



Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs: Providing evidence-informed approaches that improve outcomes in the Early Years

strongerpracticehubs.org.uk

A network of best practice to support early years education and childcare

The Department for Education (DfE) Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs programme launched in 2022, supported by evidence partner Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and delivery partner National Children's Bureau (NCB).

Each Hub is a collaboration of up to five partners, all of whom are early years providers from across the sector (PVI, school-based nurseries, childminders etc), providing support and advice to improve quality in early years settings by sharing good practice and offering evidence-informed professional development.

In July 2025, the government confirmed that the programme will receive funding for three more years, extending until March 2029.

Hub objectives are agreed locally as part of a co-produced process with the Hub, the DfE and NCB, to produce a bespoke support offer for the local sector that meets the needs of early years professionals,

and ultimately of children under five in the area.

Each Hub supports other early years settings regionally to improve outcomes for children in their local area across the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

They specifically focus on areas of development identified as local priorities, including but not exclusive to: personal social and emotional development (PSED); communication and language, and early literacy and maths.

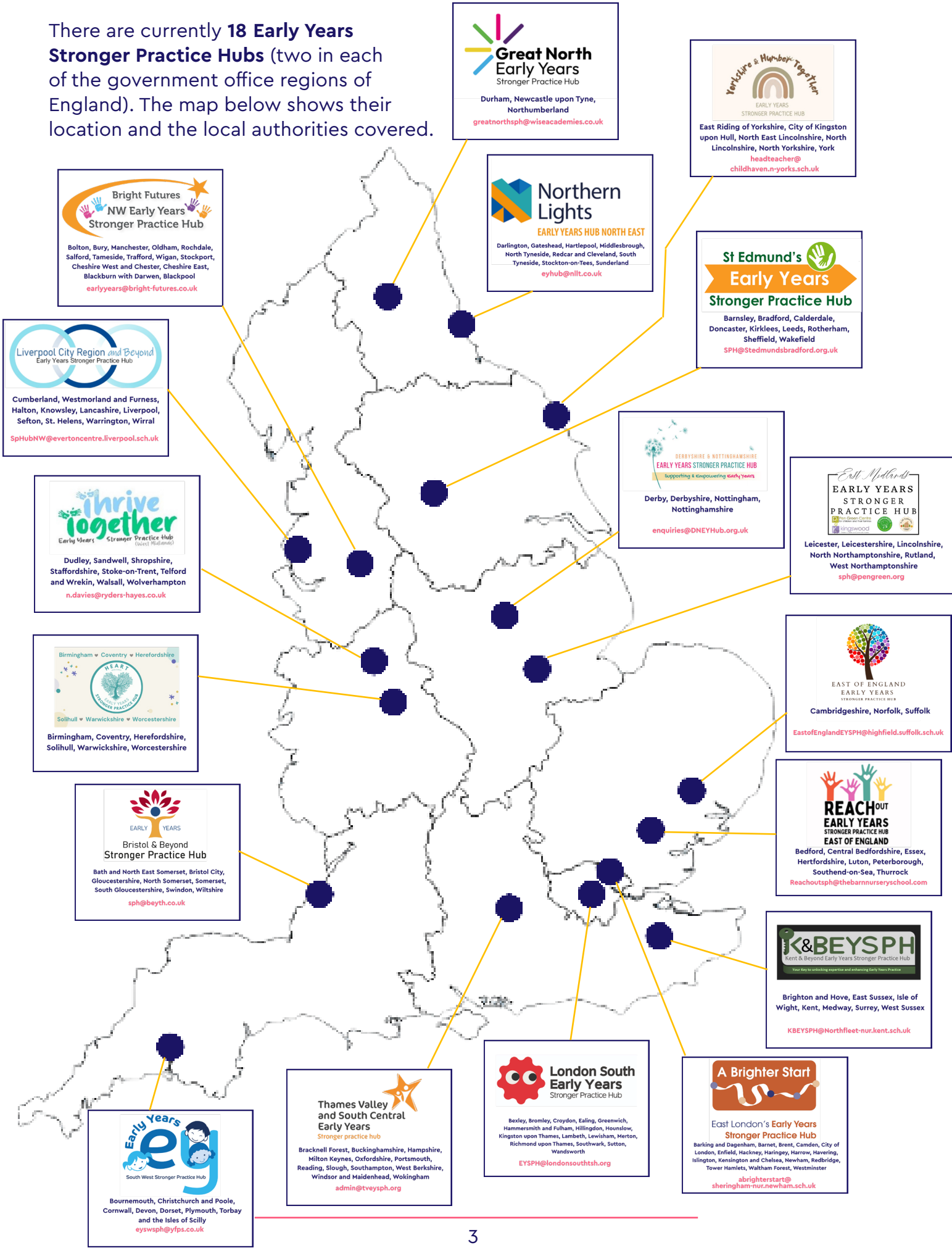
As DfE's delivery partner for the programme, NCB leads the relationships with the Hubs, including providing oversight and quality assurance.

EEF is the programme's evidence partner, supporting the Hubs by providing accessible information on its Evidence Store about the evidence around early years pedagogy and processes that support practice change.



Where are the Hubs?

There are currently **18 Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs** (two in each of the government office regions of England). The map below shows their location and the local authorities covered.



Evaluation shows Stronger Practice Hubs creating change and improving outcomes

An independent evaluation of the Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs programme supports the case for a Hub model for the early years sector and found positive responses from settings and concluded the changes made to practice will benefit children across all outcomes.

The evaluation, published in June 2025, was carried out by IFF Research on behalf of the Department for Education and reported that over 8,000 settings had signed up to the Hubs network, a number that since passed 10,000.



The evaluation found...

A peer-led Hub model responsive to local needs, and inclusive of different types of early years providers is **suitable for supporting the early years sector**

The **working relationship with local authorities** is an area that could really help accelerate the success of the SPH programme

73% of settings in more deprived areas engaged with **three or more types of Hub activity**

A high proportion of settings (74%) **changed their practice** following participation in the SPH programme.

The use of exemplification videos in EEF's Evidence Store is an **accessible way for practitioners to see good practice in action**

The activities that the settings engaged with were **relevant** (92%), **high quality** (90%), **accessible** (87%), and **practical / actionable** (88%)

Most settings reported that the programme had a **positive impact on their children**; 78% felt the **communication and language development** of the children in their setting had improved, 73% that the **personal, social and emotional development (PSED)** had improved, 62% that **school readiness** had improved, and 58% that **early mathematics development** had improved.

The majority of practice leaders felt the SPH programme supported workforce development, with **four-in-five saying it had improved staff skills** (82% agreed) or staff practice (81%)

What do practitioners say about the support available from the Hubs?



"I really enjoyed the [webinar on EAL]. It was very professionally presented, with lots of links to further learning and support to follow up later. Very worthwhile!"

Nursery worker

"I think we already do a lot of this in practice, but [this spatial reasoning webinar] makes you think more about how you can extend what you do. We can definitely introduce more discussion of perspective when interacting."

PVI practitioner



"I think the Hub model has worked really well [...] they do listen, they are absolutely passionate about child care and being there for the children. They go above and beyond."

Childminder



"The videos make it very easy to copy and be inspired... We have each other to discuss what went well and the resources... they are brilliant!"

"You can keep repeating [the cards] until you can remember, they provide lots of new ideas."

Childminders on a "recipe card" approach to professional development

Case study: How Hubs are strengthening Local Authority capacity to support providers

Opportunities to collaborate

Hubs are working collaboratively with local authorities across their region to identify areas of need, complementing existing offers and bringing a range of evidence informed approaches to life.



The Thrive Together Early Years Stronger Practice Hub (West Midlands) have supported Local Authority team members with high quality evidence-based information that has increased knowledge and provided strategic direction. Thrive also facilitated communication between LA Leads through the Stronger Practice Hub strategic board, which enabled wider regional challenges to be discussed and signposting of national programmes. These activities have culminated in the LAs refocusing strategic priorities to support evidence-informed practices in conjunction with statutory duties and frameworks.

"Thrive Together has supported the professional development of the LA Team, particularly the conference and Webinar Wednesdays where team members have developed their strategies for challenge, based on this new learning."

Nicola Hart,
Senior Quality Assurance
Lead Early Years,
Walsall

"Working closely with The Thrive Together Stronger Practice Hub has been invaluable to us as a local authority... I have also attended other training sessions from the Stronger Practice Hub and have found these very beneficial for my own continuous professional development."

Cherelle Bashford,
Cluster Birth to Three Officer,
Dudley

"Being able to access training from the Stronger Practice Hubs has enabled us as an authority to increase the training offer and knowledge of our practitioners across Dudley. It has helped to provide solid examples of good practice for the Integrated Early Years team to draw on when supporting practitioners..."

Gillian Hickinbottom,
Integrated EY Advisory Teacher

Successfully working in partnership to support more children and families



"All the staff at The East of England Stronger Practice Hub have always been approachable and keen to hear what Norfolk LA are offering the early years workforce.

They tailor their offer depending on what we have on our training brochure. Together, we look at any gaps and plan accordingly. Some of the opportunities offered have included getting national speakers.

By working in collaboration, we are able to ensure that there is no duplication of work. The incentives for the workforce always included well thought out resources to support practice back in the setting or childminding business and enthuse staff. It always has the wow factor."

Gemma Lane, Early Years Intervention Officer, Norfolk County Council

"[The contribution of the Bright Futures Hub] was amazing and I'm sure the childminders went home with lots of practical ideas and 'food for thought'!

Your commitment and passion for working in partnership with us is just fab – and is truly appreciated!"

Jo Elvin, Early Years Quality Officer
Education Improvement and Partnerships
Tameside MBC



"Working together means that we can share expertise and learning opportunities, whilst avoiding duplication. Together we aim to ensure that training is relevant and responsive to the childcare practitioners, and of a high quality.

It enables us to offer a greater variety of courses and in a flexible way which we know our practitioners welcome. Our ability to work jointly enhances what we can offer childcare professionals in our area and ultimately supports the children and families."

Carolyn Heyburn, Lead Officer – Early Years and Childcare Services, Suffolk

What are the benefits for local authorities of working with Stronger Practice Hubs?

Evidence-informed approaches

Hubs are working collaboratively with local authorities across their region to identify areas of need, complementing existing offers and bringing a range of evidence-informed approaches to life.

Here are just some of the benefits that working with your local Hub can offer:

- Opportunities to contribute to and influence Hubs' strategic priorities.
- Opportunities for joint planning to identify any gaps, select professional development programmes and avoid duplication.
- Using current local authority/Ofsted/Hub data to prioritise professional development themes that will have the greatest impact and support the targeted increase of children reaching a Good Level of Development from 67% to 75% by 2028, ensuring plans align with the Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy.
- Jointly delivering professional development opportunities.
- Providing an accessible and seamless support offer for the diverse range of Early Years settings in the locality.
- Collaborating to identify and propose solutions to Early Years staffing retention and recruitment challenges.
- Enhancing the offer to the Early Years sector in the area ultimately supporting children and families.
- Co-creation of high-quality resources and incentives that support engagement and offer good value for money.
- Opportunities to work with other local authorities across a region to share learning.
- Opportunities for local authority staff to support their own continuous professional development.



Find out what your local Hub can deliver by visiting
www.strongerpracticehubs.org.uk

If you have questions about the Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs programme, please email NCB at sph@ncb.org.uk

EARLY YEARS STRONGER PRACTICE HUBS

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) supports the Department for Education (DfE) in delivering the Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs programme as part of the government's Plan for Change to provide high-quality early education and childcare.