setting up and delivering REAL

In the follow-up survey practitioners were asked what had helped them to run Making it REAL. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents felt that the motivation

from attending the training had been very beneficial while nearly three in five (59%) respondents believed working with a colleague to be beneficial in running the project (Figure 2.19). Several respondents also commented on the importance of having support from other practitioners in the setting and parents.

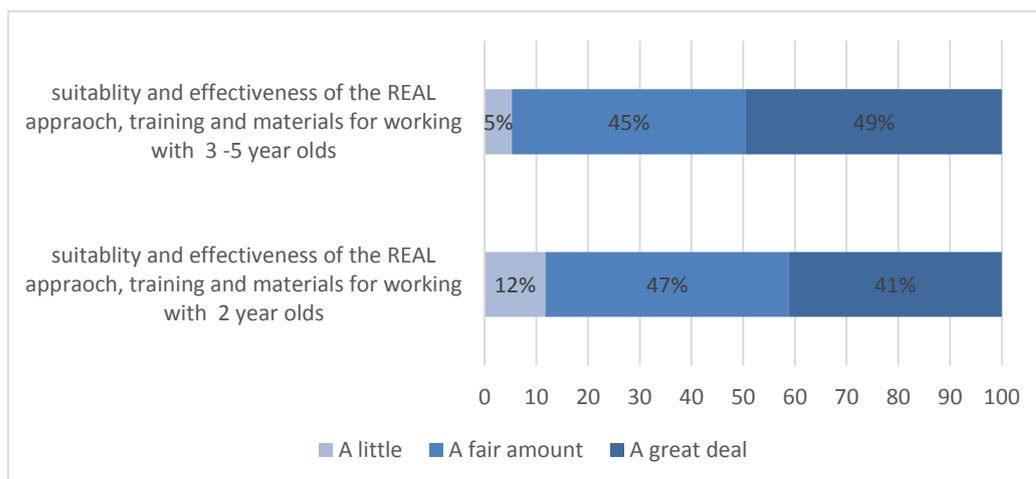
**Figure 2.19: Factors that have helped to run the Making it REAL project**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=92. Please note that respondents could select more than one response)*

When asked about the suitability and effectiveness of the REAL approach, training and materials the majority of practitioners believed it had a great deal (49%) or a fair amount (45%) of suitability for three- to five-year olds. This was slightly reduced in relation to working with two-year olds (41% a great deal and 47% a fair amount) (Figure 2.20).

**Figure 2.20: Suitability and effectiveness of the Making it REAL project for three- to five-year olds and two-year olds**

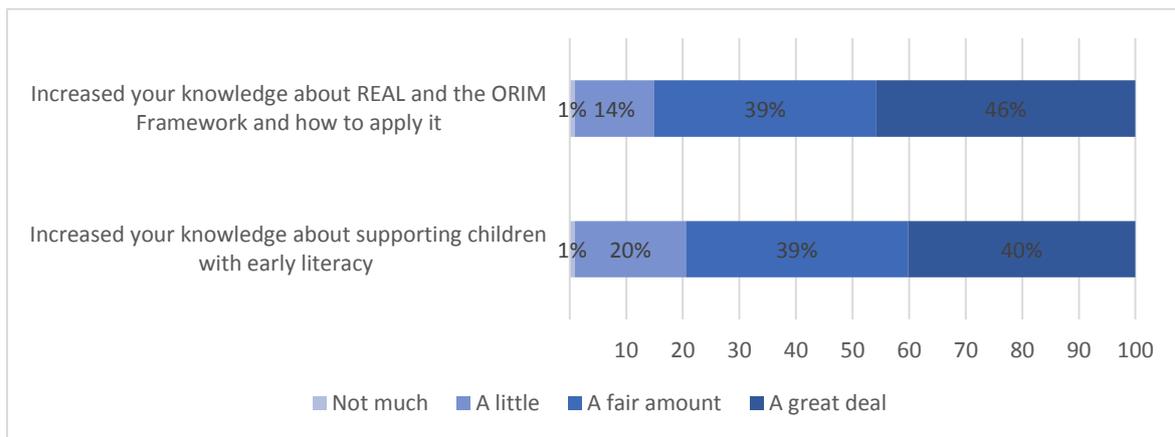


*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n= 95 for three- to five-year olds and n=68 for two-year olds)*

### 2.5.2 Practitioners’ knowledge, understanding and confidence in supporting families with early literacy

The majority of practitioners felt that the project had increased their knowledge to some degree about REAL and the ORIM Framework with 46% saying a great deal and 39% a fair amount (Figure 2.21). Similarly, four out of five practitioners also believed that Making it REAL had increased their knowledge of supporting children with early literacy either a great deal (40%) or a fair amount (39%).

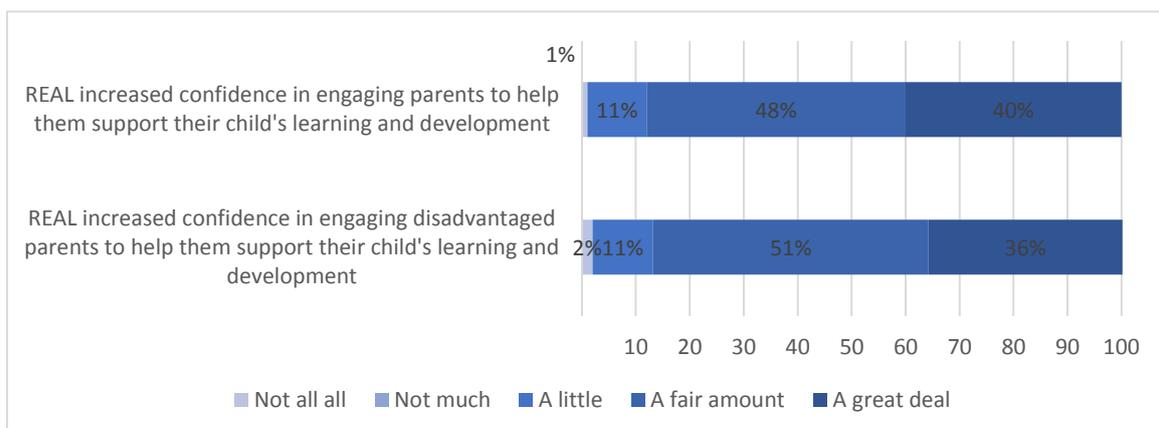
**Figure 2.21: Extent Making it REAL increased knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework, and supporting children with early literacy**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=107)

Nearly nine out of ten practitioners (Figure 2.22) reported Making it REAL had increased their confidence either a fair amount (48%) or a great deal (40%) in terms of engaging parents to help support their child’s learning and development. There were similar findings for engaging disadvantaged parents (36% reporting a great deal and 51% a fair amount).

**Figure 2.22: Extent Making it REAL has increased practitioner confidence in engaging parents and disadvantaged parents**



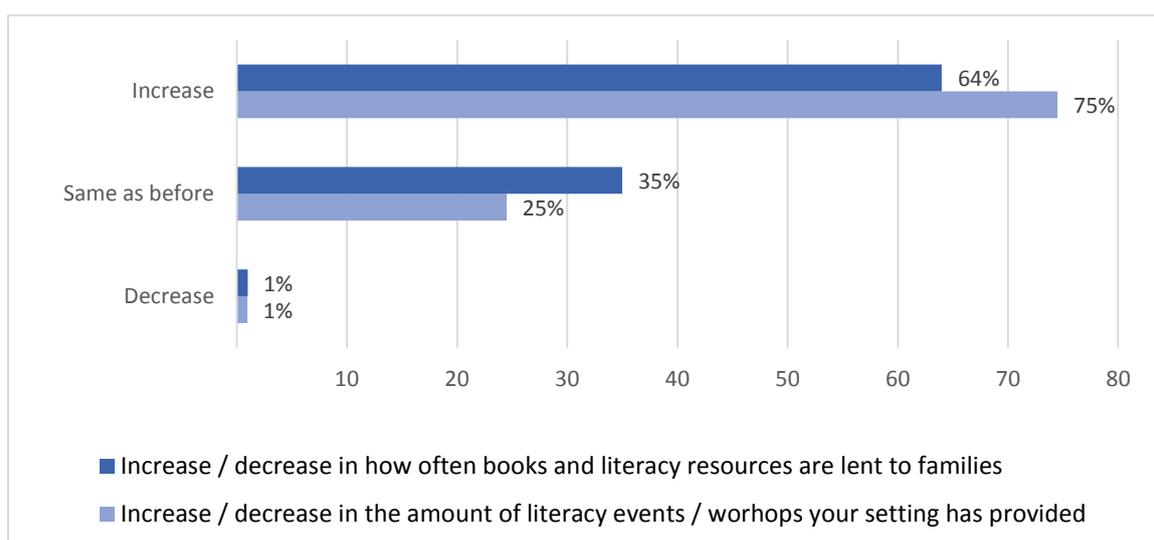
(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=107)

Practitioners were generally confident about delivering home visits with 59% feeling very confident and 41% feeling quite confident ( $n=106$ ). Half of the practitioners believed the home visits had a great deal of impact on their understanding of the child and home context, and 43% felt that the home visits had a fair amount of impact on their understanding of this.

### 2.5.3 Changes to practice

Three-quarters of respondents to the practitioner follow-up survey reported that there had been an increase in the number of literacy events / workshops being held at their setting (75%) and an increase in the frequency with which books and literary resources were lent to families (64%) (Figure 2.23).

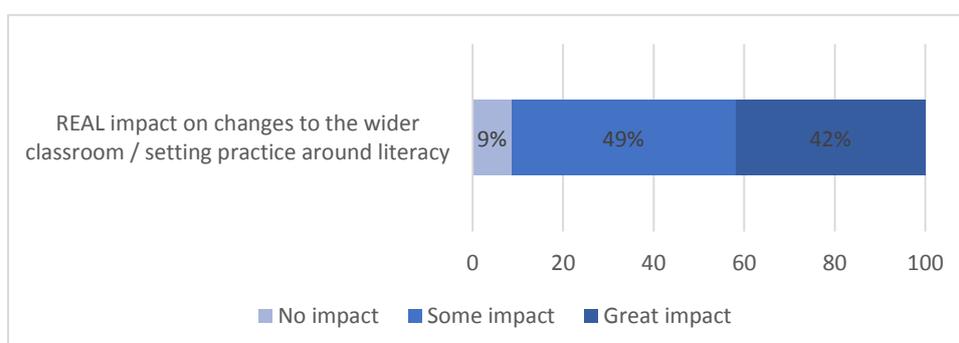
**Figure 2.23: change in the number of literacy events / workshops and how often books and literary resources are lent to families**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey,  $n=102$  for the number of literacy events,  $n=100$  for the frequency of lending).

Nine out of ten practitioners also reported that Making it REAL had some (49%) or a great (42%) impact on wider setting practice (Figure 2.24).

**Figure 2.24: Impact of REAL on the wider setting practices for literacy**



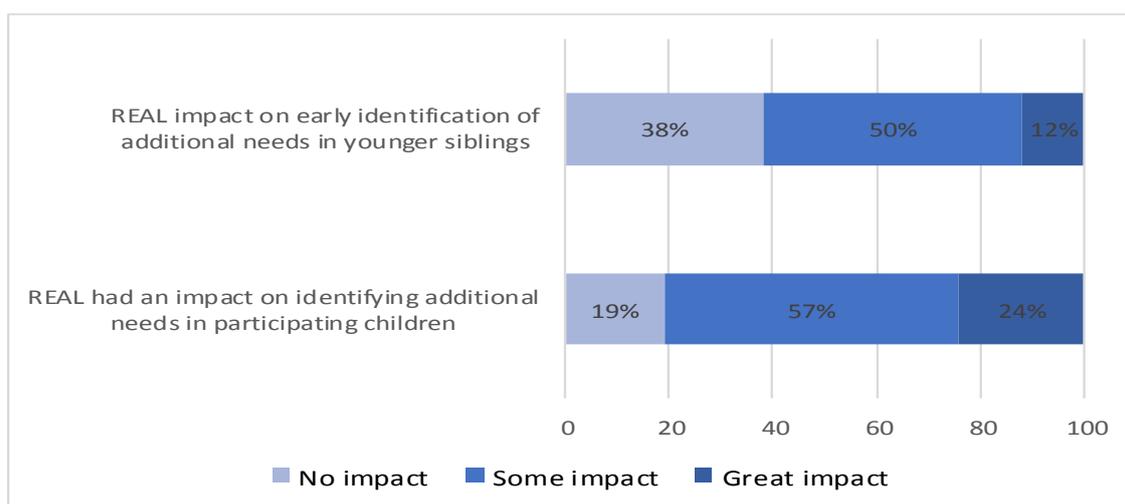
(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey,  $n=93$ )

For those settings that used a quality improvement framework such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS) practitioners were asked if they perceived any changes to the settings quality improvement ratings as a result of Making it REAL. Few respondents answered this question with over a third confirming that they did not use any quality improvement framework. Of those that did most thought that Making it REAL had increased their rating in terms of the work with parents (70%, n=40) and in literacy (82%, n=39).

**Early Identification of Need**

Four out of five participants believed that the project had some (57%) or a great (24%) impact in identifying additional needs of participating children (Figure 2.25). Three out of five participants felt that the project had some impact (50%) or a great impact (12%) on the early identification of additional needs in younger siblings.

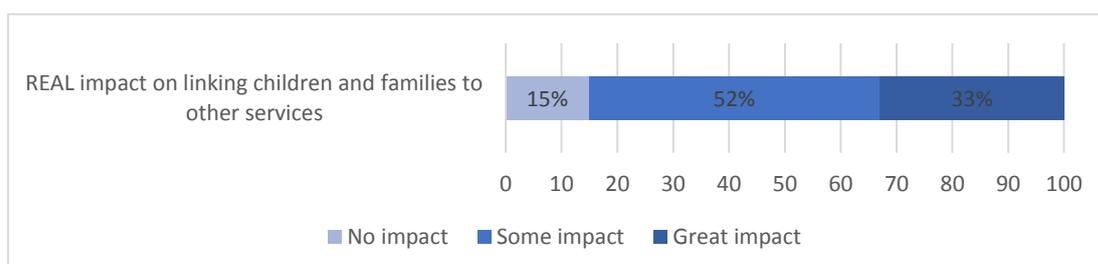
**Figure 2.25: Impact of REAL on the identification of additional needs for participating children and their siblings**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n= 95 early identification in participating children and n=92 early identification in younger siblings)

Practitioners in the follow-up survey were asked if Making it REAL had improved linking families with other services (Figure 2.26). Generally practitioners were positive about the impact with half (52%) saying the project had some impact and a third (33%) a great impact.

**Figure 2.26: Impact of Making it REAL on linking families to other services**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=94)

Generally, practitioners were very positive about Making it REAL, with one practitioner explaining:

*This has been a wonderful project! I've always felt pretty comfortable with talking to parents, disadvantaged or not, about their children, but having this opportunity to take things into the home and follow up with other visits has been fantastic. I've watched the parents relax and take a real interest in what was coming next! The children, particularly the shy ones, have grown in confidence in school quicker than they would have done otherwise, and because we have used the same books - and other resources - in school as we have left in the home, the children feel instantly familiar and confident with them. It also means that if we work on a book at school, then we know the child definitely has a copy of it at home! The impact on the whole nursery has been great because we've managed to get all of our parents to the Literacy Events - and we plan to encourage parents to support their children in the same way in Reception next year. The parents have enjoyed the events; they know there is an expectation that they will attend, but they seem positive about it and appreciate the chance to be involved in their child's education.*

Teacher

## 2.5.4 Volunteers

Fifty-eight percent of practitioners reported that their setting had a volunteer connected to Making it REAL, with the majority (84%) of those reporting that they had one or two volunteers. Practitioners were asked their views around what the impact had been on having volunteers involved in the project. Many respondents (57%, n = 28) felt that it had had a positive impact on other parents who were involved in the project by encouraging them to take part and stay engaged in the project.

*This has seen an impact mainly on parents, more parents feel they can engage with practitioners and ask for help/support with having a 'voice' representative in another parent.*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

*She is now volunteering on a regular basis at preschool and is more than willing to engage with other parents to inform them what a positive impact the projects have had on her and her child's learning and development.*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

Many practitioners (36%, n=28) also commented on the benefit the additional support had on the setting enabling more / new activities to happen.

*Having someone there as well just to support reading stories for an hour here and there means that there are times in the week when there is ALWAYS someone available to read, even in our busiest periods.*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

Several comments (14%, n=28) related to supporting practitioners by providing support at events, helping to organise home visits and engaging with parents to make them feel more relaxed about their own involvement in the project.

Parents were also asked if they had had any contact with volunteers during the project: nearly half said that they had (46%, n=165) although many parents were unsure. Of those that commented on support provided by the volunteer overwhelming parents were positive, although some comments related to staff members and not volunteers. Therefore, it is hard to judge parents' understanding of the role of the volunteers.

*Both volunteer and support worker have been brilliant with me and my son. We love them both.*

Parent of boy aged 4

Parents commented on how helpful it was to have an additional person supporting families, especially someone who had been part of the project themselves in the first year.

*As there was only two members of staff that done the 'making it REAL' project the volunteers went around to the other parents to make sure all parents had help and support in the activities we were doing*

Parent of boy aged 3

*Talking to other parents helped us understand more of what was expected/ what we were to do and how others were interacting with their own children - giving us more tools to use at home to broaden to help son's learning*

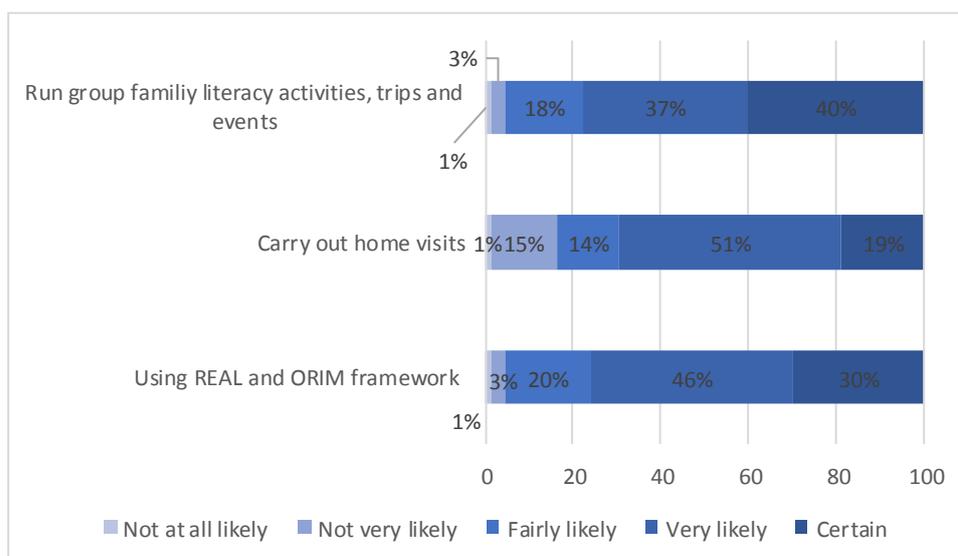
Parent of boy aged 5

### 2.5.5. Future plans

Although settings were coming to the end of the two year funded programme practitioners felt it likely, to some extent, that their setting would continue with:

- family literacy activities (40% certain, 37% very likely and 18% fairly likely);
- home visits (19% certain, 51% very likely and 14% fairly likely);
- using REAL and the ORIM Framework in their day to day practice (30% certain, 46% very likely and 20% fairly likely).

**Figure 2.27: Likelihood of continuing Making it REAL activities beyond the project**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=89 family literacy events, n=85 for home visits, and n=87 for using REAL and ORIM framework)

Of the 14 respondents who said that they were either not at all likely or not very likely to continue with the home visits the reasons they gave for this are listed in Table 2.28<sup>22</sup>.

**Table 2.28: Reasons for not continuing with home visits**

	n
Lack of staff availability	11
Lack of funding	5
Organisational aspects are too time consuming	4
Not a priority for the setting	2
The setting will be doing other work with families to support literacy	2
There is no need for them	1
Difficult to engage parents	1

Only four respondents reported that it was not at all likely or not very likely that their setting would continue with the group family literacy activities and events. Of these one respondent felt that this was due to lack of staff availability and another due to the organisational aspects being too time consuming.

<sup>22</sup> Respondents could select more than one reason why the home visits would not continue.

### 3. National Rollout of one-day training

This section investigates the reported outcomes of the one-day free training course attended by early years practitioners working with children aged two- to five-years old in childminder, statutory and private, voluntary or independent (PVI) settings. **Findings in this chapter are all based on the three-month follow-up survey of practitioners who attended the one-day free National Rollout training.**

#### 3.1 Project design and approach

The National Rollout provides free one-day Making it REAL training sessions to early years practitioners; for more information about what the training see Chapter 4. Participants who attended the training were free to take forward any aspects of Making it REAL, as they saw appropriate, into their everyday practice.

Between April 2014 and March 2015, the National Rollout aimed to deliver 140 courses over the two years of the project. The training was delivered by the ECU. The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), Pre-school Learning Alliance (PSLA), and National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) worked in partnership with ECU to promote the opportunity of training to settings across England.

#### 3.2 Project Delivery Outputs

##### Summary

- **The National Rollout was successful in meeting its delivery targets:**
  - **72 local training courses** were delivered throughout England in Year 2, surpassing the target of 70 training course
  - Training was delivered to **1,161 practitioners** and those who support practitioners.
  - Two regional events were also held with an additional 102 practitioners attending them.

##### 3.2.1 Profile of attendees

In Year 2 there were **72 training courses** delivered throughout England, therefore, ECU exceed their targets in terms of the number of events being held. A total **1,161 practitioners** (and those who supported practitioners) attended the training. There were also an additional **two large regional events** held in Bristol and London with an additional **102 practitioners** attending these events.

Table 3.29 shows the profile of the events in terms of which organisation the participants were attending from with most events (57%) being organised directly by ECU for a local authority or an individual early years setting and a

fairly even divide between training courses being organised by PACEY (15%), PSLA (14%) and NDNA (14%).

**Table 3.29: One-day training courses organised by PACEY, PSLA, NDNA and Other**

	%	n
Other including local authority and individual early year settings	57	41
The Professional Association of Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) – Childminder groups	15	11
Pre-school Learning Alliance (PSLA)	14	10
National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)	14	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>72</b>

(Source from ECU monitoring data).

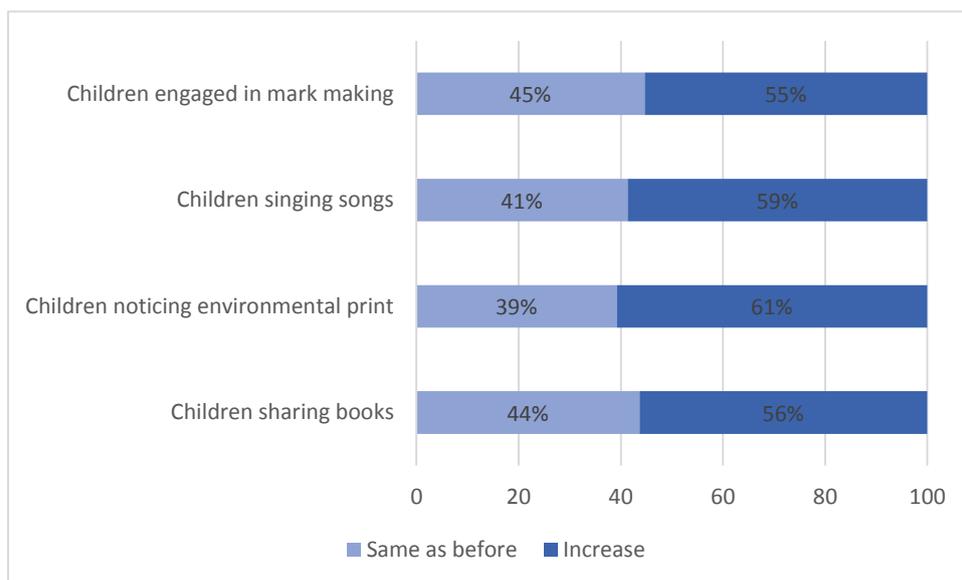
### 3.3 Outcomes for children and parents

#### Summary

- **Practitioners were positive about changes to the outcomes for children** with nearly three out of five practitioners reporting an increase in children noticing environmental print, singing rhymes and songs, sharing books and mark making.
- **Practitioners reported an increased awareness and understanding among parents** about what their child is able to do and how they, as parents, can best support them to develop and learn.

Practitioners were generally positive about changes to the outcomes for children (Figure 3.30) with more than half of all respondents reporting an increase in frequency with which children noticed environmental print (61%), sang rhymes and songs (59%), shared books (56%) and engaged in mark making (55%).

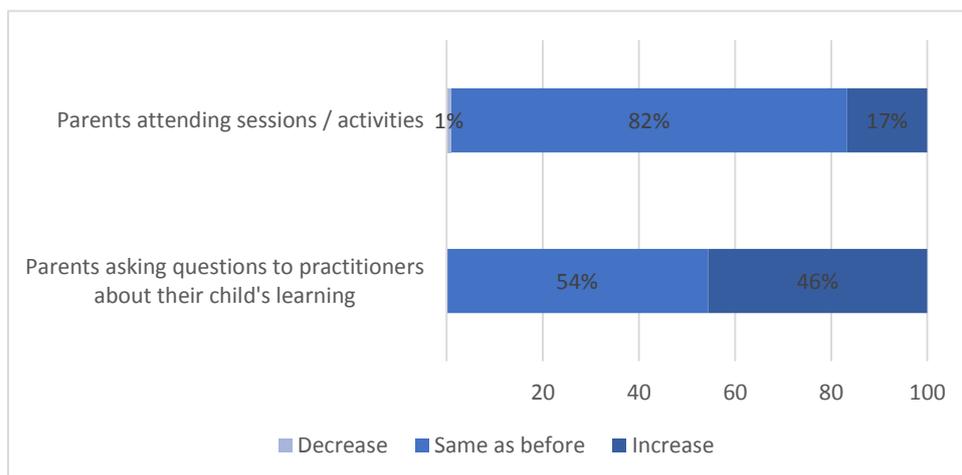
**Figure 3.30: As a result to changes made in practices, frequency with which children engage in mark making, sing songs, notice environmental print and share books**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=103 sharing books, n=102 environmental print, n=104 singing rhymes and songs, n=103 mark making)*

Nearly half of the respondents (46%) reported an increase in parents asking questions to practitioners about their child’s learning and 17% reported an increase in parents attending sessions / activities (Figure 3.31).

**Figure 3.31: As a result in changes to practice, frequency that parents attend sessions / activities and parents asking questions about their child’s learning**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=102 for activities and n=103 for asking questions)*

When asked to outline what aspects of the REAL approach that they thought had been positive for parents, practitioners said:

- An increased awareness and understanding by parents of what their child is able to do and how, as parents, they can support their child's learning and development.

*Parents are more aware of how much their children can do. Better sense of partnership between home and school*

Headteacher / assistant Headteacher

- Parents felt better supported and inspired by staff, due to the increased time practitioners spent with families which lead to improved relationships.

*We've found it a really great tool to support parents. Parents have responded well and are interested in how they can encourage their children's literacy and the staff have been inspired with lots of new activity ideas. It has strengthened our working partnership with parents.*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

- The home visits were seen as being especially useful by some practitioners to help build the foundations of a trusting relationship between the staff and parents.

*The making it REAL approach has had a very big impact on the parents and children that I have done it with. They have made a lot of progress in so many areas and have enjoyed all the aspects of the approach. Some of the families don't want it to come to an end and the home visits have been an excellent method of building friendships with hard to reach families that would otherwise have missed such wonderful learning opportunities had it not been for REAL.*

Early Years Literacy Development Worker

### 3.4 Outcomes for practitioners

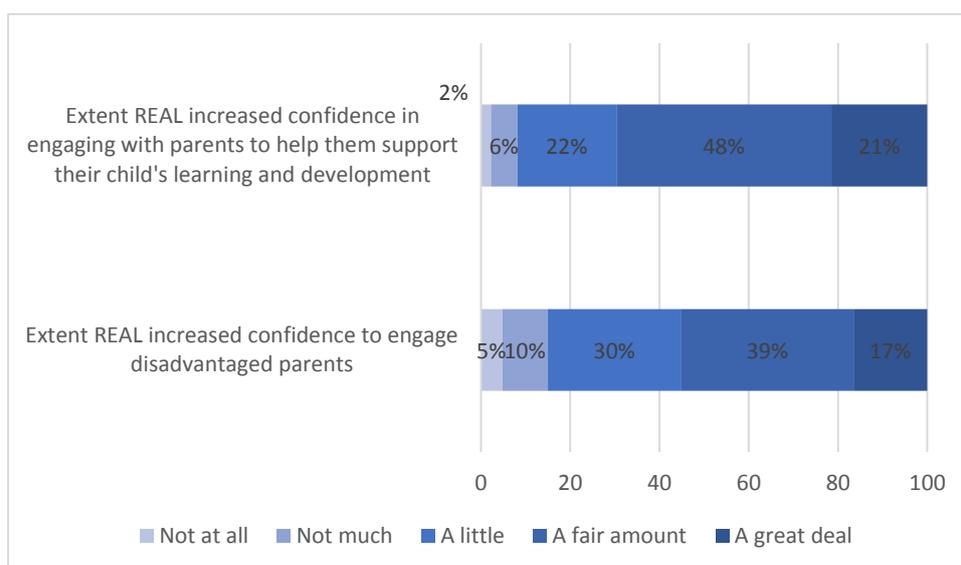
#### Summary

- **Practitioners felt more confident and knowledgeable** in several areas, for example, engaging with families, including disadvantaged families; supporting early literacy in children and using REAL and the ORIM Framework.
- Several **changes to practice** were also noted as a result of the REAL training, including a third of practitioners reporting an **increased number of literary events** and 44% noted **an increase in the number of books and literary resources being lent to families**. Other changes included changes to curriculum planning, supporting two-year olds with early literacy and tracking children's literacy progress.
- **Enablers encouraging changes to practice included the resources provided at the training and staff motivation from attending the training. While barriers included lack of time and a lack of awareness by other staff of the benefits of the REAL approach.**

### 3.4.1 Practitioners’ knowledge, understanding and confidence in supporting families with early literacy

Practitioners reported an increase in their confidence when engaging with parents (Figure 3.32). Two-thirds said their confidence to engage parents and help them to support their child’s learning and development had increased a fair amount (48%) or a great deal (21%). Similarly, just over half said their confidence had increased a fair amount (39%) or a great deal (17%) in terms of engaging ‘disadvantaged’ parents specifically.

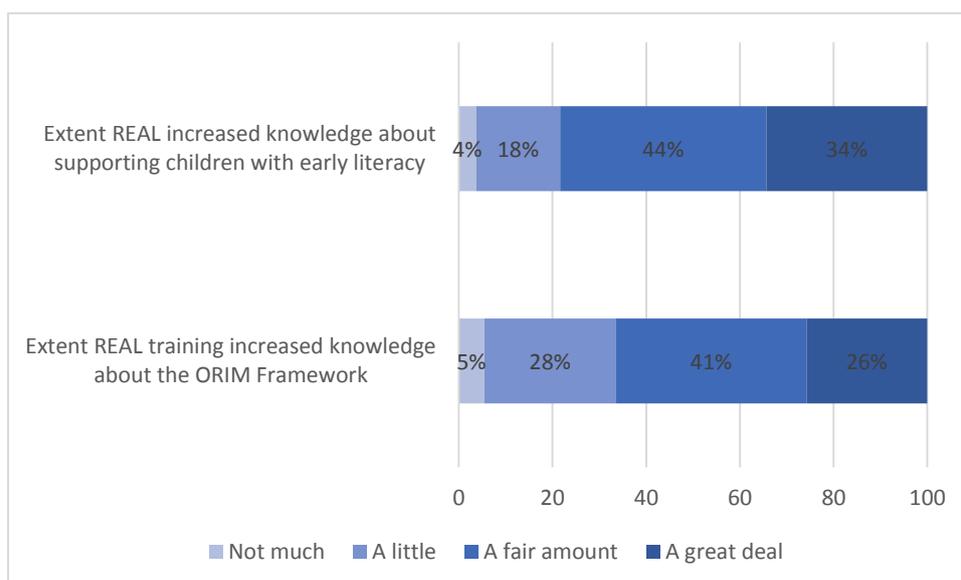
**Figure 3.32: Impact of Making it REAL training on practitioners’ confidence to engage with parents and disadvantaged parents**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=135 engaging with parents, n = 127 engaging with disadvantaged parents)*

Practitioners were also asked if the REAL training had increased their knowledge about supporting children with early literacy and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it with families (Figure 3.33). Forty-four percent of respondents believed their knowledge had increased a fair amount in terms of supporting children with early literacy and two out of five respondents (41%) believed that their knowledge had increased a fair amount in using the ORIM Framework.

**Figure 3.33: Impact of Making it REAL training on practitioners' knowledge about supporting children with early literacy and the ORIM Framework**



(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=134 early literacy, n=128 ORIM)

When asked about the impact of the training, several practitioners commented on their increased confidence:

*Extremely useful training and has been taken on enthusiastically by all staff. It has given us confidence to do a termly literacy event and resource lending bags and look at our own resources from baby room to preschool*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

*The course provided many real examples of good practice which has supported the staff team to promote literacy around the whole setting and with parents*

Early Years Professional at a voluntary setting

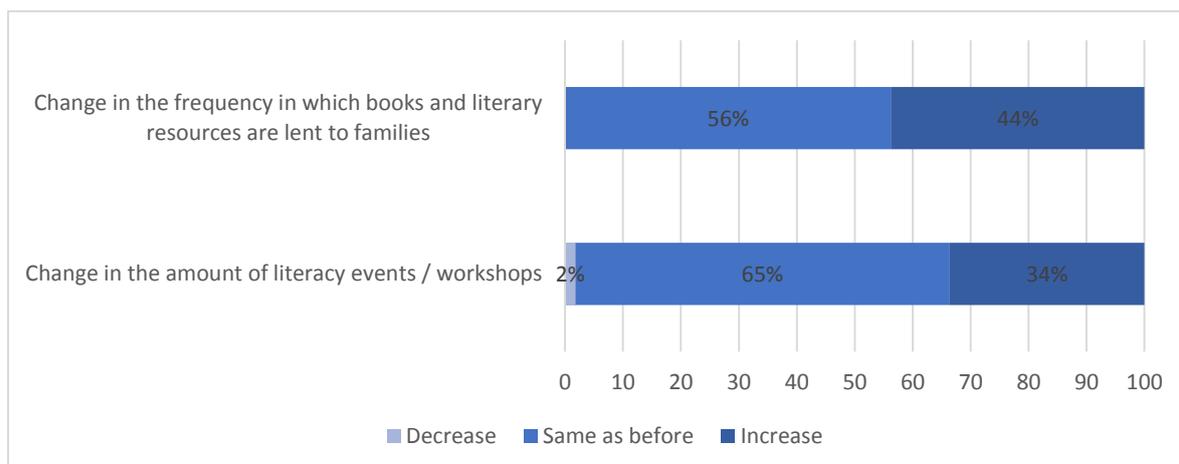
*As a result I have the confidence to explain to parents/carers the impact has on their children and how simple reading etc can be in everyday life and making use of the environmental and recognising that children take in more than we give them credit for.*

Childminder

### 3.4.2 Changes to practice

Practitioners who completed the follow up survey were asked if they had made any changes to their practice as a result of attending the Making it REAL training: four out of five (83%) had. A third of participants (34%) reported an increase in the number of literacy events / workshops their setting provided and 44% reported an increase in the frequency of the number of books and literary resources lent to families (Figure 3.34).

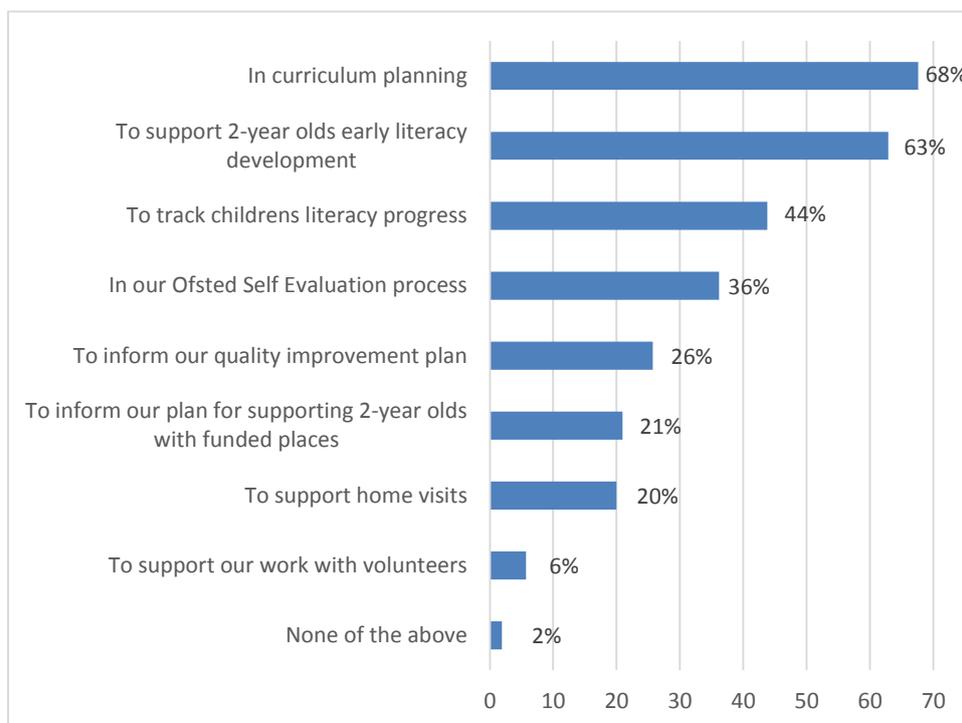
**Figure 3.34: Change in frequency that books and literacy resources are lent to families and change in the amount of literacy events**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=110)*

Two-thirds (68%) of respondents found that changes had been made to their settings curriculum planning as a result of the Making it REAL activities and ORIM Framework. Three out of five (63%) practitioners also said that changes had been made to the support being provided to two-year olds early literacy (Figure 3.35).

**Figure 3.35: Changes made to practices to incorporate REAL and ORIM Framework**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=105, please note respondents could select more than one response)*

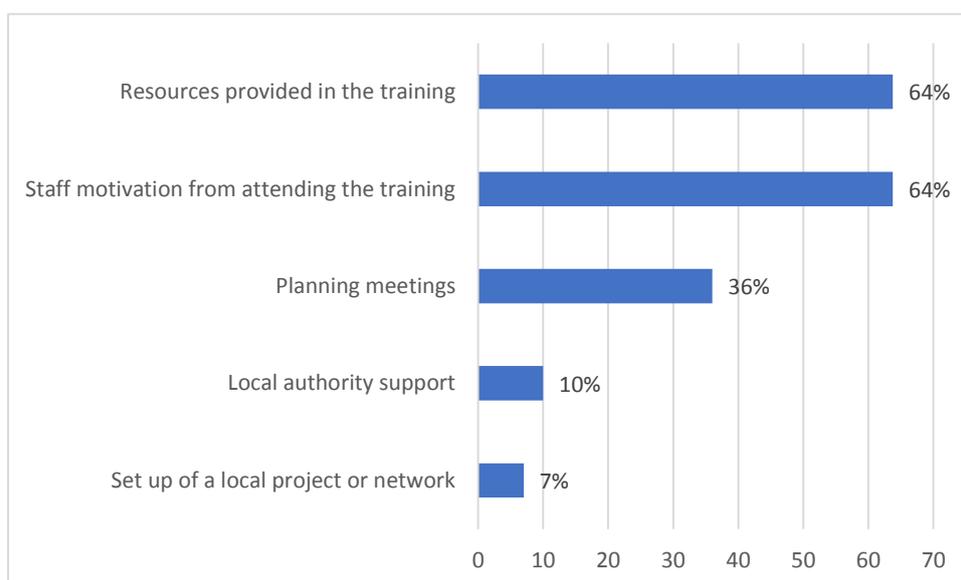
As a result of attending the training one practitioner explained the difference it had made at their setting:

*I shared my knowledge ... for others to hear and was able to set up a display with info on for parents to view their child's work. I have been able to buy more resources to encourage more mark making and this has been recognised with an increase in children's mark making. Ofsted were very pleased – we have just received another outstanding!*

Manager / Deputy Manager at a private setting

Nearly half of the respondents to the survey (48%, n=69) provided information on what had helped to make improvements in their setting. Two-thirds of these respondents believed that the resources provided at the training (64%) and staff motivation after attending the training (64%) were key factors leading to improvements being made (Figure 3.36).

**Figure 3.36: Factors that enabled improvements / changes at the setting**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=69, please note respondents were able to select more than one response)*

Respondents were asked what barriers had made it difficult to implement aspects of the Making it REAL training and approach in their setting. A quarter of participants (26%) identified barriers and referred to the following:

- time constraints / other commitments taking priority in the setting (n=12)

*Time - having the time to discuss and bounce ideas with colleagues*

Childcare / teaching assistant at a private setting

*I have been focusing on one family at a time, in order of need, as parents couldn't attend together. Slower to implement than I had hoped.*

Childminder

- a lack of staff and management awareness or support to implement new activities (n=9)
- difficulty engaging parents (n=8)
- the setting was already delivering something similar so no changes had been made to practice as a result of attending the Making it REAL training (n=6)
- a lack of resources and funding (n=5)
- not suitable for the setting, for example due to its small size or age of children (n=5)

Other settings highlighted issues around staff restructuring stopping any 'new work' being undertaken.

*We have undergone many structural changes over the last few months and this has had an impact on the service we offer, therefore we have been unable to utilise the REAL training to its full extent.*

Centre Team Lead, Children's Centre

*There have been some more pressing improvements to be made before we can concentrate on REAL.*

Early Years Advisor at a private setting

Some comments about how these barriers may be overcome included:

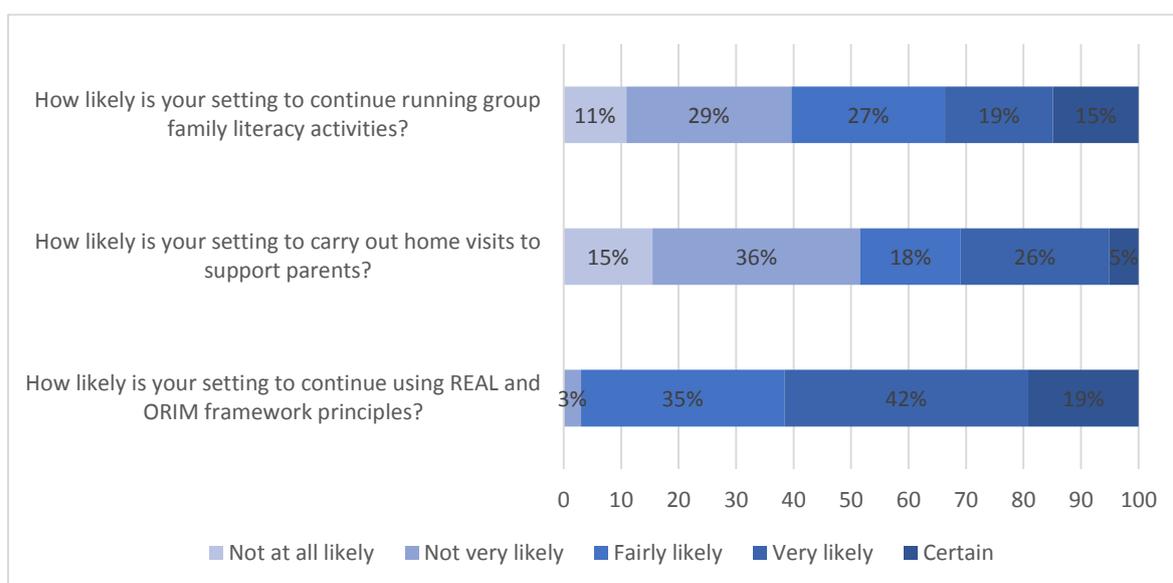
- providing further training for managers to increase their awareness and buy-in to the benefits of REAL,
- engage all parents as soon as their child starts to attend the setting, hopefully this would lead to better engagement of families,
- allowing more time at staff meetings / inset days to discuss REAL so that materials can be properly developed and staff awareness about the benefits of REAL increased.

Twenty-eight respondents indicated that they used a quality improvement framework such as ECERS. These were all asked if using REAL had made a difference to ratings in terms of work with parents and early literacy. Sixty percent (n=17) reported an increase in their ratings for early literacy and 40% said they had increased their rating for working with parents.

### **3.4.3 Future Plans**

Many practitioners highlighted that they were very likely (42%) or certain (19%) to continue to use REAL and the ORIM Framework in their setting (Figure 3.37). However half of the participants said that they were not at all likely (15%) or not very likely (36%) to carry out home visits. More practitioners believed that they were either fairly (27%) or very (19%) likely to provide group family literacy activities.

**Figure 3.37: Likelihood of the setting to continue with the following activities**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=101 family literacy activities, n= 97 home visits, n=99 REAL and ORIM Framework)*

Table 3.38 shows one of the main barriers for practitioners to completing home visits was a lack of staff time (81%) to undertake them followed by a lack of funding to implement them (56%). For running group family literacy trips the main barrier was funding (46%) followed by a lack of staff time, them not being a priority for the setting and difficulty in engaging parents (all 33%). Some childminders felt that home visits and running group family literacy trips were not appropriate activities for them to undertake.

**Table 3.38: Barriers to completing home visits and running group family literacy trips**

	Home Visits		Running group family literacy trips	
	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency
A lack of staff availability to deliver them	<b>81</b>	29	33	8
Lack of funding/budget	56	20	<b>46</b>	11
Don't think there is a need for it	31	11	13	3
My setting is/will be doing other work with families to support literacy	31	11	13	3
Not a priority at the moment	28	10	33	8
Organisational aspects/preparation is too time-consuming or burdensome	28	10	25	6
Don't have enough staff with sufficient training/confidence	25	9	21	5
Don't think it is sufficiently beneficial	14	5	4	1
It is difficult to engage parents	14	5	33	8

*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n= 36 home visits, 24 running group family literacy trips. Please note respondents were allowed to select more than one response)*

## 4. Practitioner feedback on Making it REAL training

This chapter reports practitioners' views on attending the Making it REAL training for both the Local Authority Development projects (which involved two days of training) and the National Rollout (a one day training course). In both cases, the training aimed to enable practitioners to use the REAL approach in early literacy work with families; including to:

- learn about the REAL approach to early literacy work with families,
- share examples of existing practice,
- understand and develop their own practice based on REAL and the ORIM Framework,
- enable reflection on working with parents in a range of environments, including home visits, and identify the strategies required to do so,
- identify resources, opportunities, challenges and sources of support.

A training pack was provided to each participant that included information about research, resources and practice examples. For participants of the two-day training course for the Local Authority Development projects they also received light touch on-going support from ECU and more intensive localised support from the local authority lead which varied according to the local authority capacity and the needs of individual settings.

Data in this chapter comes from the feedback forms that participants of the training were asked to complete at the end of their training course. Findings focus on whether the training met their expected aims and an overall assessment of the training<sup>23</sup>.

### 4.1 Local Authority Development projects' training

All respondents (100%) reported that the training had met the stated aims and they all gave a very positive overall assessment of the course with four out of five practitioners (83%) giving it a rating of excellent and the remainder a rating of four on a scale of one being poor and five excellent.

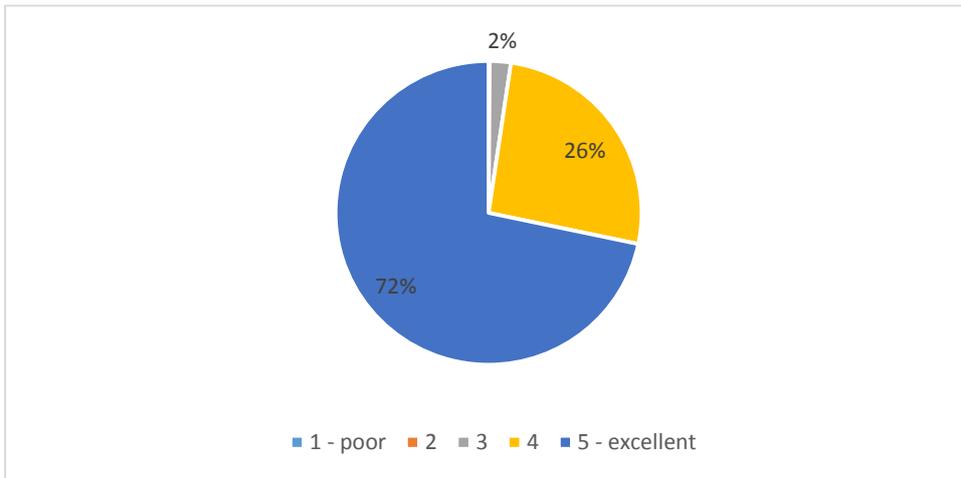
### 4.2 National Rollout training

Participants were asked if the training met its stated aims and objectives – 100% of respondents reported that it had. Participants rated the overall assessment of the course with one being poor and five being excellent; seven out of ten gave their overall assessment as excellent (Figure 4.39).

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<sup>23</sup> The Year 1 Evaluation of Making it REAL covers a more comprehensive breakdown of the feedback provided by participants of both the Local Authority Development projects' two-day training and the National Rollout one-day training.

**Figure 4.39: Overall assessment of the National Rollout training**



*(Practitioner respondents to the post training evaluation form, n= 852)*

## 5. Conclusions

This section of the report discusses if the targets and aims of the project have been met in the second year of delivery. Where applicable reference has also been made to the findings from Year 1.

### 5.1 Delivery outputs

Overwhelming, practitioners and parents were very positive about their involvement in Making it REAL. Broadly, for the Local Authority Development projects, the targets have been met. Year 2 of the project saw a total of 79 settings taking part, fifteen more settings than the target, although 13 of these settings were the extra settings where the entire project may not have been implemented. In Year 1 a total of 64 settings took part, meaning that ECU have met this delivery target. Over the two year period a total of 271 practitioners have attended the two-day training, again exceeding the target of two practitioners being trained from each eight settings in the eight local authorities.

A total of 595 children and families were engaged in the project in Year 2. Over the two-year project a total of 1,132 children and families have been engaged. Again, ECU have managed to exceed their delivery target in terms of the numbers of children and families engaged.

There were 1004 home visits completed by settings in Year 2, an average of 1.69 visits per family. This is a slight decrease from Year 1 where the average was 1.85 visits per family. This can be attributed to the different reporting timescales in each year. Findings from Year 1 included home visits carried out between November 2013 and June 2014, while the data for the Year 2 evaluation was collected between October 2014 and March 2015. Therefore, settings had an additional three months to carry out the home visits and for the data to be included in the evaluation report in Year 1.

There were a total of 240 group literacy events (including trips) delivered in Year 2 giving an average of three events per setting. This is slightly higher than Year 1 where the mean was 2.9 events per setting. Generally, the delivery target of three literacy events per setting each year was met.

Since one of the main criteria for children and families to be involved in the project was for them to be disadvantaged<sup>24</sup> these findings highlight the success of Making it REAL in terms of engaging disadvantaged families. With a good average number of home visits occurring and good attendance at group literacy events and trips, the findings show that practitioners who have received the training are able to effectively engage disadvantaged families in the Making it REAL project and retain their involvement.

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<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents who were less engaged with the setting.

The National Rollout was also successful in meeting its delivery targets. A total of 144 local training courses were held over the two years (72 courses in each year) and six regional training events (four in Year 1 and two in Year 2). This exceeded the target of 140 training courses. In Year 2 of Making it REAL 1,161 practitioners attended the local training courses and 102 practitioners attended the regional training events. This brought the total number of practitioners trained through the National Rollout to 2,789.

## **5.2 Deepening the understanding of the perceived outcomes of children aged two- to five-years**

As in Year 1, all of the measured outcomes for children showed an improvement from the start to the finish of the project. Data collected from the pre- and post-project observations showed that most children, including two-year olds, showed a significant improvement in engaging with and sharing books, using environmental print, drawing and mark making and oral language development. Practitioners were specifically asked to document any changes in the oral language development of two-year olds. Nearly three out of five two-year olds were able to use three or more words by the time of the post-project observation compared with just two in five at the start of the project.

Nearly seven out of ten practitioners from the Local Authority Development projects thought that the predicted outcomes measured against EYFS early learning goals for participating children had improved with Making it REAL either having a great deal (22%) or a fair amount (47%) of impact on this.

As in Year 1, findings from this year highlighted the positive effect the project can have on siblings. Seven out of ten practitioners who responded to the Local Authority Development project follow-up survey stated that Making it REAL had a fair amount of impact on siblings' learning, development and confidence. When asked about the project helping to identify additional needs in younger siblings nearly two-thirds of practitioners in Year 2 thought that it had some (50%) or a great (12%) impact. These were slightly more positive than Year 1 findings where just over half of practitioners felt that the project had some (37%) or a great (18%) impact in helping to identify additional needs in younger siblings.

Parents echoed similar feelings believing that the new activities they were doing with one child would also benefit their other children's learning and development.

Practitioners reported wider changes to settings' early literacy practices which suggests that children who are not directly involved in the project but attend the setting or school have also benefitted.

An aim of the second year of the project was to increase the numbers of disadvantaged two-year olds involved. There was a marked increase in Year 2 of two-year olds as 44% of children were aged two compared with just 18% in the first year of the project. In Year 1 only two of the local authorities engaged two-year olds in order to test the suitability of the materials for this age group.

Year 2 saw all eight local authorities engaging two-year olds in the project. Year 2 findings represents a slightly younger age group than in Year 1 where the majority of children were aged three and four.

Respondents of the Local Authority Development projects follow-up survey commented on the suitability and effectiveness of the Making it REAL project for two-year olds. The majority felt it was suitable, to some extent, with 41% believing a great deal and 47% a fair amount. Nearly two-thirds of practitioners (64%) also believed that Making it REAL had an impact on improving support to parents of two-year olds who were accessing free early education places.

For the National Rollout the findings on children's outcomes is also positive; although less in comparison to the Local Authority Development projects which included pre and post observation of children. This comparison is as expected given that practitioners were given one day of training as oppose to two and no on-going support or no / limited funding to deliver a Making it REAL project. Practitioners who attended the National Rollout still noted a perceived overall increase in the frequency with which children were undertaking mark making, singing songs and rhymes, noticing environmental print and sharing books. Nearly two-thirds also felt that the REAL training had made a difference to the support received by two-year olds in their early literacy development.

Overall, both strands of the project have had positive outcomes for children who have been directly involved in the project both for three- to five-year olds and two-year olds. To some extent, their siblings have also benefited as result of the project.

### **5.3 Understanding the role of the project in the early identification of additional needs of children**

Findings from Year 1 highlighted the potential that Making it REAL had in identifying additional needs of children and linking families with appropriate services. Year 2 of the Local Authority Development projects has built on this as shown in the evaluation findings.

In Year 2 four out of five practitioners (81%) thought that the project had some (57%) or a great (24%) impact on identifying additional needs of participating children. This was an increase from the Year 1 findings where 68% of practitioners reported that Making it REAL had helped them to identify additional needs in the target children. As already discussed above (section 5.2) practitioners also believed that the project had an impact on identifying additional needs in younger siblings too – 62% stated with some or a great impact in Year 2 and 55% in Year 1.

In terms of linking families to services 85% of practitioners in Year 2 said that the Making it REAL events and activities had some or a great impact on this. Again, this is a marked increase from Year 1 findings where 71% of practitioners stated that the project had some or a great impact on linking children and families with services.

These findings suggest that the project has supported practitioners to identify additional needs at an earlier stage and that this theme has become more embedded into the Making it REAL approach.

## **5.4 Parents' skills, confidence and behaviours in supporting their children's early literacy development**

Both practitioners and parents who were involved in the Local Authority Development project described an increase in parents' confidence to support their child's early literacy development. Findings from Year 2 suggest a slightly more positive outcome for parents compared with Year 1. For example, 82% of practitioners in Year 1 reported that Making it REAL had either some or a great impact on improving parent-setting relationships. While in Year 2, 99% of practitioners felt that the project had some or a great impact. This suggests that the project has managed to build on knowledge and experience gained in the first year around supporting parents.

Along with this improved relationship between practitioners and parents, nine out of ten practitioners believed that many parents had a great deal (45%) or a fair amount (47%) of confidence to speak to practitioners about their child's learning and development.

Parents also described new activities they were doing at home with their children to improve their literacy. These activities covered the four strands of literacy in the Making it REAL approach and included more reading, encouraging mark making, singing songs and rhymes and using environmental print far more frequently. One in eight parents also highlighted an increased awareness of the activities and routines they could involve their child in, such as cooking and shopping, to provide new learning opportunities for their child. Using everyday items from around the house was also seen by a quarter of parents (27%) as a new way to engage their child in learning.

Again for the National Rollout, when compared to the Local Authority Development project, the benefit for parents is slightly less, but none the less still very positive. Practitioners who responded to the follow-up survey thought that there had been an increase in the number of parents attending activities (17%) and asking questions (46%).

## **5.5 The skills, knowledge and practice of practitioners working with parents and children in early years settings**

The majority of practitioners who responded to the Local Authority Development projects follow up survey felt that their knowledge had increased either a fair amount or a great deal in terms of supporting children with their early literacy (79%) and using REAL and the ORIM Framework (85%).

Findings from the National Rollout are similar: practitioners had increased their confidence either a fair amount or a great deal in supporting families with early literacy (78%) and using REAL and the ORIM Framework (67%).

When asked about their confidence in engaging parents to help them support their child's learning and development findings for the Local Authority Development projects are similar to those in Year 1 of the evaluation. In Year 2 88% of practitioners expressed a fair amount or a great deal of confidence in engaging parents compared with 93% of practitioners in Year 1. This suggests a slight decrease in confidence levels between the two years of the project, but this can most likely be attributed to the difference in reporting timescales. In Year 1 the practitioners had a six-month follow-up survey, allowing them more time to embed practice and therefore have increased confidence levels. However, in Year 2 the follow-up survey was only three-months after the training, possibly leading to lower self-reported confidence levels as they had less time to engage parents.

Eighty-seven percent of practitioners also said that they had a fair amount or a great deal of confidence of engaging disadvantaged families in Year 2 compared with 88% in Year 1.

In Year 2 respondents to both the Local Authority Development projects and the National Rollout follow-up surveys were asked if they had made any changes to their practice. This focused on an increase in the number of books and literary resources being lent to families and an increase in the number of literacy events being run by the setting. In both cases some practitioners did note an increase in activity, for example 64% of respondents to the Local Authority Development projects follow-up survey stated that there had been an increase in the number of books lent to families and three-quarters said there had been an increase in the number of literary events.

In terms of how successful the project has been in embedding the Making it REAL approach nationally the findings suggest that this has been achieved in most of the settings. For the Local Authority Development projects 96% of respondents to the follow-up survey said that they were either certain (30%), very likely (46%) or fairly likely (20%) to continue to use the REAL and the ORIM Framework in their day to day practices. When asked about specific activities 95% said they were certain (40%), very likely (37%) or fairly likely (18%) to continue to run literacy events and activities and 84% thought they were certain (19%), very likely (51%) or fairly likely (14%) to organise home visits in the future.

Practitioners who attended the National Rollout training were asked the same questions in their follow-up survey. Ninety six percent of respondents reported that they were certain (19%), very likely (42%) or fairly likely (35%) to continue to use REAL and the ORIM Framework in the future. This is similar to the respondents of the Local Authority Development projects. However, about a third fewer respondents said that they would continue in the future with running literacy events and home visits. This is most likely as a result of no funding and no staff time being given to undertake such activities. Three out of five (61%) respondents said that they were certain (15%), very likely (19%) or fairly likely

(27%) to run the literacy events and nearly half thought that they were certain (5%), very likely (26%) or fairly likely (18%) to undertake home visits.

## **5.6 Perception of what contribution the introduction of volunteers has had on the effectiveness of the project**

The introduction of volunteers has had a positive perceived impact on children, parents and the setting. The types of roles volunteers undertook included:

- engaged parents at events, this helped to relax parents and get them more involved in the project and freed up staff capacity to talk to and engage more parents,
- spent time organising events and activities which enabled staff to be able to do other activities and potentially increase the number of events being offered to parents,
- volunteered generally in the setting, spending time with children and encouraging them to read.

Those parents who had contact with volunteers reported how helpful they found the support, especially from someone who had been involved in the project the previous year.

## **5.7 Future plans for Making it REAL**

Funding has now been confirmed from DfE to continue Making it REAL for a third year, taking it to the next level of embedding and sustainability through; the set up of a self-improving model which includes cascade training for the existing 8 Local Authority Development projects and neighbourhood network hubs to support practice sharing and the set up of new local authority / early years setting run project across the country. Year 3 will also include a focus on supporting children with additional needs and bilingual families in particular, as well as strategic support around using the Early Years Pupil Premium and other funding streams to sustain local REAL activity. Findings from this evaluation highlight the need to ensure that the project becomes fully embedded in settings (which takes at least six-months) and is sustainable.

# Appendix A – Methodology and Sample

## A.1 Methodology

Data for the evaluation was collected through the following means:

- **Post training evaluation forms** completed by practitioners that attended the two-day training for the Local Authority development projects and the one day training for the National Rollout which focussed on practitioners' views of the training.
- **A three-month follow up practitioner survey** distributed to those who attended either the one-day or two-day training courses for Making it REAL. Two different surveys were developed for participants of the two training courses. Both covered questions around:
  - the perceived impact of the REAL training and approach in terms of staff confidence and knowledge,
  - any reported changes to practice including the number of literacy events being provided and parents' attendance at these events; parents' involvement in their child's literacy development and children's development in the four early literacy strands (environmental print, books, writing and oral language),
  - barriers to implementing aspects of the training,
  - how REAL and the ORIM Framework have been used in the setting to help with curriculum planning and tracking children's literacy progress,
  - future plans to continue with REAL activities.

For the Local Authority Development projects practitioners were also asked about the impact:

- on two-year olds involved in the project,
- of the home visits, identifying additional needs and changes to the wider setting practice around literacy,
- of volunteers being involved in the project.

The evaluation of the Local Authority Development projects was designed to be more in-depth, and included additional data being collected via:

- **Pre- and post-project observational measure forms to be completed by practitioners for each child / parent.** Two comparable practitioner observation forms were designed to track individual children's outcomes in key areas of literacy and perceived levels of parents' confidence, one pre-intervention and another post-intervention.
- **A parent postal self-completion feedback form distributed to all participating parents.** This short survey was designed to gain a broad range of parents' views on the programme and self-report on

impact. Questions were designed to be as accessible as possible and included a range of pictures to illustrate question topics.

## A.2 The sample for the Local Authority Development projects

Below is a description of the achieved sample from the various methods of data collection used to evaluate the Local Authority Development projects.

### A.2.1 Participant feedback forms post training

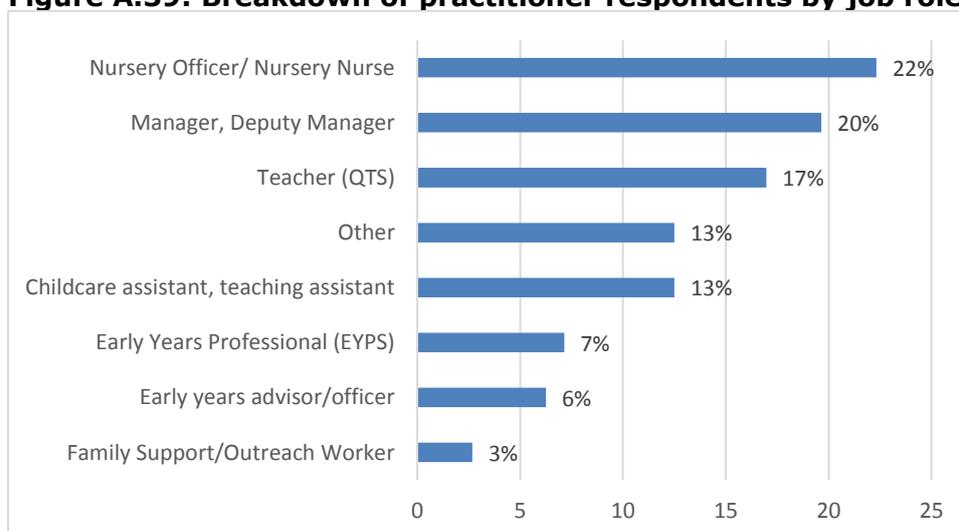
Training courses were held in the eight local authorities between September and October 2014. A total of 150 practitioners attended the training and 142 forms were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 95%.

### A.2.2 The three-month practitioner follow-up survey: settings and practitioners

From among the 150 practitioners who attended the training, 113 follow-up surveys were received, a response rate of 75%.

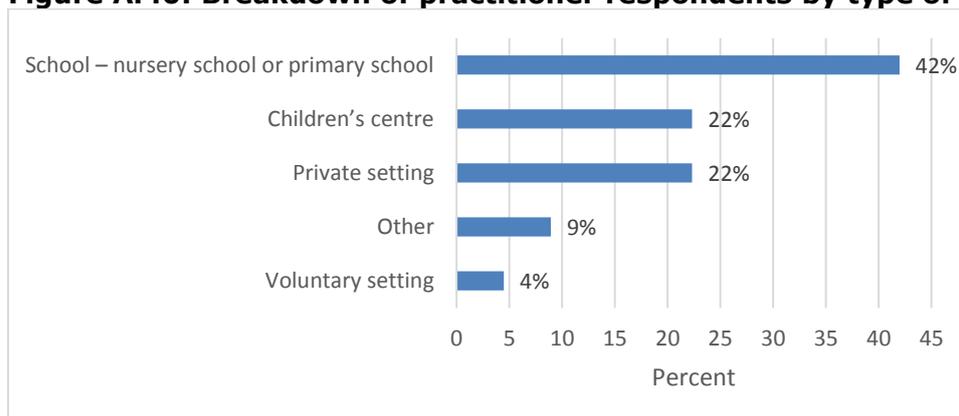
In terms of who completed the follow-up practitioner survey from those settings involved in the Local Authority Development projects Figures A.39 and A.40 show respondents' job roles and the type of setting in which they worked. Nearly a quarter (22%) of respondents were nursery officers or nursery nurses and one in five (20%) were managers or deputy managers. Nearly a quarter of participants were practitioners, either teachers (17%) or Early Years Professionals (7%). Respondents that selected other for their job role included volunteers, learning mentors and activity worker. Just under half (42%) of the respondents worked at a school – either nursery or primary. For those respondents that selected other for the type of setting generally worked for the local authority and / or provided support to a number of different settings.

**Figure A.39: Breakdown of practitioner respondents by job role**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=113)*

**Figure A.40: Breakdown of practitioner respondents by type of setting**



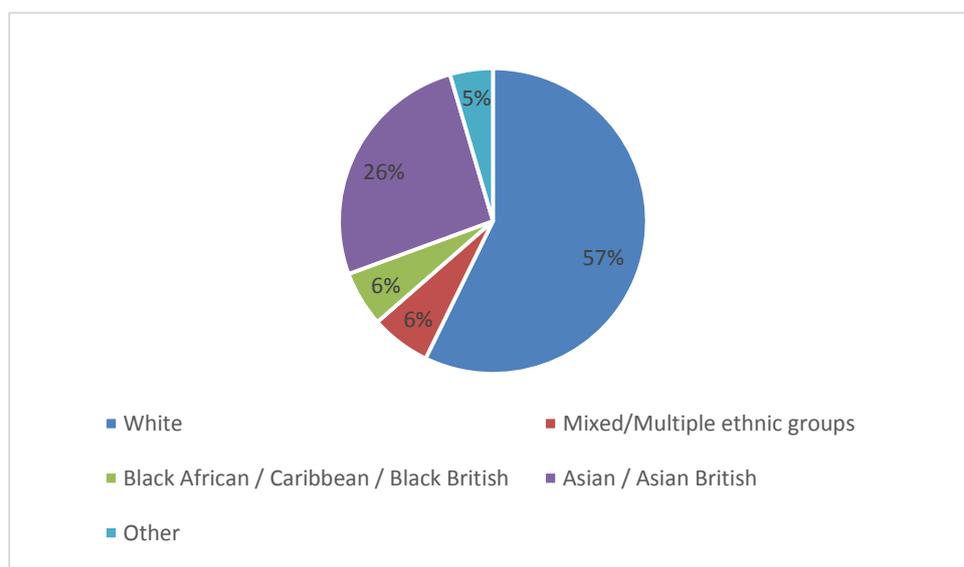
*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n = 112)*

Respondents were asked if this was their first year of being involved in Making it REAL: 59% of respondents said that they had taken part in Year 1 of the project while 41% said that this was their first year of being involved (n=113).

### A.2.3 The parent postal self-completion feedback form

A total of 224 parent questionnaires were received, representing 38% of families. Of these, 48% were completed by parents of boys and 24% by parents of children aged 2 or under. Figure A.41 shows the ethnic background of the children, with the majority (57%) being white and just over a quarter (26%) being Asian / Asian British.

**Figure A.41: Ethnic breakdown of families**



*(Parent postal self-completion feedback forms, n=222)*

### A.2.4 Pre- and post-project child observation forms

In total 595 children took part in the second year of the project. A total of 426 children (71%) are included in the analysis of pre- and post-project

observations. This represents the 'matched' sample – in other words data that was received at both points in time for that child. Of the matched sample 55% were boys (n=426). Table A.42 shows the breakdown of the age of the sample with two-year olds accounting for 44%.

**Table A.42: age breakdown of children with matched observational data**

Age of child	Percent
1 or under	3 <sup>25</sup>
Two-year old	44
Three-year old	40
Four-year old	10
Five-year old	3

(n=414)

## **A.3 The sample for the National Rollout one-day training**

### **A.3.1 Participant feedback forms post training**

The National Rollout free one-day training was attended by 1,161 practitioners (and those who support practitioners). Training was held across England between April 2014 and March 2015. A total of 855 forms were returned, giving a response rate of 74%.

### **A.3.2 Three-month follow-up practitioner survey**

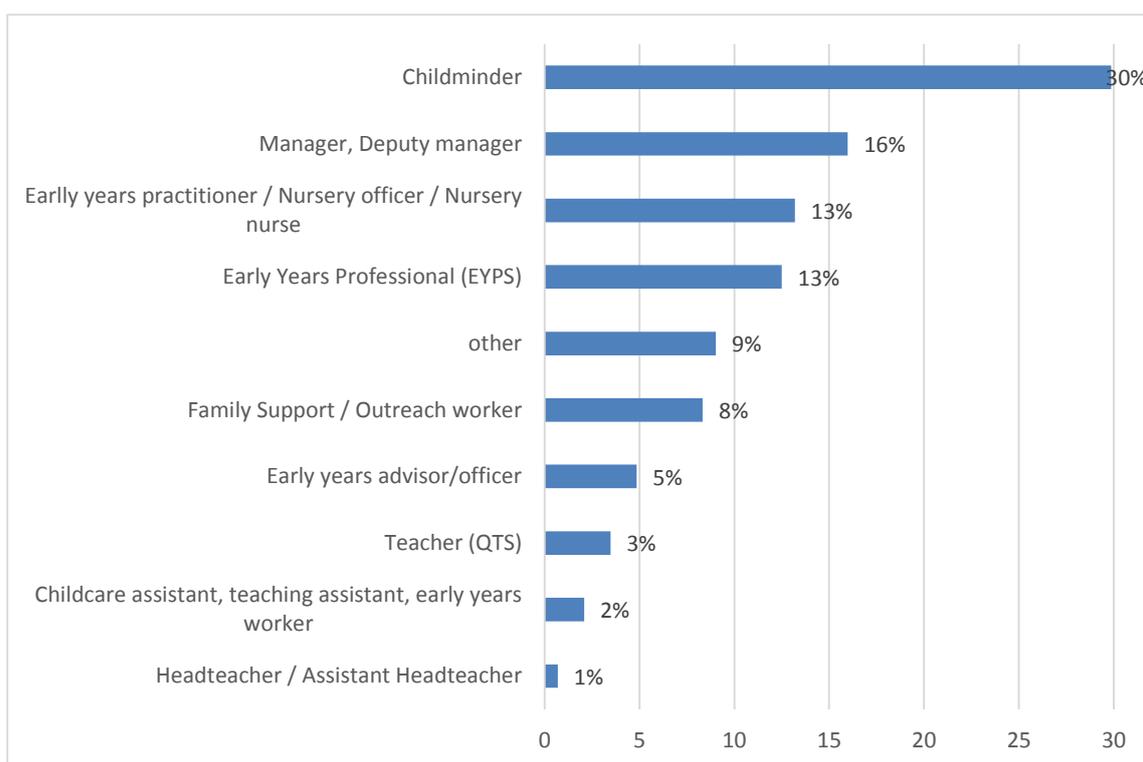
From among the 1,161 practitioners who attended the training, 146 follow up surveys were received, a response rate of 17%.

Respondents came from 52 different local authorities across England (n=146). Nearly a third of respondents were childminders (30%) and 16% of respondents were managers or deputy managers (Figure A.43). Nearly a fifth (16%) of participants were practitioners, either Early Years Professionals (13%) or teachers (3%). Nine percent indicated other and these included an early years development worker, SENCO, tutor assessor and area manager for Children's Centres.

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<sup>25</sup> Three percent of children were aged one or under in the matched sample suggesting that practitioners had involved children who were even younger than two. This data is included in the all children sample but not in the two-year old or three to five year old samples.

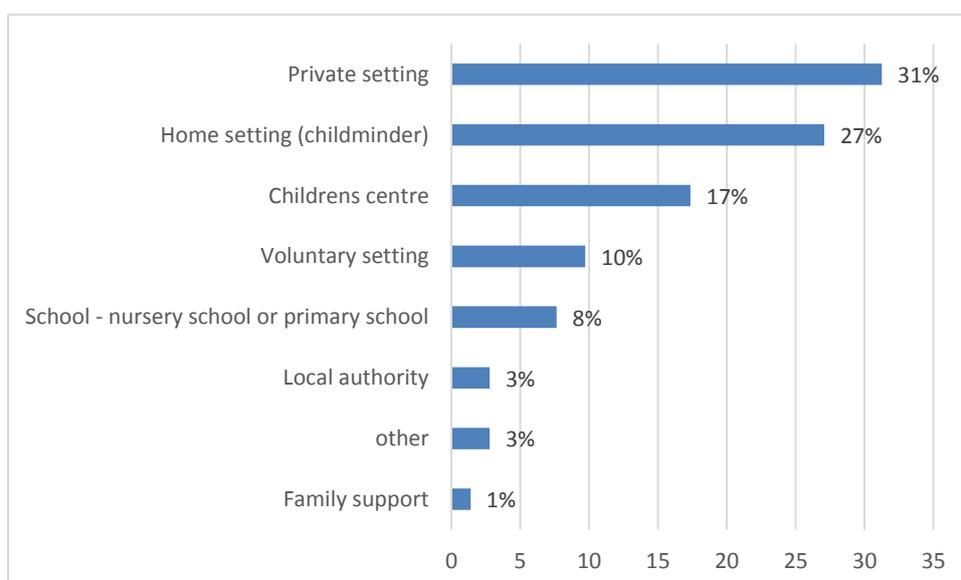
**Figure A.43: Job role of practitioners**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=144)*

Nearly a third (31%) of respondents were from private settings and a quarter (27%) worked in a home setting (Figure A.44).

**Figure A.44: Type of provision where practitioners work**



*(Practitioner respondents to three-month follow-up survey, n=144)*