

Research
Centre



National Children's
Bureau

Year 3 Evaluation of Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy)

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Executive Summary

Key findings from the evaluation of Making it REAL Year 3.

Overall, the findings have been very positive, this evaluation highlighted:

- Positive impacts on children with marked increases in the frequency with which children read, engaged with environmental print and mark making, and sang songs and rhymes;
- Findings included some positive outcomes for children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds;
- Parents were more confident and knowledgeable in how they could support their child's literacy;
- The programme is successfully becoming embedded in the eight local authorities that have been involved since Year 1. In Year 3, Making it REAL programmes were implemented with reduced direct support from NCB, but good levels of project activity were achieved; and
- The co-delivery training model has resulted in the programme being self-sustaining in regards to new settings being trained in the REAL approach.

Background to Making it REAL

This report presents findings of the evaluation of Making it REAL Year 3 (2013 - 2016). Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) delivers an evidence-based family literacy intervention for two to five year olds. This 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).

Making it REAL builds on an evidence-based programme *Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)*¹ which involves practitioners working with parents² 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 users³ - the ORIM framework.

In 2015-2016 NCB has taken the Making it REAL project to a new level, building on a strong foundation of DfE project work since 2013. The ultimate aim of Making it REAL is to provide a replicable, scalable model of the REAL approach and embed it nationally.

Evaluation aims and methodology

In this year of the project there were two strands:

- Continue with **development projects in eight existing local authorities** and expand to include

¹ 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>

² In this summary the word parent is used to cover both parents and carers

³ Further details on the ORIM Framework <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf>

the recruitment of **15 new areas**; and

- A **lighter touch** rollout of 20 one-day training courses delivered to early years settings that have not yet received Making it REAL.

Following two successful years of delivering Making it REAL, in Year 3^{4 5}, the programme was particularly concerned with:

- Working with partners to ensure the approach becomes self-sustaining among local authorities and settings (i.e. reducing the need for support from external organisations such as NCB) and is more widely utilised and embedded nationally.
- Supporting the workforce to support disadvantaged families⁶ and children with SEND; others less likely to engage in services, for example parents with EAL; and two-year olds.

This evaluation drew on a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods included analysis of **training feedback forms** from training received in the project areas, support packages and national roll-out; **train the trainer feedback forms** which examined the training received by new trainers; **hub event attendee feedback forms**; a **practitioner follow up survey** to capture practitioners' views of the impact of Making it REAL; **setting record forms** providing data on the overall number/profile of children/levels of activity delivered at each setting; a **parental feedback survey**; and **child-level pre and post data forms** to capture activity and some outcome data for all participating children and families in the eight original local authorities.

The qualitative aspects included telephone interviews (offering flexibility to participants and cost-effectiveness) across a range of stakeholders. In three of the local authorities involved in the original eight project areas the following stakeholders were interviewed: **one local authority representative**; **one practitioner** from a setting where Making it REAL is embedded but the setting did not take part in Year 3 training or support; **one practitioner** from a setting that has taken part in the Making it REAL project training and delivery across the three years; **one practitioner** from a setting where this is their first year of Making it REAL; and **two parents** (across six providers). Interviews were also conducted with **one local authority representative** from three different local authorities who received support packages in Year 3.

Key findings

Project areas

Local authority co-led delivery of Making it REAL in the original eight local authority project areas

- ECU provided 'train the trainer' sessions to 16 practitioners, two from each of the original eight local authorities in June 2015;
- Two-day training was co-delivered by the new local authority trainers alongside ECU associate trainers, to groups of 16 – 20 local practitioners in September – October 2015; and
- Delivery of the Making it REAL projects to families from November 2015 to March 2016.

Eight project areas were involved in Year 3 of Making it REAL. 79 settings across these eight local authorities completed Making it REAL. Over half of the settings were new to Year 3 and had not taken part in Year 1 or 2. A total of 530 children were registered to take part.

⁴ Year 1 evaluation report:

<http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making-it-real-evaluation-report-final-version-230914-2.pdf>

⁵ Year 2 evaluation report: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1236324/evaluation-of-making-it-real-year-2.pdf>

⁶ For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents who were less engaged with the setting.

Training

Local authority leads received a 'Train the Trainer' course, to equip them for co-delivery of the two-day training to practitioners. The purpose of co-delivering training was to ensure the sustainability of Making it REAL as NCB's support is reduced. Evaluation forms were collected after the training, and interviews and questionnaires with practitioners included questions about the two-day training.

A total of 16 participants attended the Train the Trainer course and all participants agreed that the day met its aims and objectives and provided positive feedback. All participants said that their knowledge and skills had improved in delivering the overall framework and content of two-day Making it REAL training and using participatory training approaches to deliver the two-day Making it REAL training.

There were 131 practitioners, from the eight project areas, who attended the **two day co-delivered training** by an NCB Associate and local authority lead who had attended the Train the Trainer session. Local authority leads were positive about the co-delivery of these sessions. All participants felt that the training had met the stated aims and objectives and 95.5% reported that they were either very confident or confident in implementing what they had learnt on the training. Nearly all of the participants (96.9%) believed that their knowledge had increased a great deal or a fair amount in engaging parents to help them to support their children's learning; and 93.0% felt that this was the case for supporting children with early literacy.

All practitioners ($N = 72$) who completed a follow-up survey at the end of Making it REAL reported that they had a fair amount or a great deal of knowledge and confidence to support their children's early learning and development. This was the case for all but one participant in relation to supporting children with early literacy.

The practitioner interviews highlighted that, as well as commending the content and delivery of the training, practitioners found the information and supporting materials provided very stimulating and well matched to their needs, such as the training packs, lists of resources and links to other sources of information and ideas.

Delivering Making it REAL

In order to understand how Making it REAL had been delivered, interviews were conducted with the local authority leads and highlighted the reasons for continuing with Making it REAL into the third year, including: evidence of effectiveness from previous years; buy-in at strategic levels; building on other early years programmes; improved Ofsted ratings; and a desire to extend the focus to children entitled to the Early Year Pupil Premium. For the practitioners who were interviewed, Making it REAL's primary attraction was the opportunity to learn and improve practices for: working closely with and involving families; developing the setting's home visiting practice; introducing the REAL literacy approach into the setting; and building on other initiatives. They expected Making it REAL to assist the children's long-term development by enabling parents to learn how to support their children's learning and development at home as well as building better relationships between parents and the setting.

'I'm a great believer in home visits because ... they're more comfortable in their home setting, they're more likely to build ... that relationship with you... it's building that trust, and that's how they sort of nurture them really. So I think the home visits are probably one of the most powerful tools'

Practitioner

Those adopting Making it REAL for the first time in Year 3 reported that they wanted to extend what the setting already did, work more closely with parents, involve parents more in their child's development and look afresh at the setting's whole package, particularly around literacy.

'REAL made it more exciting, because we've been thinking out of the box. And the activities have been developed and extended on. So for us I think it's brought more fun into the nursery'

Practitioner

The **support provided to settings by local authorities** included providing information about Making it REAL and support in planning how Making it REAL would be implemented. Practitioners were given individual telephone and email support by the local authority leads as and when they needed it. Training was also provided to practitioners and parent volunteers who could help to run events and support the programme. Network meetings were arranged and facilitated to enable mutual support and help practitioners share issues and learn from each other. New settings were also linked with settings which had delivered Making it REAL for longer to improve learning. This support was praised by practitioners, who felt that the support provided by local authorities and NCB was very responsive.

The Making it REAL funding was apportioned in two ways: the local authority used a portion to fund area-wide events and the remainder was divided across the settings. Making it REAL activities were considered a good use of the Early Years Pupil Premium. However, in practice it was said that fewer children were eligible for the EYPP than previously anticipated and in comparison to numbers eligible for free school meals.

Implementing Making it REAL and engaging families

According to information provided by settings and local authorities, there were a total of 954 home visits carried out across the eight local authority projects. The vast majority of settings (75 out of 79) offered the required 2 rounds of home visits during the project, even if these were not taken up by all families. Seven of these settings went beyond project expectations and also undertook an additional (3rd) round of home visits.

There were also 235 literacy events held, and the vast majority of settings (70 out of 79 settings) held the required three literacy events. Settings recorded a total of 1,167 attendances at events amongst children registered for the project. Events were often extended to all the children in the setting, not just the registered project children. Settings were asked to record the total number of children attending events, which was 3,841⁷.

The practitioners highlighted several benefits of implementing Making it REAL which included having a common approach across all the staff in a setting and inspiring practitioners due to the creativity of the approach, to which parents and children responded positively.

However, there were some implementation **challenges** highlighted. For example getting staff and parents on board initially proved difficult in some cases, especially with families who did not speak English and where the worker did not speak their language or have access to an interpreter. Budgeting and organising rotas to ensure staff cover during home visits and training, and the short time frame of the project, were also highlighted as issues.

Several different methods were used to **engage families**, including producing written information in English and other relevant languages. Settings selected the children and families they believed would benefit most from Making it REAL, including children with SEND, those who spoke English as an additional language and two-year olds. Effective targeting was a delicate balance, especially with the need to avoid raising concerns in parents who might worry that being approached for the programme meant that their child had a problem.

Home visits were reported to be very beneficial, as they enabled the practitioners to see the child in the familiarity of their own home and spend one-to-one time with them, which helped to improve links between the family home and setting and was seen to help all children feel more relaxed. Home visits also helped parents understand how they could help their children with literacy, which was far more effective than leaflets. From the parents' viewpoint, practitioners modelled how to do things together with the child and showed parents how easy it was to be creative, for example, how to use nursery rhymes, song and dance at home.

⁷ These figures represent attendance totals, not individual children, as individual children may have attended more than one event.

Impacts of Making it REAL

Practitioners and parents were hugely positive about Making it REAL via both questionnaire responses and interviews. All practitioners who completed the follow-up survey thought there had been at least some impact on their relationships with parents and that children were now taking part in many Making it REAL informed activities at home, such as cooking, reading, gardening and messy play.

According to practitioners, **key outcomes for children** included an increased interest in reading, stories and books; improved language and communication skills; more mark making; and improved concentration, confidence, social skills and behaviour. These were comments that were reinforced through analyses of observation data whereby the frequency of sharing a book showed a statistically significant increase from the start of the project to the end of the project. Similarly, there were statistically significant increases in the frequency with which children made marks and said what they meant and engaged in songs and rhymes; there was also a statistically significant increase in the use of environmental print.

These findings were also echoed by parents who said their child was much more interested in books, stories and reading, and got more involved and excited about acting out parts of the story. Parents also said that their children were talking, using environmental print and mark making more.

'He used to read before, but since he has done the REAL course he understands books a lot more, points at pictures and knows how to turn a page. He is interested in books a lot more'

Parent

Practitioners commented on **parental confidence**, saying that they seemed both more knowledgeable and confident in their own ability to support their children's reading. Parents themselves reported similar impacts, stating that they had increased creativity and confidence in developing an activity since being involved in Making it REAL.

'I think I'm more relaxed to be honest, and more confident and know what to apply'

Parent

The future of Making it REAL

The local authority leads interviewed in the project areas commented that they were keen to continue with REAL and interviewees described some of the steps being taken to help embed Making it REAL:

- Having Making it REAL **part and parcel of strategic planning** at every level. In other words, both settings and the local authority were expected to reflect Making it REAL in all planning and work programmes.
- **Training** was seen as another way to help embed Making it REAL: by training more staff in the local authority and more practitioners in individual settings, including children's centres.
- **Promoting and enabling peer support** across settings.
- **Train the trainers:** One local authority had ensured staff from settings already working with Making it REAL were trained to deliver courses on Making it REAL to new settings in Year 3. This not only helped address resource issues, it made the training more effective. Trainers gave their own testimonies of how Making it REAL had proved effective in their settings and demonstrated what it had achieved.

However despite enthusiasm for Making it REAL, particularly among settings which had already trialled it, resources were a challenge to being able to grow Making it REAL locally, fund home visits and provide free resources to families. Being able to receive free training from local authorities was seen as vital for settings. In addition, settings were expected to use the Early Years Pupil Premium where possible and run fund-raising events. All practitioners who responded to the practitioner survey answered 'yes' (70.8% [N = 58]) or 'maybe' (26.4% [N = 24]) to continuing with Making it REAL activities after March 2016.

Expanding the reach of Making it REAL

There were two ways in which NCB attempted to expand the reach of Making it REAL:

- the one-day free national rollout training;
- support packages offered to 15 local authorities.

National Rollout training

Roll out project

- DfE funded 20 x one-day training sessions delivered to PVI settings/childminder groups and local authorities who had not previously participated in Making it REAL (16-22 people at each, estimated total of 320-400).
- Seven additional training sessions paid for by local authorities, mostly one-day training.
- Wider promotion of REAL via ECU website, ECU bulletins and links with partner organisations.

As in Years 1 and 2 of Making it REAL the one-day national rollout training was delivered by 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. Early years practitioners who attended the training worked with children aged two- to five-years old in childminder, statutory and private, voluntary or independent (PVI) settings.

There were 320 evaluation forms completed for the one-day training and predominately, respondents felt that the one-day training course had meet its aims and objectives (93.9%). Participants' overall assessment of the training was positive, with 72.1% assessing the training as excellent. Participants expressed a high level of confidence in putting into practice things that had been discussed and learnt on the training, as over 95% of participants scored this as either four (46.7%) or five (49.0%) on a scale where one meant not at all confident and five very confident.

Support packages and hub events

Supported roll-out to 15 new areas

- **Three Neighbourhood Hub events to promote Making it REAL among neighbouring local authorities** in Peterborough (October 2015), Sandwell (November 2015) and Oldham (February 2016). Attendees included local authorities and organisations interested in setting up a Making it REAL project.
- **Each of the 15 new areas received a support package from ECU to train and support them in delivering Making it REAL.** Not all of the 15 new areas were recruited by Neighbourhood Hub events, some were engaged via other wider recruitment activity by ECU and partner organisations.

Views on the Neighbourhood hub events

Three neighbourhood hub events were hosted and co-produced by three of the eight existing Making it REAL local authority development areas and were designed to showcase Making it REAL projects to a wider audience of strategic leads from local authorities and early years organisations interested in setting up a Making it REAL project. A total of 105 evaluation forms were completed and 99% of respondents felt that the event was either excellent (62.9%) or good (36.2%) saying:

Clear, concise, lots of practical advice and ideas of how Making it REAL can be delivered within different contexts.

Early Years Advisor / Officer

Great for ideas/information sharing. Love the ORIM framework!

Manager of a PVI setting

Overall, the programme content of the hub events was seen by the majority as being either excellent (71.3%) or good (27.7%) and the usefulness of the day was viewed as excellent by two-thirds of respondents (67.3%).

Support packages

Support packages provided to new areas consisted of tailored consultancy before and after one or two-day Making it REAL training delivered in the local area.

A total of 225 training feedback forms were completed. The majority (98.1%) of respondents felt that the day did meet the stated aims and objectives. Similarly 96.1% rated the overall assessment of the training as four (25.1%) or five (71.0%) on a scale where one was poor and five was excellent. Nearly nine out of ten respondents felt confident about putting what they had learnt into practice, with 45.8% selecting four and 41.9% five on a scale where one equalled not at all confident and five meant very confident.

A number of motivations underpinned the local authorities' desire to be involved in Making it REAL. Primarily, the aim was to improve reading and writing levels but Making it REAL was also seen to fit well with other plans and programmes already in place. The adaptability of Making it REAL was seen to lend itself to being adopted by diverse settings. Making it REAL also offered an approach for involving parents, which local authorities wanted to do.

Of the 15 support packages, 12 returned data to ECU consisting of setting record forms where their project work had progressed to recruiting families. Across these 12 support packages, 76 early years settings took part. Other local authorities sent back narrative information via email or phone.

There were some perceived **challenges** relating to the continuation of Making it REAL and the ability to embed and sustain it. The cost of delivering training and the time needed to offer proper support to settings were seen as possible barriers. The capacity of settings to conduct home visits, despite their accepted value, was another challenge highlighted by the local authorities.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this evaluation, as with the previous two evaluations, has shown that Making it REAL has **a positive impact on children and their parents**. Both practitioners and parents observed changes in the children, with them being more likely to share books and engage in mark making and with environmental print at the end of the project. Children were reported to have improved their language and communication skills as result of Making it REAL. Parents were also observed, and reported themselves, to be more knowledgeable and confident, which helped to reinforce the approach at home and in the setting.

ECU were successful in supporting local authorities and settings to **embed Making it REAL and build a self-sustaining model**. This was evidenced through the large number of settings that had been involved in Making it REAL. Many settings that took part in the third year had also been involved in previous years of the project, demonstrating the positive experiences of this programme. The good levels of support provided by local authorities to settings indicate that the project is being embedded both at the local authority level and setting level to ensure the continuation of the programme into the future.

The reduced direct support provided by NCB was also successful. There was still high project activity and reach across the participating local authorities, with all local authorities exceeding their target of registering 50 children and, as already shown, children experienced positive outcomes from being involved. A new co-training model with local authority leads was developed

in Year 3. The trained 'trainers' reported good levels of confidence of being able to train others with their increased knowledge and skills. This suggests that the co-training model is a useful tool for ensuring sustainability. The co-delivered training was evaluated as very positive, with practitioners reporting confidence to deliver Making it REAL.

Whilst settings and local authorities reported plans to continue with Making it REAL, it is also important to consider that concerns were raised about restrictions on resources and funding in taking Making it REAL forward. It is therefore useful to consider suitable approaches to limiting these challenges to ensure the self-sustainability of Making it REAL.

Finally, an important part of Year 3 Making it REAL, was the inclusion **of children with SEND, EAL, and two-year olds**. Many steps were taken towards achieving this objective, and evidence of its success can be seen from the positive comments from practitioners about increased knowledge on how to support bilingual children and where to find information about SEND reforms. There were also significant numbers of two-year olds and children with SEND and EAL registered in the project. Practitioners reported an increase in the extent two-year old children vocalised and used words and a decrease in the number of two-year olds observed to be babbling. Making it REAL provided an evidence base on how to support children who were bilingual, which practitioners highlighted as particularly useful. There was also an increase in referrals to other services after Making it REAL, suggesting that the project was effective in facilitating early identification of need.

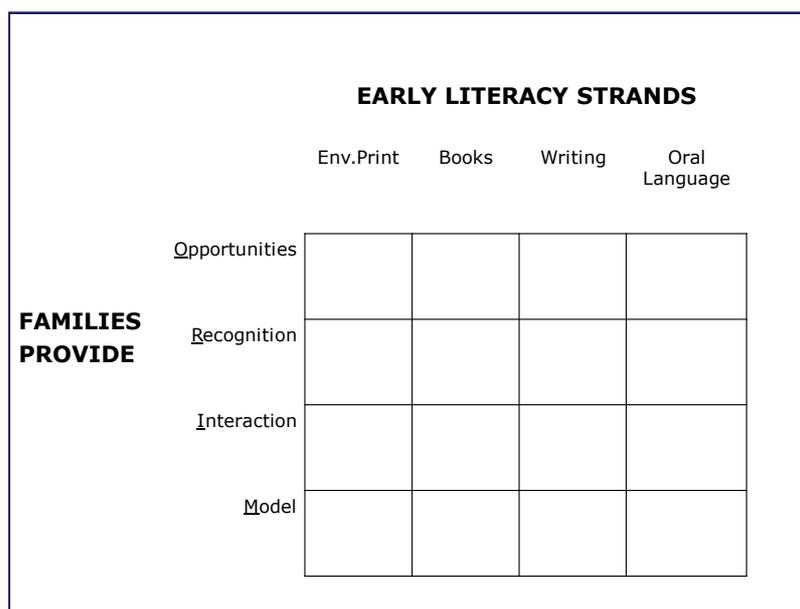
Substantial steps were made towards achieving the objectives of building a self-sustaining model and engaging disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds in Making it REAL. The positive feedback, experiences and outcomes demonstrate the importance of local authorities and settings continuing with Making it REAL in the future.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to Making it REAL 2013-2016

Making it REAL builds on an evidence-based programme *Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)*⁸, which involves practitioners working with parents⁹ 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 users¹⁰ ('ORIM').

Figure 1. The ORIM Framework



1.2. Making it REAL project design and approach

The ultimate aim of Making it REAL is to provide a replicable, scalable model of the REAL approach and embed it nationally. This is achieved through the NCB Early Childhood Unit (ECU) working with local authorities to provide training and support to settings and practitioners, so they can work with parents to support the early home learning environment and improve children's early literacy outcomes. Following two successful years of delivering Making it REAL^{11 12}, in Year 3 the

⁸ 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>

⁹ In this report the word parent is used to cover both parents and carers

¹⁰ Further details on the ORIM Framework <http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf>

¹¹ Year 1 evaluation report:

http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1161080/making_it_real_evaluation_report_final_version_230914_2_.pdf

¹² Year 2 evaluation report: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1236324/evaluation_of_making_it_real-year_2.pdf

programme was particularly concerned with:

- Working with partners to ensure the approach becomes self-sustaining among local authorities and settings (i.e. reducing the need for support from NCB) and is more widely utilised and embedded nationally.
- Supporting the workforce to support disadvantaged families¹³ and children with SEND; others less likely to engage in services, for example, parents with EAL; and two-year olds.

The focus for Year 3 was therefore to support the existing eight local authority development areas to fully embed and sustain Making it REAL. This was done through providing a self-sustaining model to enable the local cascade of future training and project work. Three of the eight local authority development areas were identified as **hub areas** to co-host strategic neighbourhood hub events to share their local knowledge, experience and achievements of delivering Making it REAL with other local authorities across neighbouring regions. Hub events aimed to inspire and support 15 new areas to develop projects to widen and embed Making it REAL across the country.

ECU continued to work with partners National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), Preschool Learning Alliance (PSLA), the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) and the Learning and Work Institute to ensure practitioners from private, voluntary and independent settings, childminders and family learning practitioners accessed Making it REAL. A deeper emphasis on inclusion, especially how to support bilingual families, children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and disadvantaged two-year olds was provided via the delivery of tailored training and resources.

As in previous years, there were two general strands to the programme In Year 3, these were:

- To continue with **development projects in eight existing local authorities** and expand to include the recruitment of **15 new areas**; and
- A **lighter touch** rollout of 20 one-day training courses delivered to early years settings that have not yet received Making it REAL.

This involved a cascade approach, involving the following key elements.

Local authority co-led delivery of Making it REAL in the original eight local authorities.

- ECU provided 'train the trainer' sessions to 16 practitioners, two from each local authority in June 2015;
- Two-day training was co-delivered by the new local authority trainers alongside ECU associate trainers, to groups of 16 – 20 local practitioners in September – October 2015; and
- Delivery of the Making it REAL projects to families from November 2015 to March 2016.

Supported roll-out to 15 new areas (Local authorities, or groups of settings)

- **Three Neighbourhood Hub events to promote Making it REAL among neighbouring local authorities** in Peterborough (October 2015), Sandwell (November 2015) and Oldham (February 2016). Attendees included local authorities and organisations interested in setting up a Making it REAL project.
- **Each of the 15 new areas received a support package from ECU to train and support them in delivering Making it REAL.** Not all of the 15 new areas were recruited by Neighbourhood Hub events, as some were engaged via ECU working with other national partner agencies.

¹³ For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents who were less engaged with the setting.

Roll out project

- DfE funded **20 x one day** training sessions delivered to PVI settings/childminder groups and local authorities who have not previously participated in Making it REAL (16-22 people at each, estimated total of 320-400).
- Seven additional training sessions paid for by local authorities, mostly one-day training.
- Wider promotion of REAL via ECU website, ECU bulletins and links with partner organisations.

The delivery approach and expected outcomes from development projects and the training rollout was very similar to previous years. However, in Year 3 the Making it REAL training rollout included the option of tailoring the delivery to one of the following aspects: working with two-year olds, working with bilingual families, and working with children with SEND.

Table 1 below summarises some of the differences between the support for the Making it REAL programme offered by NCB in Years 1 and 2, as compared to the reduced support offered in Year 3.

Table 1. Summary of difference between Making it REAL Year 1 and 2; and Year 3

Year 1 and 2	Year 3
Two-day training delivered by NCB associate.	Two-day training co-delivered by NCB associate and local authority lead.
ECU member of staff attended to explain/support project elements.	Local authority lead responsible for explaining project elements.
Children's data returned to NCB for inputting.	Children's data input at local authority level
ECU staff assigned specific local authorities to support/liase with during the project.	Reduced level of support/liason from ECU. Hub authorities liaised directly with NCB associate to coordinate hub event.
NCB associate and an ECU member of staff attended two network meetings in each local authority, to convey project information to practitioners.	Arrangements for network meetings left to local authority leads.
Detailed monitoring information on what happened during home visits submitted to ECU – providing an overview of activity.	Lighter touch summary data collected via setting record forms. Detailed monitoring now just for optional use by local authorities with the information held at a local level.

1.3. Evaluation aims and methodology

This evaluation focused on examining the following:

1. Understanding if and how the Making it REAL programme has built capacity and secured embedded and sustainable delivery.
2. Capturing data on outcomes, to confirm that the Making it REAL approach is still achieving the intended level of quality and outcomes as in Years 1 and 2, when Making it REAL was more fully supported by the ECU team.
3. Capturing data on the new outcomes of interest this year, namely working with two-year olds,

bilingual families and children with additional needs.

Key outcomes relate to the following main areas:

- Improved quality of provision and workforce (as measured by practitioners' skills, confidence and practice in working with disadvantaged parents to enhance the home learning environment, and in turn improve child literacy, as well as similar changes in the wider setting's practice).
- To provide support for the early home learning environment by building knowledge and confidence of parents.

This evaluation drew on a range of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative methods included analysis of:

- **Training feedback forms** from the national one-day rollout training and the two-day training in project areas and support packages. Data was analysed separately (findings are shown for the project areas two-day training, one-day national rollout and two-day training for support packages). Three questions have been added in since previous years, on practitioner skills/confidence in support/engaging children with SEND, parents with EAL and two-year olds, where appropriate to tailored training. This data was used to indicate the effectiveness of the cascade approach and embedding Making it REAL and to measure practitioners' views on their confidence to deliver the project.
- **Train the trainer feedback forms** examined the effectiveness of training received by new trainers from the eight development project local authorities, as this was relevant to understanding effectiveness of the cascade approach/national embedding of Making it REAL.
- **Hub event attendee feedback forms** examining the effectiveness of the event in generating interest in setting up a Making it REAL project using a support package, and an understanding of how the Early Year pupil premium¹⁴ (EYPP) can be harnessed to help fund project work. This data is relevant to understanding effectiveness of cascade/national embedding of Making it REAL.
- **Practitioner follow up survey** captured practitioners' views of the impact of the Making it REAL on their own skills and practice; and on parent and child outcomes. This survey included questions relating to experience of impact and was distributed to practitioners from development projects in the eight original local authorities five months after the training course. It was agreed not to extend this survey to the other local authorities or participants in the training rollout as these areas were focused on implementing the Making it REAL approach for the first time, which was extensively evaluated in Year 1 and Year 2.
- **Setting record forms** provided data on overall number/profile of children/levels of activity delivered at each setting (including some child-level data). This data was analysed by ECU and included in quarterly monitoring reports to DfE but also informs this third year evaluation. Local authorities collated forms from settings (both the original eight and new 15 support package areas) and sent information to ECU.
- **A parental feedback survey** included the voice and perspective of parents in this final evaluation (in addition to interviews, which are discussed below).
- **Child-level pre- and post-data forms** were used to capture activity and outcome data for all participating children and families in the eight original local authorities. Settings completed child observational data forms and passed these on to NCB. This data was collected for the

¹⁴ The **early years pupil premium** (EYPP) is funding for early years settings which is provided to specifically improve the education they provide for disadvantaged 3- and 4-year olds.

eight original local authorities, but the form has also been made available to the 15 new areas in case they wished to utilise this for their own purposes. Data entry for child outcome data was mainly carried out by the eight local authorities and passed over to ECU (rather than NCB doing this data entry centrally as in previous years). This reflects the nature of this 3rd year, which is enabling local authorities to be more in control of their own evaluation data as ECU supports them to be more self-sustaining.

The **qualitative** aspects of this evaluation involved telephone interviews (offering flexibility to participants and cost-effectiveness) with a range of stakeholders:

- **In three local authorities involved in the original eight project areas** (Peterborough, Oldham and Sandwell, which were also the local authorities responsible for running the hub events.)
 - **one local authority representative** from each of these areas;
 - **one practitioner** from Year 1 and / or Year 2 settings where the Making it REAL approach is now part of established practice in the setting and they did not take part in Year 3 training or support;
 - **one practitioner** from a setting that has taken part in the Making it REAL project training and delivery across the three years;
 - **one practitioner** from a setting where this is their first year of Making it REAL;
 - **two parents** from each local authority (across six providers).
- One local authority representative from three different local authorities who received support packages in Year 3.

1.4. Structure of report

This report is structured by the key aspects of this Making it REAL evaluation.

Chapter 2: Project areas

Chapter 2 presents findings on the original eight project areas and makes use of findings from setting record forms; Train the Trainer evaluation forms and two-day training feedback forms; interviews with local authority leads in the three hub local authorities; survey and interviews with practitioners; surveys and interviews with parents; and children's pre- and post- project observation data. Findings are presented on the views of training, delivery of Making it REAL, impact of Making it REAL and the future of Making it REAL in settings.

Chapter 3: Expanding the reach of Making it REAL

Chapter 3 focuses on the national rollout and the 15 support packages. Findings from training evaluation forms from the one-day roll out training; evaluation forms of the hub events and interviews with local authority representatives from three of the local authorities that received the support package from ECU are discussed.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

In chapter 4, we present the main conclusions from this evaluation of the final year of Making it REAL, in line with the original project objectives.

2. Project areas

2.1. Description of settings and children involved

2.1.1. Project areas and the settings

Eight project areas were involved in Year 3 of Making it REAL and in each area settings were asked to complete a 'Setting record form' and return this to their local authority lead. These forms were passed on to ECU and asked for some basic information about the children registered to take part in the project and their participation in home visits and events. Seventy-seven out of 79 Making it REAL settings submitted data at the end of the project.

- **80 settings** began the Making it REAL project, across 8 local authorities. **1 PVI setting withdrew** due to staffing issues, leaving **79 settings completing the project**.
- More than half of the settings were **new to** Making it REAL in Year 3 (47 out of the original 80).

Table 2 shows the number of settings in each project area at the end of project.

Table 2. The number of settings at the end of Making it REAL in each project area.

Local authority	Frequency
Blackpool	12
Sandwell	12
Sheffield	11
South Tyneside	11
Oldham	10
Peterborough	9
Luton	7
Haringey	7
Total	79

There were five types of settings or groups of settings; Table 3 provides a breakdown of the number of settings in each group. The largest group were primary school or academy nursery or reception class (N=33) followed by PVI nursery, pre-school or playgroup (N=25).

Table 3. Breakdown of settings by type at the end of Making it REAL

Setting type	Frequency
Primary School or Academy nursery or reception class	33
PVI nursery, pre-school or playgroup	25
Children's Centre, including those attached to primary schools	15
Maintained nursery school or nursery school & children's centre	6
Childminder or childminding network	0
Total	79

2.1.2. Children

Each local authority was asked to register 50 children, with each setting deciding the number of children they could involve in the project. All of the project areas registered at least 50 children, with some registering more. In total, **530 children were registered** to take part in the Making it REAL project in Year 3. More than half of the children who began the project were boys: 300 boys and 230 girls.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the children's ages.

Table 4. Breakdown of the children registered for Making it REAL by age

Age	Frequency
Under two	8
Aged 2	157
Aged 3	259
Aged 4	92
Aged 5+ ¹⁵	14
Total	530

A total of 31 children who registered did not complete the Making it REAL project work. Reasons for this included:

- 26 individual children dropped out of the Making it REAL project spread across different settings. This was mostly due to the family leaving the setting, but in some cases due to illness of the child or family members, or for reasons unknown.

A further 6 children attended the PVI setting that withdrew from the project.

This represents a retention rate of 94% of the original 530 children and in many cases, settings recruited children to replace those who had withdrawn. Adjusting for both those who left the project and those who replaced them, 522 children finished the project

One of the potential impacts of the Making it REAL project is for family engagement to have a beneficial effect on younger and older siblings. This was explored in the reports for Years 1 and 2. There were **283 individual siblings** who were involved in literacy activities during the Making it REAL project¹⁶. The nature of the involvement included attending events or being present during home visits.

2.2. Views on the training

Various sources of data are discussed in this section to understand participants' views on different training courses, including:

- Feedback forms from participants who attended the Train the Trainers' course;
- Feedback forms from the two-day training delivered across the eight project areas; and
- Interviews with practitioners based in the project areas.

2.2.1. Train the trainer¹⁷

A training programme to '**train the trainers**' was developed in Year 3 of Making it REAL, as part of the aim of embedding the programme within local authorities. A total of 16 participants attended the course, mostly local authority leads for Making it REAL, and all participants agreed that the day had meet the stated aims and objectives. Overall they were positive in their assessment about the training with 14 (87.5%) giving it a rating of four (N=4) or five (N=10) on a scale of one being poor and five being excellent.

Participants of the Train the Trainers' course were asked how much they felt the training had

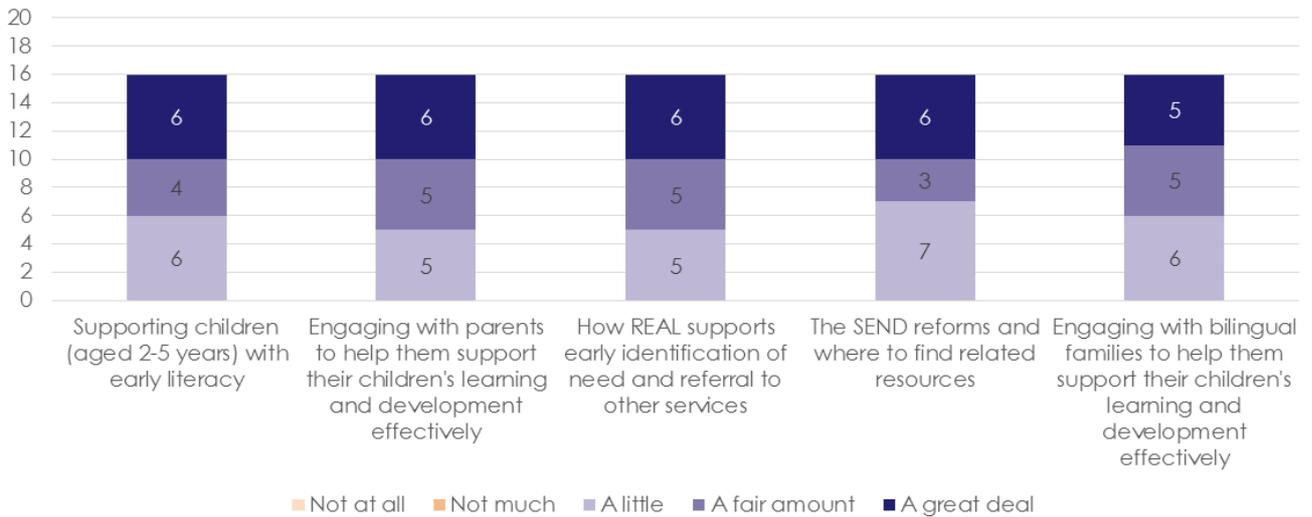
¹⁵ This includes one child over the age of 6

¹⁶ The way settings recorded sibling involvement changed in Year 3. Previously settings had been asked whether or not siblings had been present during a home visit but this did not capture if multiple siblings were involved or the same sibling was present more than once. In Year 3 this was amended and settings were asked to record the number of individual sibling children involved.

¹⁷Please also see reference to the Train the Trainer course in section 2.3.4 Local authority views on support

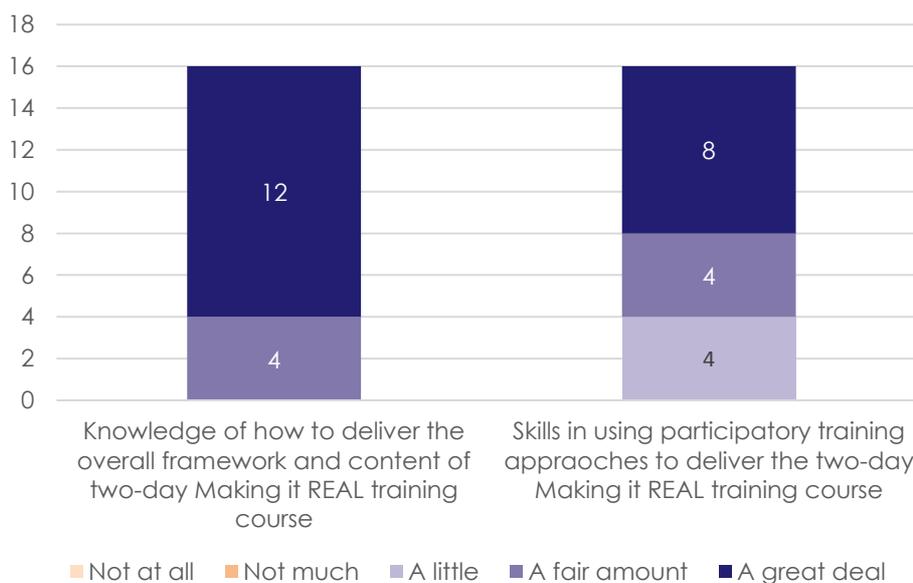
improved their confidence in supporting practitioners in a variety of aspects (Figure 2). All participants indicated that the training had a positive impact, to some degree, on their confidence in all of the five aspects. However, only a little over half of the respondents (N=9) said that the training increased their confidence a fair amount or a great deal of the SEND reforms and where to find related resources. Nonetheless, this is still very positive and maybe an indication that participants, as local authority officers, already had a good knowledge base in this area.

Figure 2. Participants' views on how the 'train the trainers' programme improved their confidence in supporting practitioners



Participants were also asked to indicate how much their knowledge and skills had improved as a result of the 'train the trainers' programme; in regards to how to deliver the overall framework and content of Making it REAL and using participatory training approaches to deliver the two-day Making it REAL training course (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Participants' views on how the 'train the trainers' programme improved their knowledge and skills



Similarly, all 16 participants were very positive saying they had increased their knowledge and skills , especially in terms of their knowledge of how to deliver the overall framework and content. They

were also asked how confident they felt about putting what they had learnt into practice, with four out of five (N=13) respondents giving a response of four (on a scale where one was not at all confident and five was very confident) and the remainder (N=3) said that they were very confident.

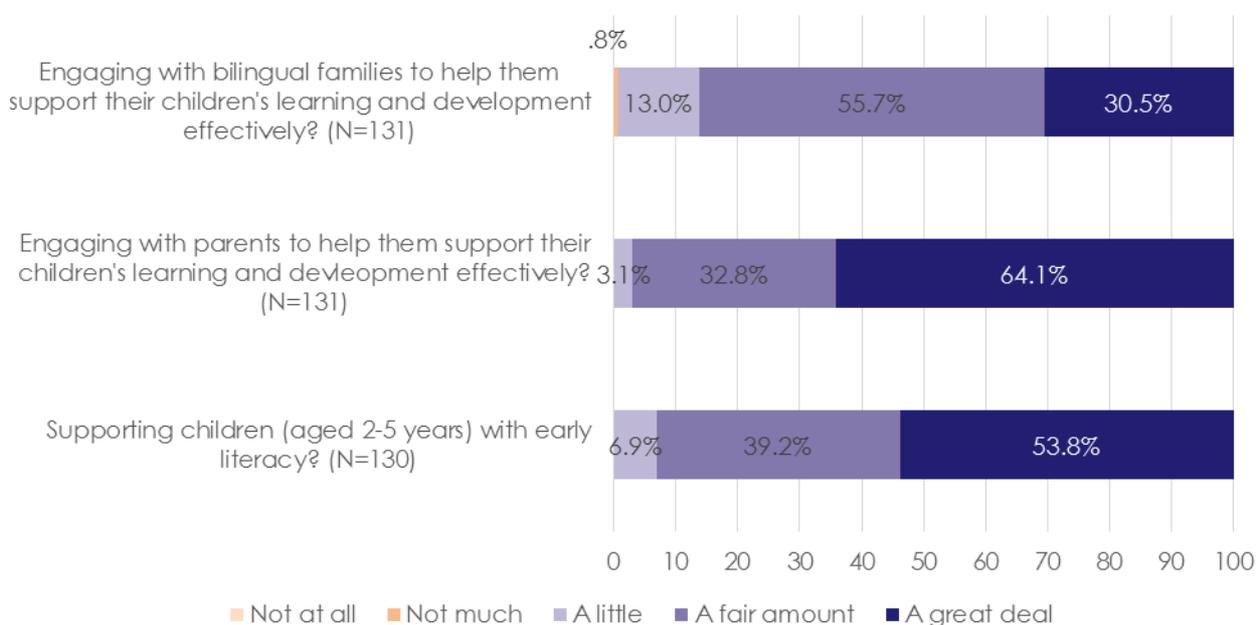
2.2.2. Two-day training

In reference to the training, local authority leads were interviewed who had co-delivered the two-day training to practitioners alongside a NCB associate trainer. The co-trainers praised the planning, materials, joint approach and support and encouragement given to them and found the collaboration with ECU to be very effective. As a result they had gone on to deliver training on their own. Advice and support to deliver the two-day Making it REAL course was said to be outstanding. Discussions with the NCB associate trainer and their knowledge and experience helped address any emerging challenges.

A total of 131 feedback forms were completed for the **two-day training**. These included eight groups of participants who received co-delivered training by their local authority lead and an NCB associate. All participants believed that the training had meet the stated aims and objectives. The majority of respondents (98.5%,) were very positive about the overall assessment of the training with four out of five (80.2%) respondents giving the training a score of five on a scale where one equalled poor and five equalled excellent. Generally speaking participants also felt confident in being able to implement what they had learnt at the training: 50.0% selected very confident and 45.5% confident.

Participants reported an improved knowledge about various aspects of practice (Figure 4). When it came to engaging with parents to help them to support their children's learning, 96.9% of respondents believed that their knowledge had increased a great deal (64.1%) or a fair amount (32.8%). Similarly, for supporting children with early literacy nine out of ten participants (93.0%) indicated that their knowledge had increased a great deal (53.8%) or a fair amount (39.2%).

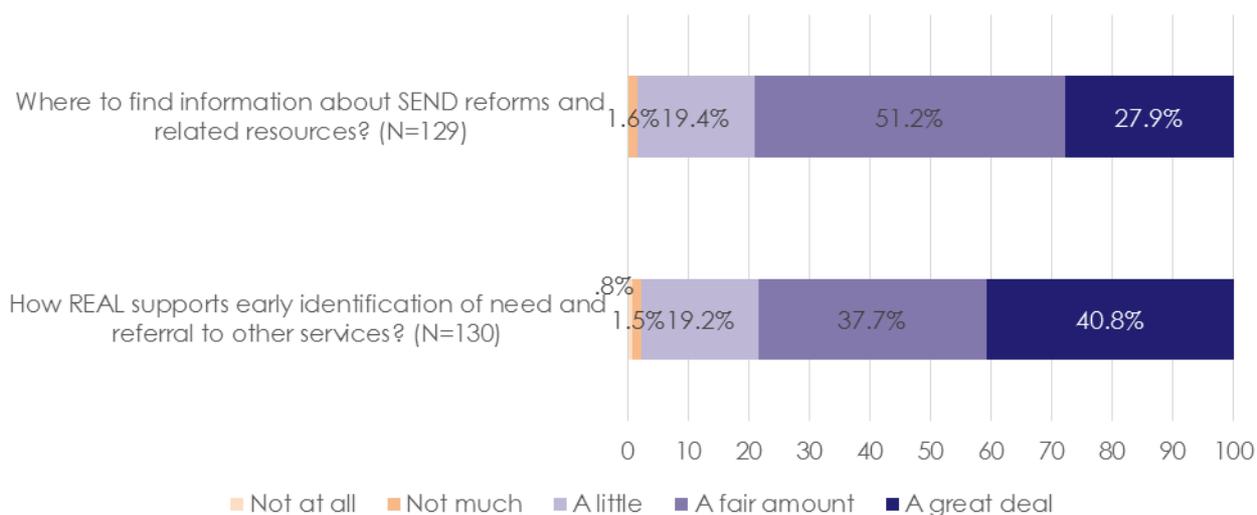
Figure 4. Level of improvement in participants' knowledge after the two-day training



In terms of the two-day training increasing knowledge about how Making it REAL supports early identification of need and where to find information about the SEND reforms participants were mainly positive (Figure 5). Nearly four out of five respondents thought that the training had improved their knowledge either a fair amount (51.2%) or a great deal (27.9%) when it came to finding information about the SEND reforms. While just over three quarters of respondents thought their knowledge had increased either a great deal (40.8%) or a fair amount (37.7%) when it came

to understanding how Making it REAL supports early identification of need.

Figure 5. Level of improvement of participants' knowledge of SEND reforms and how REAL supports early identification of need after the two-day training



Qualitative **interviews** were conducted with nine managers and early years practitioners from nine early years settings, mainly nurseries, based in three geographical areas which hosted the 'Hub events' (see Section 3). Three settings had been involved with Making it REAL in Years 1 and 2; three had started in this the third year; and three were 'going it alone' to continue with Making it REAL this year (in other words, without formal support or project funding from NCB).

All the settings were in very deprived areas and worked predominantly with disadvantaged and low income households. Interviewees reported high levels of special educational needs, child protection and speaking English as an additional language (EAL) occurring in their areas and in families using their settings. In one setting 93% of the children spoke English as an additional language. Commonly, children had not attended any other play-based provision or early years services before starting at these settings.

Practitioners stated that they enjoyed and praised the training. They appreciated that the training was over two days, as this helped them assimilate the new information and approach more easily. In addition they found it very helpful when given the space in the training to draw up plans on how they would implement Making it REAL in their own settings, as finding time for planning was often difficult. The role-plays used in the training, which included parents raising issues and different scenarios they might encounter during Making it REAL, helped them to practise how they could react to situations and had later proved useful in real-life situations.

As well as commending the content and delivery of the training, practitioners found the information and supporting materials very stimulating and well matched to their needs. This included the training packs, lists of resources and links to other sources of information and ideas. Practitioners really enjoyed meeting colleagues from other settings at training and other meetings and drew inspiration and encouragement from shared events.

2.3. Delivering Making it REAL

In order to provide comprehensive findings from the research conducted with practitioners, the findings from the follow-up practitioner survey, and practitioner and local authority lead interviews, are reported together. In this section findings from the parent interviews will also be included to give their views about how Making it REAL was delivered.

For the **follow-up practitioner survey** a total of 72 practitioners responded. Of these, 15 (20.8%) said that they were a manager or deputy manager; and nine (12.5%) reported that they were a Nursery

Officer or Nursery Nurse. Other roles included: Family Support / Outreach Worker ($N = 6$, [8.3%]), Nursery / Childcare / Teaching Assistant ($N = 5$ [6.9%]), and Early Years Professional ($N = 4$, [5.5%])¹⁸.

The most common types of provision where practitioners worked were Primary School / Academy Nursery / Reception Class (27 - 38%). A third reported working in a Private, Voluntary or Independent (PVI) nursery, pre-school, or playgroup (22 - 30%). Another common type of provision was a Maintained Nursery School (including those with an attached children's centre) (14 - 19%). Seven (10%) respondents said they worked in a Children's Centre (including those attached to primary schools or academies), and two said that they worked in a Local Authority Support Service (3%).

Three **interviews** were held with four **local authority leads/staff involved in the Making it REAL project** (one was a paired interview) in the three hub local authorities. Two were early years specialists; one the Early Learning Manager for the council's Early Years and Childcare Services Teams; and the fourth the local Specialist Leader for Education for Early Years at a teaching school.

All had been working with ECU and leading on the local implementation of Making it REAL from Year 1, as part of their wider remits to help involve parents in early years and education, support the sector and help local early years providers deliver programmes, such as Every Child A Talker. As such, Making it REAL fitted well with longer-term agendas and ongoing work.

Two of the local authorities ranked in the top 11 of national deprivation indices. The third fared better overall, but with distinct pockets of local deprivation. Across all three councils, Making it REAL was implemented in localities with high levels of social deprivation, child protection cases, cultural and ethnic diversity and recent immigration. Over 100 different home languages were spoken in two of the local authority areas. In the third local authority area 27 languages were spoken, but deprivation, need and poor outcomes were said to be as, or more marked, in the White British communities. Interviewees reported poor educational outcomes for children, high levels of speech and language problems when children started early years settings and, in one area, widening gaps in literacy attainment levels at school.

2.3.1. Local authority involvement with Making it REAL

Local authority lead interviewees all came from authorities that had been involved in Making it REAL from the first year, which in itself reflected their respect for, and high expectations from, the programme. Interviews and analysis tried to capture any distinctions in expectations for the wider council areas, setting, parents, children and interviewees, and any changes in expectations noted over the years of involvement in Making it REAL.

Interviewees described various expectations for their involvement in Making it REAL:

- Raise knowledge among local practitioners to improve literacy;
- Improve outcomes for children, especially those who needed it most;
- Being an evidence-based programme, practitioners expected REAL to work;
- Making it REAL could complement other programmes, such as PEAL and Every Child A Talker;
- The Making it REAL monitoring and assessment methods were seen as useful to implement across the board; and
- Help to improve Ofsted ratings of the local authority children services.

Local authority leads discussed how they wanted to trial Making it REAL with a range of settings, to judge how well each coped, as well as derive any lessons on implementation for different providers. One local authority intended to train all children's centre teachers to cascade the

¹⁸ 'Other' roles included: Early Intervention Lead (1), Early Years Educator (1), Early Years Practitioner in a Children's Centre (1), Family Worker (1), Nursery Administrator (1), Play Practitioner at a Children's Centre (1), Room Leader / Assistant Deputy Manager (1), Setting Supervisor (1),

training to all settings across the local authority area.

Interviewees were convinced that Making it REAL would help children's development, and so wanted settings and practitioners to try the new approach, with emphasis on developing home visits, home learning environments and creativity. They hoped that settings would embed parental involvement, rather than see it as an optional extra. In turn involving parents to a greater degree was anticipated to improve relationships and collaboration between parents and settings.

The local authority leads were asked why they had wanted to continue with Making it REAL in Year 3. They said their expectations had not changed since they were first involved in Making it REAL and that they wanted to continue and develop those over the third year. Their local authorities' reasons for continuing into the third year were:

- **Locally-gathered evidence** from Years 1 and 2 that Making it REAL was effective. Indeed settings which had participated in the previous years were said to be forceful advocates for Making it REAL, as they had seen benefits among their children. This included evidence of progress in children's literacy outcomes.
- Data was shared widely and at different levels, for example with local councillors, head teachers, children's centres, managers and directors. As a result there was **a buy-in at strategic levels**. In addition Making it REAL's positive reputation was said to be spreading by word of mouth.
- Local authorities wanted to **extend** Making it REAL to as many of their early years settings as possible, but also to provide refresher training for those who had got involved in earlier years and support settings with more experience of Making it REAL to informally support new 'recruits'.
- The local authorities were keen to **extend the focus of Making it REAL to children entitled to the early years pupil premium**. While vulnerable children have always been involved in Making it REAL throughout the three years the programme has been running, in this final year there was a specific focus to involve children with SEND and children who spoke English as an additional language. Year 2 saw the introduction of two-year olds into the project which continued into Year 3.
- One authority had **piloted training parent volunteers** and wanted their model for that to be adopted.
- A number of settings had received **improved Ofsted ratings** which were at least partly attributed to Making it REAL.

Those interviewed also gave reasons why they had wanted to become a hub authority and potentially play a role in cascading Making it REAL to other areas. These included 'being invited to', as Making it REAL was seen as a success and becoming embedded into practice; to acknowledge, celebrate and publicise the work of their early years providers and practitioners; to share their experience of implementing Making it REAL in terms of what works well; and a desire to have a two-way flow of information and support between the established settings and new settings.

'It's about that cross fertilisation of working together and practicing and sharing what works, so that people can see the difference'

Local authority lead

Making it REAL was seen to augment both the fundamental aim of all providers, namely to improve children's outcomes, and '*narrow the gap*' for children from deprived backgrounds. One of its perceived advantages was that it could build on previous initiatives and practice, undertaken by these local authorities and settings, rather than necessitate reinventing the wheel. Every Child a Talker, PEAL and RightStart were most frequently mentioned.

Many of the core principles of Making it REAL, such as involving parents more and the methods to do so, were seen as offering solutions to challenges which authorities and settings had been

experiencing for many years. The data collection process provided authorities with the means to measure progress for children over time. Securing interest and approval of Making it REAL at all levels of the council was critical, especially including Making it REAL in area-wide strategic plans.

2.3.2. Recruiting settings

The criteria used to select settings for Year 3 inclusion across these three local authorities were a mix of the following:

- Low literacy outcomes for settings, using Early Years Foundation Stage data.
- Settings in areas with high levels of deprivation and entitlement to Early Years Pupil Premium; and/ or high levels of SEND and EAL.
- Continuing with a number of settings in an area which had participated in Years 1 or 2, to help continuity, sustain the approach there and train extra staff there in Making it REAL. In addition introducing Making it REAL from scratch to some new settings, which were keen to try it.
- Settings had to have the capacity to pursue the programme, especially staff members who could undertake the training and implement the programme.
- Targeting on the basis of evidence: one interviewee mentioned targeting an independent provider located close to a school which had poor outcomes at Reception stage.

In addition these interviewees tended to know their local settings very well, had close relationships with managers and head teachers and discussed Making it REAL and what it would involve at length with settings, as part of the selection process.

There were no major **challenges** in recruitment reported. As Making it REAL had already been running in these areas and had a good reputation, settings often already knew about it and wanted to be involved. Being the third year helped as they were able to share information and data on how it had worked previously. The offer of free training from the local authority was attractive as provision of free training support was said to be relatively rare at present. The opportunity to improve Ofsted ratings, work with children speaking English as an additional language, demonstrate they were working with parents and make effective use of the Early Years Pupil Premium, all served as selling points.

A significant challenge was turning settings down. In one case this was because staff could not attend the training. Another concern voiced by local authority leads was sometimes around the individual practitioners whom a setting had selected to attend training, and lead on implementing REAL. Interviewees were not always convinced that they were the best candidates.

Staff capacity posed an issue. Releasing and covering staff for home visits was seen as a major hurdle to signing up for Making it REAL. Moreover if only a small number of staff were trained in Making it REAL, there would be a major impact on the setting and on the programme if they left, or were off work for any reason. Providing adequate information about Making it REAL and the commitment required was seen to offset some of these issues.

2.3.3. Practitioners' rationale for undertaking Making it REAL

For the practitioners who were interviewed, Making it REAL's primary attraction was the opportunity to learn and improve practices for: working closely with and involving families; developing the setting's home visiting practice; introducing the REAL literacy approach into the setting; and building on other initiatives. They expected Making it REAL to assist the children's long-term development as well as help parents learn how to support their children's learning and development at home and undertake more activities with their children.

'I'm a great believer in home visits because ... they're more comfortable in their home setting, they're more likely to build ... that relationship with you... it's building that trust. So I think the home visits are probably one of the most powerful tools'

Practitioner

Those who had been involved in Making it REAL in previous years had enjoyed the programme and

seen how it benefited the parents and children, especially how it had helped create good relationships with them by working in the family home and by focusing on this relationship, rather than on assessments and results. Settings continuing for their third year said they had received excellent feedback from parents and wanted a new cohort of children to enjoy the advantages of Making it REAL. Participating over 2015-16 gave them the opportunity to integrate the Making it REAL observational data form across the setting, build on staff enthusiasm for the programme and train all their staff to have a good understanding of the programme's principles and practice. Two settings pursuing Making it REAL without NCB support in Year 3 reported being able to do so as they had already embedded the approach and adapted it to their own setting in previous years.

Those adopting Making it REAL for the first time in Year 3 did so for similar reasons, namely to extend what the setting already did, work more closely with parents, involve parents more in their child's development and look afresh at the setting's whole package, particularly around literacy.

'REAL made it more exciting, because we've been thinking out of the box. And the activities have been developed and extended on. So for us I think it's brought more fun into the nursery'

Practitioner

2.3.4. Local authority views on support

Over the three years of their involvement, local authority lead interviewees had received a range of training and support from NCB, which they had found extremely valuable, even though support had been reduced during the third year. Positive, supportive relationships were developed between these local authorities and NCB.

Initially they were trained in Making it REAL by NCB and then, in Year 3, trained as trainers to deliver the training to others. The training, materials and resources were described as excellent. NCB provided further support when they first delivered training days. The NCB associate trainer was present to help if needed. Guidance and support was provided by NCB associates on all aspects of Making it REAL and any issues or questions arising; and on piloting new aspects such as maths. At times some assistance was given with administration, such as getting materials to the local authority. Support was mainly provided by e-mail and telephone, but sometimes in person. NCB also supported local hub meetings and activities.

NCB also supported them to recruit, train and support parent volunteers and to evaluate this work, as well as providing specific input around SEND, EAL and two-year olds.

Interviewees praised the training and support and described it as pertinent, well designed and delivered, and very responsive to their needs: *'everything was useful'* *'fantastic'*; *'encouraging'*.

The design of the training and support package, its content and consistency helped these local authorities deliver Making it REAL and develop how it was run in their areas. They appreciated being treated as partners and collaborators on this project and the individual time they were given to help develop the programme locally. Having NCB associate trainers on hand at local meetings and events guided them on what needed to be covered in meetings and how to support practitioners during such events. Being able to co-deliver the practitioner training alongside an NCB associate was seen as supportive, gave them confidence to run the training themselves after that and provided some ideas on delivery styles.

'He [NCB trainer] really made us think about the way we deliver training as part of our own role... do we give too much information, as opposed to waiting to see how much our practitioners already know'

Local authority lead

'I can't say enough how proud I am and I'm really excited and really honoured that we've been part of the NCB work,...it really has made a difference to us. I can't thank them enough for all the training they've given us and all the support they've given us, that's been ongoing'

Local authority lead

When asked how the NCB training or support could be improved, all said 'nothing'. However, at the same time there was some desire to maintain the initial levels of support.

Local authority leads described the range of support offered to settings, namely:

- **Information about Making it REAL** provided in person, along with written information. It was said to be critical to ensure that early years settings understood the commitment expected in terms of home visits, training and planning.
- **Co-training practitioners** on the two-day Making it REAL training course, alongside an NCB associate.
- **Training parent volunteers** to help run the events and support the programme, with support for parent volunteer trainees to get accreditation from the National Open College Network.
- **Support in planning how Making it REAL would be implemented.** Practitioners were given time during the Making it REAL training session to plan their activities and decide which families to work with.
- Three regional **Hub events** were arranged and facilitated to enable mutual support and help practitioners share issues and learn from each other.
- **Network meetings** which were timed to follow the first round of home visits or other activities, so that practitioners could feed their experiences and queries into the discussions.
- **New settings were linked with settings which had delivered Making it REAL for longer.**
- **Practitioners were given individual telephone and email support** by local authority leads as and when needed. Although more time consuming, additional personal visits to practitioners, if they were really stuck, proved very worthwhile.
- **Home visits** was reported to be the most daunting aspect to practitioners, but once they had done one or two they became much more confident. In one area, the Early Years Team tried to assist by accompanying the practitioners, to provide modelling and support. However they were reviewing the effectiveness of that approach, as it also made practitioners slightly nervous. One area had run a workshop for parents in association with the Portage service to provide further support for home visiting.

2.3.4.1. Funding

The Making it REAL **funding** was apportioned in two main ways to support the programme. Firstly, the local authority used a portion to fund area-wide events, for example: recruiting, training and supporting parent volunteers; Making it REAL networking events; and other activities. Secondly, local authorities passed on the funding to settings, dividing it across the number of settings participating. Settings were expected to use it for resources, such as book bags and other items to give to children and families; or to help run activities and events. Occasionally the local authority matched, topped up or replaced the Making it REAL funding provided to settings, especially in Year 3 when the NCB funding was reduced.

In general, Making it REAL activities were considered a good use of the Early Years Pupil Premium. It was used and considered helpful if an eligible child was experiencing literary difficulties; or to cover staff costs for home visits; or to help monitor and evaluate input using the Early Years Foundation Stage, or Every Child A Talker tools. However, in practice it was said that fewer children were eligible for the EYPP than previously anticipated and in comparison to numbers eligible for free school meals. In one area the numbers reduced from 75% of pupils being eligible for free school meals, to 25% who were eligible for the EYPP. In other words the amounts of money available were not always as much as expected.

The local authority interviewees suggested a number of areas where support to settings could be improved. However most of these were said to require additional resources to the local authority and/ or setting, especially as the EYPP funding was not as much as anticipated. It was suggested that more advice should be given to settings on how to monitor and measure use of the EYPP. More guidance could also be given on how to evaluate effectiveness generally and embed

evaluation in practice. Setting up termly meetings with local practitioners would increase the support settings received.

Settings would also benefit from enhanced capacity, by funding or providing more support to settings, for example to cover staff for training and home visiting. Using the train the trainer model to enable parents to be trained as volunteers, as happened in two hub areas, would be another means of increasing capacity.

2.3.5. Practitioners' views on support

Practitioner interviewees described the individual advice and support provided by NCB and their local authority as very responsive: they felt that if they wanted extra support they simply had to ask for it, typically by phone or e-mail. They received very practical help, which improved their confidence to implement Making it REAL. For example, the local authority leads commonly attended sessions in the setting, modelling how they would implement an idea in practice, or discussed the details of a setting's intake, or assisted practitioners in choosing the children to target for Making it REAL. Settings felt that the information, such as evidence on the effectiveness of the REAL approach, and the support provided, whether in group situations or individually, was helpful and consistent.

Local network meetings were seen as another useful form of support. Getting practitioners together was considered very helpful, as they shared any problems encountered, exchanged ideas with each other and got advice from the local authority project leads.

Support was said to have made the difference in being able to implement and continue with Making it REAL, even if, or especially when, settings experienced challenges. Even those 'going it alone' in the third year, tended to work closely with and get support and advice from their local authority and found them very responsive.

I think it was a very well run programme. It was enjoyable. It was delivered well and it was easy to understand. And if you had any questions you could ask and nobody felt silly, because ... there's nothing worse is there than asking a question and you're nervous to ask it?

Practitioner

Having more regular local meetings was desired and one practitioner suggested that the training could be improved by spreading it over three days, to cover even more and help participants assimilate all the new information. However the two-day format was generally praised, and findings indicate that freeing staff and providing cover for two days of training off-site was challenging enough: three might prove too much. A course, developed by ECU, directed at training parent volunteers, was also recommended.

2.3.6. Changes to practice

In the practitioner follow-up survey, respondents were asked how they had used their learning from the Making it REAL training. They were provided with a range of ways in which they may have used their training, and asked to comment on whether: a) this was not relevant or possible; b) they plan to do this but have not yet; c) have begun to do this or in early stages; d) have made several steps towards this; e) this has been completed (Table 5). Most practitioners reported having started, albeit at the early stages, to having completed the following aspects: reflected upon learning; shared information and ideas with colleagues; and made a change to an aspect of how they worked.

Table 5. How participants have used the information from the training

	Not relevant or not possible for me	I plan to do this but have not done it yet	I have begun doing this or am in the early stages	I have made several steps towards doing this	I have done this/complete
Share information/ideas with colleagues inside your organisation ¹⁹	1 (1.4%)	7 (9.7%)	16 (22.2%)	18 (25.0%)	28 (38.9%)
Share information and ideas with colleagues outside your organisation ²⁰	23 (31.9%)	20 (27.8%)	10 (13.9%)	10 (13.9%)	6 (8.3%)
Make a change to an aspect of how you work ²¹	5 (6.9%)	5 (6.9%)	17 (23.6%)	21 (29.2%)	21 (29.2%)
Make a change to an aspect of how your organisation works ²²	15 (20.8%)	9 (12.5%)	15 (20.8%)	19 (26.4%)	11 (15.3%)
Research the issues further ²³	12 (16.7%)	17 (23.6%)	23 (31.9%)	15 (20.8%)	2 (2.8%)
Reflected upon the learning ²⁴	0 (0.0%)	5 (6.9%)	20 (27.8%)	29 (40.3%)	15 (20.8%)

¹⁹ Two practitioners did not answer this question

²⁰ 3 practitioners did not answer this question

²¹ 3 practitioners did not answer this question

²² 3 practitioners did not answer this question

²³ 3 practitioners did not answer this question

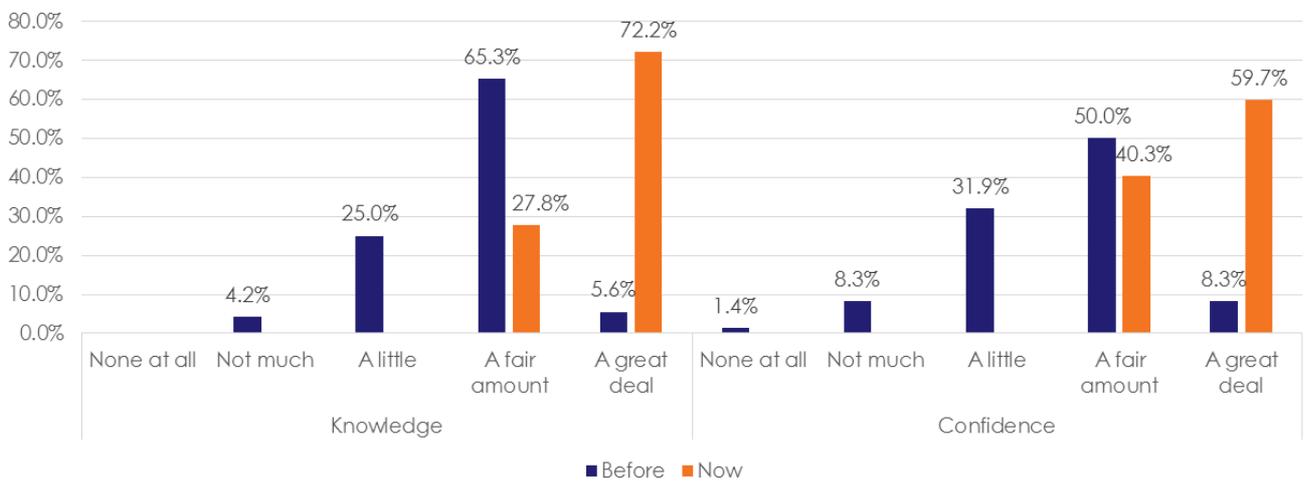
²⁴ 3 practitioners did not answer this question

Practitioners answering the survey were asked about their knowledge and confidence across a range of areas, both before the Making it REAL training, and at the time of completing the survey, post-training. This included questions about:

- Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development;
- Supporting children with early literacy; and
- REAL and the ORIM framework and how to apply it successfully in their setting.

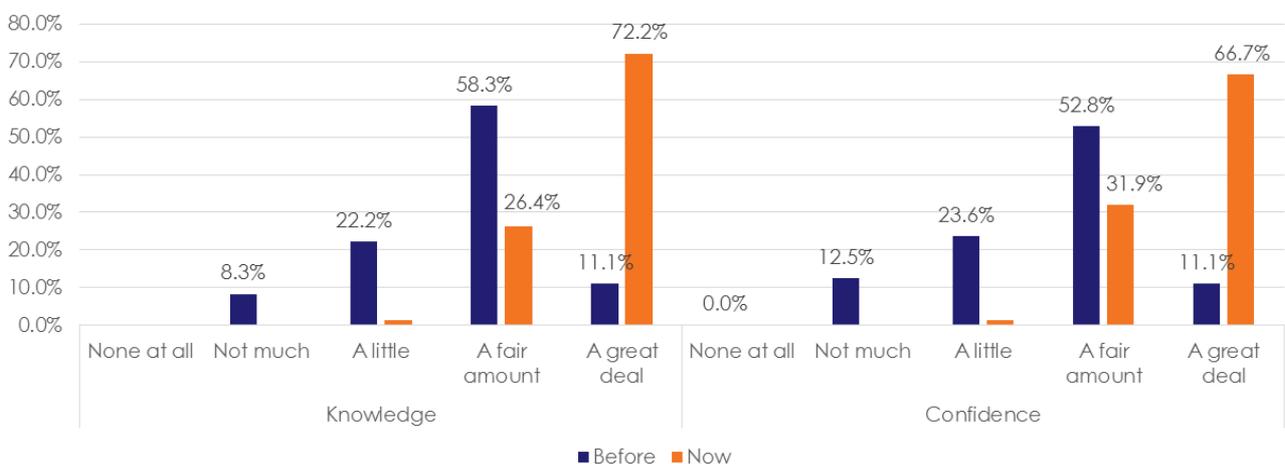
Figure 6 shows that practitioners reported an increase in both knowledge and confidence in engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development. Whilst the majority reported that they had a fair amount (65.3% [N = 47]) or a little (25.0% [N = 18]) knowledge of this aspect prior to Making it REAL training, the majority reported that this knowledge had increased to a great deal (72.2% [N = 52]) at the time of completing the survey. Similarly, whilst most reported that they had a fair amount (50.0%, [N = 36]) or a little (31.9% [N= 23]) of confidence before the Making it REAL training: the majority reported that they had a great deal (59.7% [N = 43]) or a fair amount (40.3% [N = 29]) of confidence at the time of completing the survey.

Figure 6. Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development



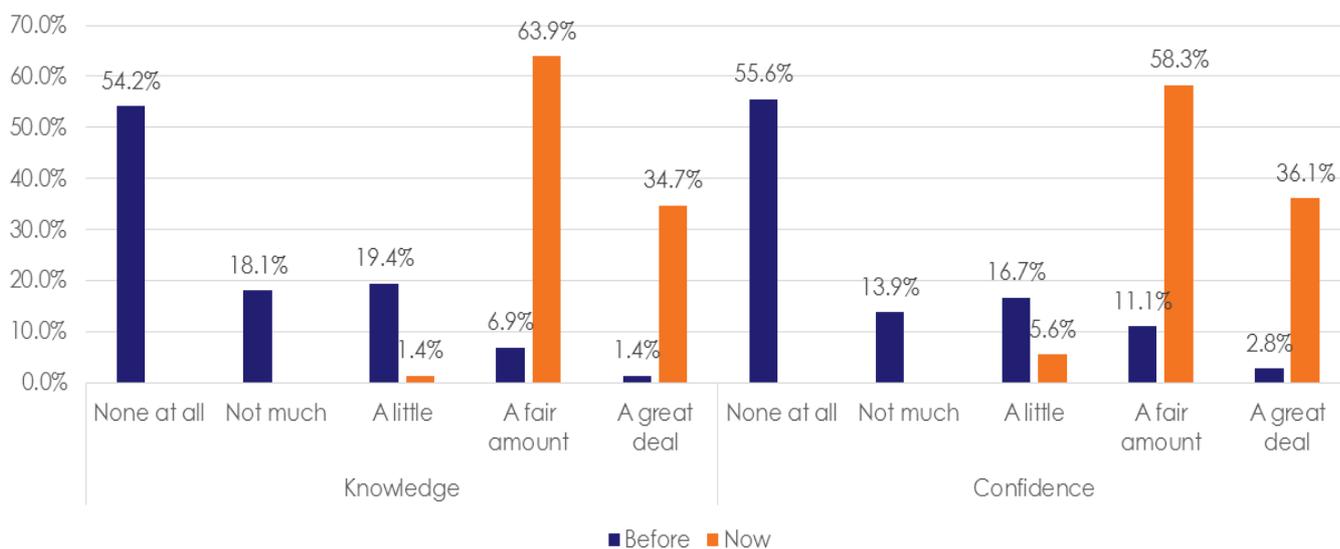
The results were similar for supporting children with early literacy. Whilst the most common responses were a fair amount for both knowledge (58.3% [N = 47]) and confidence (52.8%, [N = 38]) before the Making it REAL training, practitioners' responses of a great deal increased to 72.2% (N = 52) for knowledge at the time of completing the survey and 66.7% (N = 48) for confidence.

Figure 7. Supporting children with early literacy



Prior to the Making it REAL training, practitioners mostly reported a lack of knowledge and confidence in applying REAL and the ORIM Framework successfully with families in their setting, with over half (54%) reporting that they had none at all. However, after the training, nearly all respondents said they had a fair amount (63.9% [N = 46]) or a great deal (34.7% [N = 25]) of knowledge, and a fair amount (58.3% [N = 43]) and a great deal (36.1% [N = 26]) of confidence in this aspect.

Figure 8. REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it successfully with families in their setting



Specifically, practitioners were also asked to what extent the Making it REAL training had improved their confidence and knowledge in delivering home visits. As shown in Table 6, almost half (47.2%, [N = 34]) of the respondents said that the training had increased their confidence and knowledge in delivering home visits a great deal. Two out of five respondents (40.2%, [N = 29]) said that their confidence and knowledge had increased a fair amount. Only one respondent said this had not increased at all.

Table 6. To what extent, if at all, has the Making it REAL training and approach increased your confidence and knowledge in delivering home visits

	Frequency	Percent
A great deal	34	47.2
A fair amount	29	40.2
A little	7	9.7
Not much	0	0.0
Not at all	1	1.4

2.3.7. Implementing Making it REAL

Based on Setting Record Forms provided to ECU, there were a total of **954 home visits** carried out across the eight local authority projects. This represents an average of **1.83 home visits per child** (children completing the project) and **12.08 home visits per setting**. The vast majority of settings (75 out of 79) **offered the required 2 rounds of home visits** during the project, even if these were not taken up by all families. Seven of these settings went beyond project expectations and also undertook an additional (3rd) round of home visits.

There were **235 literacy events** held, an average of 2.97 events per setting. The vast majority of settings (70 out of 79 settings) held the required 3 literacy events. Settings recorded a total of 1167 attendances at events amongst children registered for the project. Events were often extended to all the children in the setting, not just the registered project children. Settings were therefore asked

to record the total number of children attending events, which was 3841²⁵.

Respondents to the practitioner survey were asked what had helped them to run the Making it REAL project. The most common responses were 'knowledge and confidence from attending the training' (84.7%, [N = 61]); 'working with a colleague' (72.2%, [N = 52]); and 'resources provided in the training' (61.1%, N = 44). The least common response was 'attending a Making it REAL hub event', which only eleven (15.2% [N = 11]) highlighted as important in helping them to run REAL. However not all respondents to the survey would have been asked to attend a hub event. A full breakdown can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Factors that helped to implement Making it REAL

	Frequency	Percent
Knowledge and confidence from attending the training	61	84.7
Working with a colleague	52	72.0
Resources provided in the training	44	61.1
Local network meetings	42	58.3
Local authority support	38	52.8
Support from management	28	38.8
Attending a Making it REAL 'hub' event	11	15.3
Other ²⁶	4	5.6

Those practitioners that were interviewed had a range of roles and experience of implementing Making it REAL, including: leading and organising Making it REAL in their setting; training and supporting other staff to implement the programme; organising and running events; conducting home visits; and monitoring and collecting feedback and other data.

Interviewees were asked to highlight any changes in practice since being involved in the Making it REAL project. The main distinctions reported were:

- Using the **ORIM framework** and adopting it across the whole setting. The Making it REAL activities and resources were found to be particularly useful.
- **Home visits** with a learning and development focus as opposed to simply using home visits to collect background information about the family and child. Using two staff to conduct the home visit was also seen as helpful, so that one could talk to the parents while the other did activities and interacted with the child.
- **Involving parents** more. This included giving increased importance to talking to them, including them in discussions about their child and inviting them to the settings more routinely.
- **Providing parents with ideas** on cheap and easy activities to pursue with their children, such as making play-dough, having picnics, spotting environmental print and going to the library and borrowing books from there.
- **Setting up resources** such as lending libraries and banks of other activities for children and families to borrow and use at home.
- A more rigorous approach to **identifying and assessing children who needed extra support**. For example one setting targeted boys for extra input on mark- making and creativity because of Making it REAL.
- **More routine assessment of children**, using the Making it REAL observational data form.

²⁵ These figures represent attendance totals, not individual children, as individual children may have attended more than one event.

²⁶ 'Other' responses included 'Combining REAL and EYPP funding' (1); 'Support of volunteers in making resources' (1); 'The funds' (1); and 'Visit to setting from Kim and Annie' (1)

The practitioners highlighted several **benefits** of implementing Making it REAL, which included having a common approach across all the staff in a setting and inspiring practitioners due to the creativity of the approach to which parents and children responded positively. The ORIM framework also made it easier to explain to parents how they could help their children.

However, there were some implementation **challenges** highlighted which included:

- Getting staff and parents on board initially. In one area parental turnout was quite low at first. Further information about how settings engaged families is provided below;
- Communication with families who did not speak English and where the worker did not speak their language or have access to interpreters;
- Budgeting and organising rotas to ensure staff cover during home visits and training; and
- Fitting it all in to limited time.

2.3.7.1. Engaging Families

In terms of how settings **engaged families** several different methods were used:

- Approaching parents of selected children;
- Producing written information such as letters, leaflets and posters in English and other relevant languages;
- Organising events, such as coffee mornings; and
- Visiting families at home

Settings generally combined approaching families individually with one or more of the other group methods, and found this combination successful. Leaflets and posters helped as they provided more detail, could be written in the relevant languages and visual explanations helped. Talking directly to parents made the invitations more individually attuned, addressed specific questions and adapted the information as needed for each. Visiting and demonstrating Making it REAL to the family at home, sometimes with the member of staff who they already knew best, was said to often tip the balance if parents were confused or anxious, as it showed what Making it REAL was all about and allayed any residual anxieties.

Settings selected the children and families they believed would benefit most from Making it REAL, including two-year olds, children with SEND and those who spoke English as an additional language at home. Effective targeting was a delicate balance, especially with the need to avoid raising concerns in parents who might worry that being approached for the programme meant that their child had a problem. Getting fathers involved as the main parent involved in the project was not easy although the evaluation did not measure their wider participation and involvement, which was explored as part of the evaluation of Year 1 of Making it REAL. A further barrier was communicating with parents who did not speak English, even when working through an interpreter. In one setting staff spoke community languages and translated all their written materials, which helped. Balancing the Making it REAL principles while incorporating different cultural approaches to parenting and respecting parents' own methods was found to be somewhat challenging:

'It's not forcing your opinion on somebody and saying you've got to...there's no wrong or right way of doing it... It's just working with families'

Practitioner

The settings interviewed had undertaken a variety of activities with participating families, including:

- Home visits;
- Being creative, making play items out of everyday objects with children and parents, and demonstrating to parents how to undertake similar activities at home, such as making puppets and musical instruments;
- Themed activities, including story-telling, walks, and 'treasure hunts'. One setting designed several activities around the theme of dinosaurs;

- Environmental print and listening walks and bus tours locally;
- Mark making and oral language activities and events;
- Trips to the pantomime, farms, libraries, museums, shops and town centres;
- More occasional events, such as fun-days; and
- Sessions explaining the four stands of the ORIM framework to parents.

Getting the parents to understand Making it REAL, or the activities, or what they were expected to do at home with the children was not always easy and sometimes parents did not follow through with the activities they were asked to do with their children. Parents with limited literacy skills found it difficult to follow Making it REAL or to undertake the reading or literacy activities with their children. Levels of engagement in events or home visits were found to vary. Sometimes parents were not home at the time agreed for home visits, which aggravated timing and staffing issues. At the same time, settings felt they had to adapt the approach and work with these parents very tentatively, to avoid discouraging them even more. In practice, once parents saw what Making it REAL was about, any difficulties usually diminished. Parents generally welcomed different ideas and quickly observed the benefits.

2.3.7.2. Volunteers

Capacity building through recruiting volunteers to support the Making it REAL programme had been a key aspect of the of the project plan in Year 2, with time given to supporting this element during the two-day training. In year 3 ECU still monitored the numbers of volunteers engaged by settings but did not specify it as a requirement of the project. In total, **40 volunteers** were recruited in settings taking part in the eight local authority development projects. Settings were also given a tighter definition of 'volunteer' in Year 3, to exclude paid staff, students or parents taking part in the current Making it REAL project²⁷.

Out of the nine practitioner interviews four settings had engaged volunteers to assist with Making it REAL. In three cases these were parents who had previously participated in Making it REAL themselves. Parent volunteers were said to be particularly useful in helping to recruit other parents, explain the programme to them, share their own experiences of Making it REAL, answer queries and provide reassurance. Being able to speak to participating parents in their own language was another advantage they brought.

2.3.7.3. The REAL approach and working with children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds

Generally home visits were reported to be very beneficial, as they enabled the practitioners to see the child in the familiarity of their own home and spend one-to-one time with them.

Practitioners who were interviewed described how Making it REAL's focus on special needs and disability, children who spoke English as an additional language and two-year olds was appreciated and helped these settings ensure they kept these groups in mind, even if they already had processes in place to help them. Settings sometimes prioritised one or more groups for Making it REAL input. The REAL approach assisted parents whose first language was not English. The content of the Making it REAL training enabled practitioners to offer evidence-based information on how to support children who are bilingual, for example by continuing to speak their home language to their child at home and to not avoid doing so, or insist on the child speaking English, which sometimes families had previously believed was best.

Improving links between the family home and setting was seen to help all children feel more relaxed in the latter and was particularly beneficial to bilingual children. Having staff who could speak the parents' home languages conduct the home visits also helped parents and children feel more comfortable, as did the language 'wall of words' created by parents in one setting.

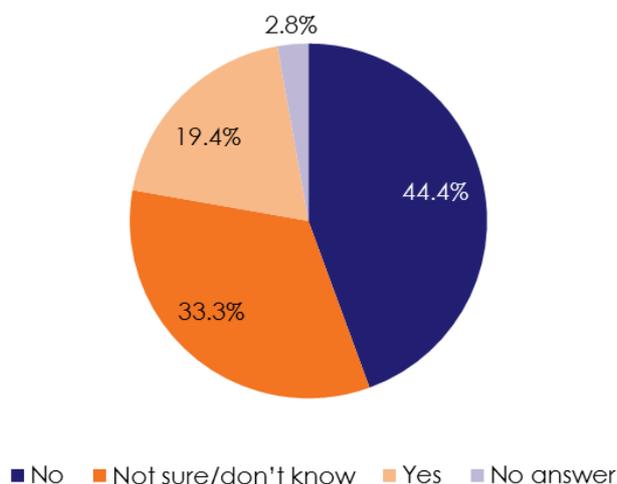
²⁷ There was also a high proportion of new settings in Year 3 and therefore, not the previous cohort of REAL parents to become volunteers

Those working with two-year olds found that Making it REAL helped plan activities for this group and focus on particular aspects, such as speech and language development.

2.3.7.4. Funding

Practitioners in the survey were asked if they were using the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) funding to support the delivery of Making it REAL in their setting. Most said that they were not (44.4%, [N = 32]) or did not know (33.3%, [N=24]). Only 14 (19.4%) said that they were (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. The current use of EYPP funding to support the Making it REAL project



Of the 14 who said that they were using the funding, 11 described how they were using these funds: providing good quality resources for families (5); staff costs, such as releasing them to go on home visits (4); running small communication and language groups for children and families (1); accessing training courses (1); identification of those who need support (1); the organisation of specific activities such as purchasing live eggs for the children to see hatch (1).

All respondents were asked if they were likely to use the EYPP to support the delivery of Making it REAL in the future, just over a third (34.7%, [N = 25]) said that they would. The same amount said that they maybe would. Only one respondent said that they would not. The remaining practitioners either did not know (26.3%, [N = 19]) or did not answer the question (2.8%, [N = 2]).

2.3.8. Parents' views on Making it REAL activities

Qualitative interviews were conducted in three areas with parents from six relevant settings. The parents were five mothers and one grandmother who provided most of the daily care for her grandchild. Their children were aged two, three and four at the time they took part in Making it REAL. All attended early years settings, such as nurseries and playgroups, mostly on a part-time basis.

All those interviewed had received home visits and had taken part in other Making it REAL activities and outings organised by the setting. These included themed literacy and environmental print walks, mark making sessions, visiting libraries, zoos and other places, and instructions on how to incorporate the Making it REAL approach into everyday activities.

During **home visits** the practitioners modelled how to do things together with the child, for example how to use nursery rhymes, song and dance; tell stories using props; spot logos and use environmental print; make marks with a range of materials, such as glue and sand; and make play-dough and other items cheaply. From the parents' viewpoints the other important aspect of the home visits was that it showed them how easy it could be to be creative at home, how to undertake simple art activities, plus how to incorporate simple methods into everyday activities to increase a child's awareness of their surroundings, encourage communication and make marks. Practitioners also modelled how to read a story to make it more interesting, such as discussing the

characters or illustrations or using objects and toys to bring the story to life.

Parents appreciated the resources that practitioners provided during the home visits. These included paper, pencils, pens, scissors, a recipe for play-dough, books, bags of resources and character toys to go with stories, such as teddy bears. In one setting the parents were given written leaflets explaining ORIM and how to apply each of the four strands.

Practitioners also provided support on managing behaviour, how to follow a child's interests and promote their concentration, and the advantages of turning off the television. One parent appreciated the fact that two staff visited. While one played with the child, the other explained the ideas and methods to her and answered her questions.

These parents really enjoyed their home visits, described them as very positive and personal experiences and felt quite comfortable about having the staff in their homes. They thought it helped staff to see their children comfortable and in their home environment. In one case the father had taken time off work to be there for the home visit, found it very interesting, enjoyed seeing his children's reactions and had been more hands-on since. Parents also described how siblings participated in the home visits and were said to have really enjoyed them.

2.4. Impact of Making it REAL

To understand the impact of Making it REAL findings from a variety of sources will be discussed together. These include the follow-up practitioner survey, local authority lead interviews, practitioner interviews, child observations conducted by practitioners, parent interviews and data from the parent survey.

2.4.1. Impact on local authority and settings

Local authority lead interviewees felt the following were the most effective aspects of Making it REAL:

- The **promotion of local networking** and mutual support across settings and practitioners. This model of enabling and encouraging practitioners to share good ideas as well as challenges, and cascade information and training, was said to help develop the local infrastructure and make Making it REAL more embedded.
- The use of data and the approach to **using evidence** proved very stimulating. An example was given in one area where there was identification of children who were or were not members of the local library service. As a result the library and settings started working more closely together. Settings were making greater use of libraries and the libraries were running story-telling sessions, giving out cards and allowing settings out-of-hours access.
- **Environmental print** was said to have sparked practitioners' imagination, especially how to incorporate it into everyday activities.

Making it REAL was said to **reinforce previous child development ideas and messages**. Training all staff in an area in Making it REAL helped ensure both high standards and consistency. Settings were reported to be keen to continue using Making it REAL. All interviewees said it augmented existing strategies such as the authority's Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and the local authority Action Plan. It also built on the Early Years Foundation Stage and current best practice programmes and interventions, such as Every Child a Talker, Early Language Development Programme, and local early years training.

Making it REAL was now seen as part and parcel of these areas' school readiness initiatives and authorities had plans to monitor this over time, as the participating children moved up to school. Positive changes had already been reported by parents and schools, and reports on the beneficial impact of Making it REAL on school readiness had prompted other schools and settings to try, or want to try, Making it REAL.

One local authority lead had received feedback from parents who were equally enthusiastic about Making it REAL once they understood what was involved and had taken part in activities or

home visits. Feedback from parents and settings indicated they felt less judged and more open with practitioners. A growing '*partnership*', '*trust and warmth*' with the settings and early years practitioners was evident, and had been remarked on by others, including health visitors. In addition parents felt more confident in their own ability to support their children's learning. In turn the improved relationships with parents improved the accuracy of assessments.

Children's relationships with the settings were said to have improved as a result of Making it REAL, especially in terms of how relaxed and at home children felt.

'We had such good feedback ... and the strength of the relationship that develops in that first term... really incorporated into some of the visits they do at home. It's tremendous really, and we get some lovely ... stories back about the impact it's had on families'

Local authority lead

Making it REAL was seen to play a major role in helping the authorities audit and measure both starting points and any changes over time, as well as embed the practice of evaluation. The fact that the programme was based on research enhanced its perceived reliability and quality for local authorities.

Interviewees reported that Making it REAL had contributed to '*massive*' quality improvement at both a setting and local authority level, in relation to improving literacy levels in particular. As it complemented other programmes, the local authorities fitted it alongside a '*jigsaw*' of other interventions. A number of settings had received improved Ofsted ratings which were attributed to Making it REAL, not least because of the improved parental involvement, raised outcomes for children and the new or renewed emphasis on measurement and evidence.

The Making it REAL approach was said to be becoming embedded throughout the area and settings through cascading of training and the sharing of practice among practitioners. The relative cheapness of the Making it REAL model, given the emphasis on sharing learning and ideas, even with those who have not attended training, provided encouragement all around that literacy levels could be improved even at low cost at the point of delivery.

2.4.2. Impact on settings and practitioners

Practitioners who answered the survey commented on a range of impacts. The most common impact was an improved relationship with parents, with 68% citing a great impact and 31% saying there had been some impact in this area. This finding was also echoed in the interviews with practitioners. Across all questions, at least 55% reported that there was some or great impact. A full breakdown can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Impacts of implementing Making it REAL²⁸

Impact	No impact	Some impact	Great impact
Improved relationships with parents	0.0% (N = 0)	30.6% [N = 22]	68.0% [N = 49]
Changes to classroom or setting practice around literacy	5.6% (N = 4)	66.7% [N = 48]	25.0% [N = 18]
Children's improved attainment in early literacy	1.4% [N = 1]	56.9% [N = 41]	37.5% [N = 27]
Improved support to parents of two-year olds accessing free early education places	29.2% [N = 21]	30.6% [N = 22]	25.0% [N = 18]
Linking children and families to other services	13.9% [N = 10]	55.6% [N = 40]	13.9% [N = 10]
Identifying and supporting children who have speech and language needs	18.1% [N = 13]	43.0% [N = 31]	33.3% [N = 24]
Supporting bilingual families	20.8% [N = 15]	45.8% [N = 33]	27.8% [N = 20]
Identifying children who have additional needs	29.2% [N = 21]	36.1% [N = 26]	26.4% [N = 19]
Early identification of additional needs in younger siblings	40.3% [N = 29]	41.7% [N = 30]	12.5% [N = 9]
Changes to setting policy and procedures, for example around literacy, home visiting or parental engagement	20.8% [N = 15]	54.1% [N = 39]	19% [N = 14]

Six practitioners also provided 'other' comments which included:

Have introduced several other parent workshops since the project and we are starting [maths work] too

Teacher at a Primary / Academy / Nursery class

Making all families aware of early literacy skills by providing events for the whole of the foundation stage

Teacher at a Primary / Academy / Nursery class

We have only had certain families that have wanted to engage in the REAL project so we need to think of new ways to engage our hard to reach and EAL families who need it the most

Teacher at a Maintained Nursery School

Practitioners who were interviewed reported that Making it REAL had helped them support families to do more, or do things differently with their children. Involving parents more was paramount, and achieved through providing information, advice and creative ideas on how to best support

²⁸ Missing answers in order of impact: 1, 3, 4, 12, 5, 5, 5, 7, 5, 5

language and literacy at home.

The interchange and communication between the settings and home was augmented by encouraging parents and children to borrow books and other resources. In one case a written communication book was created, in which both parents and staff wrote details and observations. This went back and forth between the home and setting. Where possible, messages were written in the parents' home language if this was not English.

Interviewees also highlighted the positive impact of **home visits**, which were said to have helped develop parents' understanding of how to assist their children, and to convey this much more successfully than leaflets and other methods settings had previously tried. Making it REAL training and support assisted practitioners to overcome their own nervousness and anxieties about conducting home visits and helped home visits become integrated in these settings.

In addition, survey respondents were asked an open-ended question, to describe the impact of the Making it REAL home visits on children and families. These responses were coded into groups and presented below in Table 9. Sixty-two practitioners provided responses - some responses fell into more than one category and therefore have been reported as frequencies. The most common answers included comments that relationships between the practitioner and family were improved, and that it was useful to see families in their home environment and that this made it more comfortable for them.

Table 9. Practitioners' views about how Making it REAL home visits impacted on children and families

Comment	Number of practitioners
Increased engagement / better relationships	24
Greater insight into home life / familiar environment / realistic support	14
More engagement / insight into child's learning	8
Greater impact than events/ positive impact	4
More engagement with setting	4
Improvements in speech, language, role play, literacy and phonics	4
Increased understanding of the importance of literacy	2
Increased practitioner confidence	2
Parents feel more comfortable	2
High quality experience	1
Feel valued	1
Enjoyable experience	1
Parents were already engaged	1

Interviewees explained that there were wider impacts of being involved in the Making it REAL project. For example, many of the REAL methods and approaches were shared with a larger number of children and parents in the early years setting, such as Making it REAL literacy events including mark-making activities and literacy-focused excursions. Sometimes other parents heard about Making it REAL and asked to be included as well, having heard about its benefits through word of mouth.

Learning about Making it REAL and using the child observation data form had helped practitioners to identify other children in their cohort who might be struggling and offer them targeted support. These often included boys, children with additional educational needs and children speaking English as an additional language. One setting had formed a communication group for a number of children who had been struggling with speech and communication.

2.4.3. Practitioners' views of the impact on children

Interviews with practitioners highlighted that the targeted children had engaged well in the Making it REAL programme, visibly enjoyed it and found it exciting. Moreover children were now doing many Making it REAL-informed activities at home, such as cooking, reading, gardening and messy play.

'Some of the children have made massive, massive progress. Especially the ones where the parents have been involved in everything ... they were way behind ... and now they are age [appropriate]. So they've made massive steps forwards in progress. The other children are definitely more confident to what they were, and they've all made some form of progress, but it's maybe not been as beneficial. The ones you thought would make more, maybe haven't quite accessed it the way I thought they were going to. But everybody's made progress.'

Practitioner

At the time of the evaluation, it was too early for practitioners to determine long-term outcomes and while Making it REAL was said to have successfully built on prior input, such as Every Child a Talker, it was somewhat difficult to distinguish Making it REAL effects from those of previous interventions. Nonetheless settings attributed several areas of progress to Making it REAL, especially in relation to:

- **Children's increased interest in reading, stories and books**

On the whole, children were said to be much more interested in books, reading and stories in general. They were observed to be reading more, participating better and listening attentively in story-telling sessions and asking more questions about books and stories. In comparison to before the programme they were now choosing their own books independently and were keen to use libraries. Positive changes were even noted in children who had just attended one literacy event. For one young boy, being part of REAL resulted in getting a book token and a book: parents had told staff at their child's setting that they would not have previously thought to have bought him books until he was four years old.

'One parent shared that their little boy was more interested [in books] now and much more than his siblings were. She felt it was due to the project'

Practitioner

'... they are more interested in stories'

Practitioner

- **Improved language and communication skills**

Participation in Making it REAL was reported to have assisted children's language development and general willingness to communicate. This included children expressing themselves verbally more often, showing more confidence to speak, using a wider vocabulary and having clearer speech.

Changes were even more evident among the children whose first language at home was not English. Professionals felt that the focus on the wider aspects of communication, such as modelling facial expressions, had assisted children's general communication, most noticeably for those who spoke English as an additional language.

'I have noticed that for the children who participated in REAL their language skills have developed more...'

Practitioner

- **Increased engagement with mark making**

As well as doing more mark making, participating children were said to be more interested in, and aware of, mark making:

'The older children who took part are talking about marks with staff and what it means to them'

Practitioner

- **Improved concentration, confidence, social skills and behaviour**

Children were often said to have become more confident and happier in the nursery, were more outgoing and more likely to ask questions. In addition children were observed to be more able to focus and concentrate on an activity. Practitioners attributed this mostly to parents reading to the children and doing focused activities with them at home. Children's social and relationship skills were said to be improving in the settings, possibly in part due to the interaction-based activities undertaken as a part of the Making it REAL programme.

- **Better relationships with the early years setting**

Children were described by practitioners as feeling 'safer' and more secure in the early years setting, largely as a result of both seeing their parents in the setting and practitioners in their own home. The apparent softening of the normal distinction between nursery and home was perceived by practitioners to make children feel more relaxed and comfortable. Children generally found the home visits very exciting and enjoyed the one-to-one quality time with staff, as well as the activities undertaken. The home visits were felt to have provided a big boost to children's interest in books and stories.

Children in the wider setting who had not been specifically targeted for Making it REAL were also reported to have benefitted to some extent. In one setting other parents had heard about Making it REAL and had asked to take part. In many cases other children and parents took part in Making it REAL events, typically around literacy and mark making and Making it REAL inspired resources were often shared with all families. The feedback was positive on all fronts and the wider cohort of children were said to have enjoyed the experience. Practitioners reported that even this extent of engagement had made a noticeable difference to these children's literacy and to the amount and type of activities parents did at home with their children.

2.4.4. Child observation data

Practitioners were requested to complete child observations at two time points (at the start and end of the project) for each child participant of Making it REAL. Pre- and post- project data was completed in each of the project areas by practitioners, and sent to NCB for analysis. There were a total of 417 entries that could be matched across both time points. Child observation data included information about:

- Children's demographic data;
- Children's age in months;
- Library membership;
- EAL status;
- Parents' developmental concerns;
- Support from other services due to concerns about a child's development;
- Formal identification of SEND;
- Referrals to other services during Making it REAL;
- Current attainment band for: listening and attention; understanding; speaking; reading; writing;
- Key characteristics of speech development (for two-year olds only);
- Frequency of: reading a book; drawing / making marks and saying what they mean; using environmental print; joining in with songs and rhymes;

- Confidence of parents in speaking with practitioners; and
- The number of Making it REAL events parents attended.

2.4.4.1. Child demographics

Of the 417 children for whom matched data was available, over half of the children were male (56.6%, [N = 237]) and the remaining 43.2% (N = 181) were female. At the start of the project children ranged from 6 months old to 6 years and 2 months. For post-project data, children ranged from 11 months old to 6 years 4 months. A breakdown of ages can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10. Age of children at Making it REAL observations

Age	Pre-REAL observations	Post- REAL observations
Less than 6 months	0% (N = 0)	0.0% (N = 0)
6 months up to 1 year	0.2% (N = 1)	0.2% (N = 1)
1 year up to 2 years	1.2% (N = 5)	0.2% (N = 1)
2 years up to 3 years	24.8% (N = 104)	15.0% (N = 63)
3 years up to 4 years	69.6%(N = 292)	33.4% (N = 140)
4 years up to 5 years	21.2% (N = 89)	29.4% (N = 124)
5 years up to 6 years	2.8% (N = 12)	8.6% (N = 36)
6 years up to 7 years	0.2% (N = 1)	0.2% (N = 1)

Table 11 shows a breakdown of ethnicity (based on 2011 census categories). Most children were White (58%) and a fifth were Asian / Asian British (21%).

Table 11. Child observation data and ethnicity

Ethnic group	Number and percentage of children
White	57.8% (N = 242)
Asian / Asian British	21.2%(N = 89)
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	7.1% (N = 30)
Other	6.9% (N = 29)
Black / African / Caribbean / Black British	6.3% (N = 26)

Furthermore, 139 (33%) children were reported as having English as an Additional Language (EAL).

2.4.4.2. Developmental concerns, SEND and referrals

Practitioners reported on whether parents had developmental concerns about their child prior to, and after the Making it REAL project. As shown in Table 12, the majority reported no concerns (70.4%) at both time points. However, just under a fifth reported concerns at both time points. A small number reported a change in concerns between the two time points, with these concerns either developing after the Making it REAL programme (2%) or stopping after the programme (3%).

Table 12. Parent developmental concerns at the end of Making it REAL²⁹

Level of concern	Percentage of children
No concerns	70.4% (N = 295)
Concerns remained	19.1% (N = 80)
Concerns removed	3.1% (N = 13)
Concerns started	2.0% (N = 9)

Prior to Making it REAL, 42 (10%) children were reported as having Special Educational Needs (SEN), and post- Making it REAL, 44 (11%) were reported as having SEND, meaning that there was a very small increase. This is slightly lower than the 15.4% of school aged children identified as SEND nationally³⁰.

Just under a quarter of all children reported receiving a referral or support from another service prior to participating in the Making it REAL project (23%, [N = 94]) whereas this increased after participating in Making it REAL (27%, N = 112). This positive finding illustrates an increase in early identification of need and subsequent referrals to services.

2.4.4.3. Outcomes for children

Practitioners were asked to report on a range of outcomes for children, prior to, and post-, taking part in Making it REAL. Where appropriate, statistical analysis has made use of Chi-Square, McNemar, and Wilcoxon Signed Ranked test, to understand the magnitude of any findings. In addition, statistical analyses have been conducted to consider the association of outcomes with EAL, SEND and gender.

Engaging with and sharing books

Visiting the library was a key aspect of the Making it REAL project and practitioners were asked to report whether children were members prior to and after the Making it REAL training. Table 13 shows that nearly half of children became library members over the course of Making it REAL training.

Table 13. Children's library membership

Library membership	Number and percentage of children
Became a library member	42.4% (N = 177)
Remained a non-library member	26.1% (N = 109)
Remained a library member	19.7% (N = 82)
Missing answer(s)	11.8% (N = 49)

Statistically³¹, those who were library members before the Making it REAL programme, were more likely to remain library members post-training, and those who were not library members, were likely to remain non-library members. In addition, those with EAL were statistically more likely to be a non-library member, both before and after the Making it REAL training (46%), than those without EAL (22%).

Practitioners were also asked to report on how often children share books. This could be rated as never, once a month, once a week or most days. A breakdown of responses pre- and post- Making it REAL training is shown in Table 14, which shows an increase in how frequently children share a book after the Making it REAL training and a reduction in percentage who never did so, or only did

²⁹ This question was not answered for 20 children (5%)

³⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/447917/SFR25-2015_Text.pdf

³¹ Using Chi-Square analysis

so once a month.

Table 14. Frequency of sharing a book

Frequency	Pre-REAL ³²	Post-REAL ³³
Most days	30.9% (N = 129)	63.5% (N = 265)
Once a week	36.0% (N = 150)	26.9% (N = 112)
Once a month	22.8% (N = 95)	5.7% (N = 24)
Never	9.8% (N = 41)	2.2% (N = 9)

In order to test this statistically, each level of frequency was assigned a numeric value. Never was allocated 0, once a month was allocated 1, once a week was allocated 2, and most days was allocated 3. There was a statistically significant³⁴ increase from an average of 1.87 to an average of 2.54. This did not differ across gender, or children with EAL or SEND.

Drawing and mark making

Practitioners reported how often children drew / made marks and said what they meant. Table 15 shows that there was a substantial increase in the frequency of children drawing and mark making after participation in the Making it REAL project. Furthermore, there was a decrease in the percentage who did so either never or once a month.

Table 15. Frequency of drawing / making marks

Frequency	Pre- REAL ³⁵	Post- REAL ³⁶
Most days	34.7% (N = 103)	55.2% (N = 230)
Once a week	29.04% (N = 123)	29.5% (N = 123)
Once a month	25.7% (N = 107)	8.9% (N = 37)
Never	18.7% (N = 8)	5.0% (N = 21)

As with book sharing, in order to test this statistically, each level of frequency was assigned a numeric value. Never was allocated 0, once a month was allocated 1, once a week was allocated 2, and most days was allocated 3. There was a statistically significant³⁷ increase in how often children draw / make marks and say what they mean, with an increase from 1.11 to 1.25. This did not differ across gender, or children with EAL or SEND.

Awareness of and engaging with environmental print

Children's awareness and engagement with environmental print was also monitored by practitioners. As can be seen in Table 16, children became much more likely to engage with environmental print after participating in the Making it REAL project and less likely to be observed as unengaged in print.

³² This was not answered for 2 children

³³ This was not answered for 7 children

³⁴ Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks

³⁵ This was not answered for 2 children

³⁶ This was not answered for 6 children

³⁷ Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks

Table 16. Engagement with environmental print

Frequency	Pre-REAL³⁸	Post-REAL³⁹
Identifies more than two letters, words or logos (4)	12.0% (N = 50)	20.6% (N = 86)
Identifies one or two letters, words or logos (3)	0.0% (N = 0)	19.7% (N = 82)
Points to print and comments / ask what it says (2)	11.5% (N = 48)	20.1% (N = 87)
Stops to look / point at print (1)	28.8% (N = 120)	24.2% (N = 101)
Doesn't appear to notice print (0)	47.2% (N = 197)	12.9% (N = 54)

As with sharing a book and marking marks / drawings, statistical analysis took place. Each type of engagement was assigned a numeric value, which is shown in brackets in the above table. There was a statistically significant⁴⁰ increase in how often children use environmental print from an average of 0.92 to an average of 2.11. This did not differ across gender, or children with EAL or SEN.

Development of oral language

Data was provided about the frequency with which children join in with songs and rhymes. Table 17 shows an increase in how many rhymes children join in with or participate in. There was also a decrease in those who showed no or very little interest in rhymes before Making it REAL compared to after participation in the programme.

Table 17. Engaging songs and rhyme

Frequency	Pre-REAL⁴¹	Post-REAL⁴²
Knows one or two rhymes (4)	14.3% (N = 60)	43.9% (N = 183)
Knows some words / parts of rhymes (3)	16.1% (N = 67)	21.3% (N = 89)
Joins in with rhymes (2)	29.5% (N = 123)	20.9% (N = 87)
Listens to rhymes and watches as others sing (1)	29.5% (N = 123)	10.6% (N = 44)
Shows no / very little interest in rhymes (0)	10.1% (N = 42)	1.9% (N = 8)

Statistical analysis also took place. Each type of engagement was assigned a numeric value, which is shown in brackets in the above table. There was a statistically significant increase in how often children join in with songs and rhymes from pre- project (average of 1.95) to post-project (average of 2.96). This did not differ across gender, or children with EAL or SEND.

Two-year olds' vocalisation

Practitioners also considered the extent to which two-year olds, specifically vocalised and used words. Of the sample of 417 children, responses were provided for 101 children pre- Making it REAL and 74 post- Making it REAL. Table 18 shows an increase in the proportions of two-year olds speaking more words post- Making it REAL and a decrease in those babbling or saying single words.

³⁸ This was not answered for 6 children

³⁹ This was not answered for 7 children

⁴⁰ Using Wilcoxon Signed Ranks

⁴¹ This was not answered for 2 children

⁴² This was not answered for 6 children

Table 18. 2 year olds communication pre- and post- Making it REAL (frequencies reported due to lower sample size)

Communication	Pre	Post
Three words	33	40
Two words	29	23
Single words	33	8
Babbles	11	3

Children's attainment

Practitioners were asked to report on literacy-related areas of learning and development of the Early Years Foundation Stage (listening and attention, understanding, speaking, reading and writing) and identify children's age / stages bands for each of these. To distinguish developmental progression in the broad age / stage bands, practitioners were asked to identify whether children were emerging (just moving into the band), developing (could be described by some of the development statements but not all) or secure (securely in the age / stage band). This system was developed in partnership with the local authority officers from the eight participating local authorities.

ECU were keen to estimate the progress made and in order to allow analysis across the bands, each of these sub-banded levels were assigned a rating value. A breakdown of the EYFS bands, and the rating value assigned for analyses, are shown in Table 19. It should be borne in mind that due to the overlap between age bands the findings can only be indicative.

Table 19. EYFS bands and analysis rating number

Age stage / band	Progression in band	Rating value
Birth – 11 months	Emerging	1
	Developing	2
	Secure	3
8 - 20 months	Emerging	4
	Developing	5
	Secure	6
16 – 26 months	Emerging	7
	Developing	8
	Secure	9
22 – 36 months	Emerging	10
	Developing	11
	Secure	12
30 – 50 months	Emerging	13
	Developing	14
	Secure	15
40 – 60 + months (including children in Reception classes)	Emerging	16
	Developing	17
	Secure	18
	Meeting the Early Learning Goal for this area	19

A numeric average was calculated across the five key areas, and compared pre- and post-project data. There was an increase in observed attainment, across all five areas. As shown in Table 20, average attainment sub-band values were between 10 (16 - 26 months, emerging) and 12 (22 - 36 months, secure) prior to Making it REAL training. After the Making it REAL programme, this was between 12 (22 - 36 months, secure) and 14 (30 - 50 months, developing). Over the approximately five months of the project there was an average increase of nearly two sub-stages / bands when comparing pre- and post-project data. For instance, this could reflect an increase in a band for a

particular area (e.g. writing: 30-50 months emerging to 30-50 months secure), or between bands for a particular area (e.g. reading: 22-36 months secure to 30-50 months developing.)

Table 20. Attainment ratings

Area	Average rating pre-REAL	Average rating post-REAL	Average change in rating
Listening and attention	11.4	13.3	+1.9
Understanding	11.3	13.2	+1.9
Speaking	10.8	12.3	+1.6
Reading	11.1	13.0	+2.0
Writing	11.1	13.2	+1.8

Progress and attainment compared to age in months

Children's bands were compared to their age, across the five EYFS areas (Table 21). In each of the five learning and development stages of the EYFS (listening and attention; understanding; speaking; reading and writing) statistical analyses showed a statistically significant increase in attainment. Therefore, there was a decrease in the number of children who scored *lower* than their expected band after REAL and an increase in the number who were *within* their band.

In order to understand these results further, progress was compared by a range of factors including gender, EAL and SEND (Table 22). In terms of gender, both the number of girls and boys within their expected band increased across the five learning and development stages over the five months. However this increase was not always statistically significant. Both boys and girls showed a statistically significant increase for speaking, understanding, and listening and attention, but only boys showed a statistically significant increase for reading and writing.

For children with EAL there were increases across the board between the start and the end of the project. Whilst clear progression was observed there were fewer statistically significant increases for children with EAL compared with non-EAL children. However, there were statistically significant increases from the pre- to the post-Making it REAL data when it came to the number of children with EAL who were within their bands for listening and attention; and understanding.

Table 22 also shows the figures for children with SEND who were within their band at the start and at the end of the project. For listening and attention the number of children who were within their band doubled over the life of the project and there were small increases for speaking and reading. There were no statistically significant increases for children with SEND. However, these findings may be anticipated due to the varied nature of the needs of the children with SEND, the short time frame of the project may not have allowed the full impact on children involved in the project to be observed; and the comparatively smaller sample sizes for children with SEND and EAL making it difficult to achieve statistical significance⁴³.

⁴³ Larger sample sizes provide a higher reliability that the findings accurately reflect the population. With smaller sample sizes there is insufficient evidence to establish a difference between children with EAL and non-EAL, and SEND and non-SEND.

Table 21. Attainment bands compared with age⁴⁴

	Listening and attention		Understanding		Speaking		Reading		Writing	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Exceeding	3 (0.7%)	3 (0.7%)	2 (0.5%)	4 (1.0%)	8 (2.0%)	10 (2.4%)	8 (1.9%)	10 (2.4%)	16 (3.8%)	13 (3.1%)
Within	193 (46.0%)	228 (54.7%)	186 (44.6%)	223 (53.5%)	136 (32.6%)	177 (42.4%)	152 (36.5%)	191 (45.8)	156 (37.4%)	207 (49.6%)
Below	220 (52.8%)	175 (42.0%)	227 (54.4%)	185 (44.4%)	257 (61.6%)	211 (50.6%)	235 (56.4%)	101 (45.8%)	226 (54.0%)	173 (41.5%)

Table 22. Number within their band for each area

	EAL		SEND		Males		Females	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Listening and attention	56	59	10	20	105	130	87	98
Understanding	46	76	14	12	119	133	67	90
Speaking	47	57	9	10	80	105	72	91
Reading	45	65	8	9	84	118	87	90
Writing	51	69	19	18	77	128	99	103

⁴⁴ Percentages have taken missing responses into account and therefore do not total 100%.

Parents' conversations with practitioners

As part of the observation forms, practitioners were asked to rate parents' confidence in engaging with them. Table 23 shows that there was an increase in parental confidence following participation in the Making it REAL project.

Table 23. Parents' confidence

Frequency	Pre- REAL ⁴⁵	Post- REAL ⁴⁶
Appear / feel very confident (5)	16.5% (N = 69)	39.1% (N = 163)
Appear / feel quite confident (4)	38.4% (N = 160)	22.8% (N = 95)
Appear / feel confident (3)	22.5% (N = 94)	32.9% (N = 137)
Do not appear / feel very confident (2)	15.3% (N = 64)	2.9% (N = 12)
Do not appear / feel at all confident (1)	5.0% (N = 21)	1.0% (N = 4)

In order to test this statistically, each level of frequency was assigned a numeric value as shown in brackets above. There was a statistically significant increase in how confident parents are in speaking with practitioners. This increased from an average of 3.29 prior to Making it REAL training, to 4.08 after receiving the training. This did not differ across gender, or children with EAL or SEND.

Number of events attended

Practitioners were also asked to report on the number of events children had attended. Over half of children attended three or more events. When considering how many events children attended, correlations showed that there were no statistically significant correlations between gender, or children with EAL or SEND and how many events were attended.

Table 24. Number of events attended by children⁴⁷

Number of events	Children attended
No events	5.5% (N = 23)
One event	12.2% (N = 51)
Two events	22.8% (N = 95)
Three events	40.3% (N = 168)
More than three events	13.9% (N = 58)

2.4.5. Parents' views on the impacts of Making it REAL

Parents were asked for their views on the impacts of Making it REAL via a questionnaire and interviews. They were asked to comment on both the impact upon their children and themselves.

2.4.5.1. Impacts on children

In the interviews parents were asked what they felt had been the main impact on the children. Parents said that in general the relevant children were excited, a bit surprised, and really enjoyed having the staff visiting them at home. Children were also said to enjoy all the other trips and activities arranged under Making it REAL, such as outings to libraries, shopping centres, farms and zoos. The main differences noted in relation to home visits was the combination of the enjoyment children derived from having personalised and individual attention from practitioners, in the comfort and familiar environment of their own home. Children were said to have responded very well to all the activities tried by the staff on the home visit.

A range of positive changes were noted in participating children by parents. For example, children

⁴⁵ This was not answered for 9 children

⁴⁶ This was not answered for 6 children

⁴⁷ Information was not provided for 22 children

were much more interested in books, stories and reading, getting more involved and excited and acting out parts of the story:

'He used to read before, but since he has done the REAL course he understands books a lot more, points at pictures and knows how to turn a page. He is interested in books a lot more'

Parent

Children were said to be speaking more clearly, were more confident to talk and used more words. Parents had observed that their children were taking more notice of the items around them when outside the house and were better able to recognise places, buildings, logos and numbers. Children were seen to be more creative, undertaking more mark making and to have better fine-motor control of pens or other mark making equipment.

Parents perceived their children to be calmer and '*more level*' at home, as well as more self-confident and independent. In one case, parents reported that following the practitioners' support as regards to their child's behaviour, focus and concentration had helped greatly; while suggestions on managing mealtimes had reduced another child's 'fussiness' around food.

Parents often described using what they had picked up from Making it REAL with their other children, both older and younger. In one instance a slightly older sibling got involved in the home visit, enjoyed it and as a result both children played more together. In another family, an older sibling began to read and sing with the younger child if the parents were busy.

Interviewees said they often shared what they had learnt with the children's grandparents and other relatives, who generally tried to pursue the same approach such as reading and singing with the child, or with their own children. One grandparent described it as a big '*learning curve*', and commented on how different it was to the parenting she had experienced and provided.

2.4.5.2. Impacts upon themselves

Ninety-two responses were received to the parent survey. Two said that they had not been part of the Making it REAL programme and therefore they were removed from the analysis. Of the remaining respondents, all said that they had taken part, with the exception of one who said they were unsure. However, as they answered the other questions about their experiences of Making it REAL, their answers were used in the analysis. Therefore all percentages are out of 90.

2.4.5.3. Supporting their children's learning

Parents were also asked how much the Making it REAL literacy home visits, events and activities helped them to support their child across a range of areas, on a three point scale.

The answers are presented in Table 25 below, which shows in most case (between 70% and 80% for all questions), parents felt that Making it REAL had helped them 'a great deal.'

Table 25. How Making it REAL has helped parents to support children⁴⁸

Area	Not at all	A little	A great deal
Learning about books	4.4% (N = 4)	20.0% (N = 18)	75.5% (N =68)
Making marks and saying what they mean	4.4% (N = 4)	22.2% (N = 20)	72.2% ((N =65)
Using environmental print, such as signs, notices and logos	2.2% (N = 2)	276.6 (N =24)	71.1% (N =64)
Joining in with songs or rhymes	0.0% (N = 0)	20.0% (N = 18)	78.8% (N = 71)

Parents were asked whether they do any new things at home to help their child learn, following the

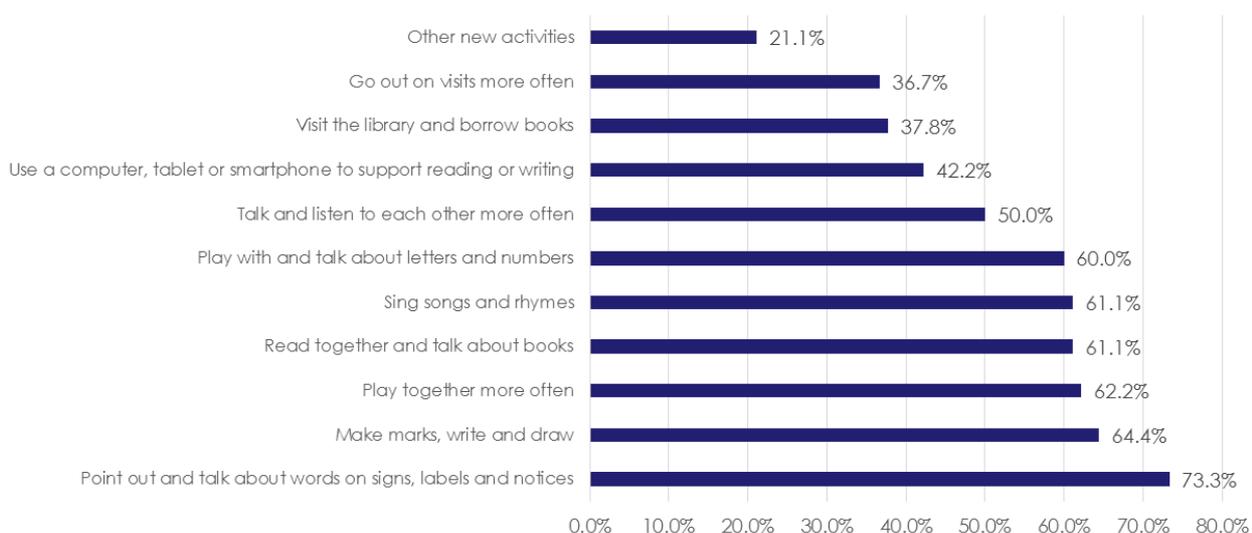
⁴⁸ With the exception of 'Learning about books' one respondent did not answer these questions and therefore responses total 89.

Making it REAL home visits. Of the 89 respondents who answered this question, 94.3% ($N = 85$) said 'yes' and only 5.6% ($N = 5$) said 'maybe / not sure'.

Parents were then asked specifically to select any new things that they do at home with their child. 88 respondents answered this question.

The most common response from parents was that they now 'point out and talk about words on signs, labels and notices' with nearly three quarters answering in this way (Figure 10). However, just over a third said that they now 'go out on visits more often' and 'visit the library and borrow books.' Of the 21.1% who provided an 'other' response, only nine specified what these other new activities were. This included: cooking more and using recipes (2); more messy related play (2); using blank books and stickers (2); drawing pictures (1); use of play dough and shapes (1); and the activities learnt on the Making it REAL project (1).

Figure 10. New things parents now do at home with their child



Parents were asked if they had any concerns about their child's learning or development. The majority said that they did not have any concerns about their child's learning or development (75.5%, [$N = 68$]). However, just under quarter said that they did have concerns about their child's learning or development (22.2%, [$N = 20$]). One respondent said that they were unsure, and another said that they would prefer not to say.

Those parents who said that they did have concerns, were asked how the Making it REAL home visits had been useful to them and their child. Of the 20 respondents who answered, most said that members of staff are supporting their child in new ways at pre-school, nursery or school (15).

Table 26. How Making it REAL has helped parents to support children

Area	Frequency
Members of staff are supporting my child in new ways at pre-school, nursery or school	15
I now know more about how to support my child at home	15
Members of staff have told me about other services that I could use with my child – e.g. library, rhyme-time or Children's Centre activities	12
Joining in with songs or rhymes	9

In their interviews parents were asked about the impacts of being involved in Making it REAL. They

reported that they now **read more** with their children, including those who already read books with them.

'I said I read books to her anyway as much as I could. I think it's pushed me more, to do it more because I've realised how important it is ... I started to actually point to the words, so that [the child] knows these words'

Parent

Parents reported that they now pointed to words and pictures as they read and tried to keep the child's interest. They felt more aware of the wider importance of stories and rhymes, how to elaborate on a book and share the story experience, rather than sticking rigorously to the given text. As a result they said they were making up more stories, talking around the story and wider aspects in a book and asking the children to input more and to discuss the plot, characters or illustrations.

'... instead of me just reading to her, I involve her in reading the story with me'

Parent

They appreciated being able to borrow books and story bags from settings. Membership and use of libraries had also increased.

One parent, who was not confident speaking English and as a result had not previously read to her child, was now looking at and reading books to her child every day, sometimes with the help of an older sibling. Now, they both enjoyed books as a shared experience, looking at the pictures together and trying to make out the words and story together.

These changes were promoted by the home visits and the information and advice provided by the practitioners. Parents watched and tried to emulate the techniques used by the practitioners during the home visits. Interviewees said that they now understood more about how children learn and the techniques to support this, plus how important it was to encourage the child to be involved and use their own imagination.

Parents they were **talking more** with their children, making up more stories with them, including while they were playing, and singing nursery rhymes and other songs much more often. The children were said to thoroughly enjoy this.

'You just start singing the song and I think that she learns a lot better that way, because she is actually looking at it ... rather than just singing a song and not knowing the meaning behind it... When I was doing the rhymes with her I was telling her to go and pick up the animal and she was picking up the right one. And then I know as well: "Oh, she's understanding and she's learning"'

Parent

Differences in how parents approached conversing with their children and correcting language and speech were also noted and were said to have followed the advice given by Making it REAL practitioners. For example, rather than correcting their child when they pronounced a word wrongly, the adults had learned instead to repeat the word in question, but in the correct way. For example if a child could not use the 'S' sound and pronounced 'nake' rather than 'snake', parents would say 'snake'. Parents who spoke languages besides English at home had been reassured that it was helpful, rather than detrimental, to their child's language development to speak the home language with them. Commonly, parents had been worried about their children's speech development, but appreciated getting advice that it was in the normal range, as well as useful tips and information.

'I feel I can help him a lot more with his speech and reading'

Parent

Interviewees attributed the changes in their approach to the explanations given by the

practitioners during Making it REAL, whilst they had always been keen to help develop their children's speech, vocabulary and linguistic skills and wanted their children to be ready for school. For example the importance of using singing and rhymes, or of linking what was being described orally to tangible objects, and/or to what the child would next see or do, had provided new insights and understanding.

Since the home visits and going on Making it REAL **environmental print** trips, parents reported that they were pursuing more environmental print ideas, both around the house and when out and about during routine activities. Looking at signs, labels and landmarks, making shopping lists and discussing what the child could see on the street were said to have made children more aware of the world around them. As well as increasing their recognition of logos, word patterns and numbers, it also resulted in one family taking more walks together.

'When going to the bus stop, now [she] asks questions like "What is that used for?"'

Parent

The beauty of Making it REAL in their minds was its simplicity and accessibility, which contrasted positively with other 'overwhelming' information, on how to support children's learning. They were impressed and surprised with the effectiveness of a relatively simple method, which they could easily do during other daily activities. All but one said they would not have done this without the input from the practitioners.

Parents reported that as a result of the home visits, they were now encouraging their children to try **more painting, drawing and mark making** using different media and understood how it could help underpin early writing skills. On top of using bespoke arts and crafts materials somewhat more, they also understood and said they were much more likely to encourage mark making with household materials, such as water, flour, pasta, glue or sand. Since Making it REAL, one parent had bought chinks and encouraged her child to make marks in the back yard. All felt they had a better idea of how to encourage certain aspects, such as pencil control.

Parents attributed the change directly to the advice and demonstrations given by the practitioners, as well as the resources they provided. Concerns about children's skills in this area were common across this group and so this guidance was well received.

As a result of participating in Making it REAL and especially the home visits, these parents reported that they understood child development much more and were more aware of general ideas and specific techniques to supporting this. One parent commented that it is difficult for parents to know what is best to do and what works, without some external input.

'It's the basics. Sometimes you don't realise how easy it can be to just apply techniques ... in everyday situations'

Parent

These parents described being a lot more 'hands-on' at home and having a greater understanding of the importance of spending discrete time with each child and playing with them. They said they now saw how important play was in itself, as well as its role in helping child development, literacy and other skills. They had become adamant converts to the importance of play.

'I think it's very important to use that time with my child to learn and play, because it helps them, obviously, ultimately to progress in their own learning, and playing is one of the best ways they can do that'

Parent

Interviewees said they learnt how to be **more creative** and make activities and art out of everyday household items, and relied on television less to entertain their children. They appreciated being given so many ideas of being creative cheaply and easily, using accessible materials. Accessibility was key, such as joint cooking and baking, or painting with water or pasta, or looking for logos when out shopping, or reading road signs and symbols when driving.

'I think the techniques that have been applied, and how to apply it to a child, the knowledge has expanded without realising the simpler ways to actually teach a child... Just sitting in the car and pointing out logos and things like that. Sometimes you just sit at the traffic lights and you just, you don't even realise, and I think it's helped a lot'

Parent

They also said they learnt more about encouraging creativity and learning through play and were fascinated to see how household objects or cooking could assist development. In turn this reduced the pressure on them to buy toys.

'I used to do things at home but this showed me how I could do other things. They showed us how to make home-made play-doh as it's obviously cheaper and it's getting the child to help you as well. Using pasta shapes - there are many things you can do with pasta shapes! So it has helped me to think differently, before I would have just had toys or books out.'

Parent

Since Making it REAL, pictures and work children had produced were more likely to be praised, saved and displayed in the home or stuck in a scrapbook. Parents also felt they now knew how to develop and elaborate an activity, such as discussing colours while painting. Houses were reported to have been made more 'child friendly'. More mess and messy play was allowed along with more cooking with children and using the floor to make pictures.

Parents appreciated getting **helpful advice** and techniques such as on potty training, healthier eating, concentration and behaviour and had been applying these methods since the home visits. For example one parent felt they had a better idea of how to maintain their child's concentration, by following their interests, while also getting their cooperation by telling them the sequence of activities and what would be happening next.

On top of getting direct reassurance from practitioners during the programme, the parents we interviewed said that trying out the Making it REAL approach helped to feel more confident about their role and the positive input they could provide. Prior to taking part in Making it REAL confidence was often lacking in this regard. As a result they did not feel able to read to their children, or draw with them, or help their speech and language. They were reassured that they were capable of undertaking positive, beneficial, activities with their children. Besides following the ideas suggested during the Making it REAL project, they reported feeling more empowered and creative to generate their own. Moreover, they said they were more likely to simply 'go with the flow' of what the child wanted to do and they reported being less anxious about their children's progress and development. Their children had responded positively.

'I think I'm more relaxed to be honest, and more confident and know what to apply'

Parent

'It's just helped to know that what you're doing is right and that there's no really right or wrong way of playing with her, as long as there's language, opportunities and variety, and obviously love. What's helped me is knowing that there's people there that I can turn to should I need to know something or am worried about something'

Parent

Much of the change was attributed to staff spending time with the child and parents in their own home, where all were more relaxed and open. Moreover their attitude and approachability was praised for supporting parents, rather than making them feel judged or intimidated.

An added bonus to Making it REAL was the improved relationships it facilitated between parents and a reduction in their sense of isolation as a result; something that practitioners talked about too in their interviews. Parents appreciated the mutual support and felt that they had learnt a lot from the others, but that they would not have approached them previously. They had also been encouraged to look at the internet for information and ideas on creative activities to pursue with their children.

Parents answering the survey were asked if they had any other comments about the Making it REAL project. Sixty-four parents made 'other' comments and these have been grouped below into categories (Table 27). Most comments were positive.

Table 27. Parents other comments

Comment	Frequency
Enjoyment of the project	34
Looking for new ways to help them learn now / using new activities	19
Child learning more / more confidence	15
Positive comments about staff	4
Course could have been longer	2
Good that younger children / family can take part	2
No real change since taking part	2
Improved relationship with child	1
Should be targeted at those who need it	1
Would have been better suited to a school class	1
Good to learn in different environments	1
Useful gifts	1
Unclear goals	1

2.4.6. Practitioners' views on the impact on parents

In their interviews practitioners said that the more parents were engaged, the more their children got out of the programme. As well as maintaining generally high attendance rates, many positive changes among parents were reported, especially relating to:

- **Parental confidence and skills**

Parents were observed to be more knowledgeable and confident in their own ability to support their children, from having a better understanding of how best they could help children's reading, literacy and communication. For example the parents involved started visiting their local libraries more, had more books at home and borrowed more books from the settings and libraries. Making it REAL outings to the library were said to have '*opened up another world*' for them. Previously many had not known where their local library was, or what was on offer, or how to use it.

Across all the settings and demographics, parents were said to be more confident to read to their children, were reading more and making stories a fixed part of the daily routine. The increased likelihood to read to their children, together with greater understanding of how important this could be, was attributed directly to Making it REAL.

'One parent shared that she has started reading at bedtime to her son and it is something that she really enjoyed. Whereas at the start of the project she said that she never did that, as he did not listen...'

Practitioner

- **Perceptions around play, reading and literacy**

Children were said to be benefitting from and enjoying more focused activities at home, as well as more direct attention from parents, within a more relaxed, playful and exploratory approach. Parents were observed to have an increased understanding of the importance of play in itself, as well as its role in helping child development, literacy and other skills. As a result the television was relied on less and turned off more.

'Before they did not think play was worthy... the parents here did not believe that play is learning. They leave children [in the setting] to play. So there are parents who have changed their views'

Practitioner

In particular parents were now more likely to try some form of messy play at home, for example making their own play-dough, or using corn flour. Previously the idea of making such a mess at home would have been out of the question in many cases. Practitioners noted that parents had become more aware of how children can make marks, its developmental role and how to support this in a wide range of ways which, even though they may not necessarily look like 'writing', support children's writing development. Parents were more aware and more willing to engage in these activities, while simultaneously being more relaxed about formal 'writing' at a young age:

'It's not about trying to get them to write ABC or write their name. This is what every parent wants their child to do. It's about all the other things they could do'

Practitioner

'It's finding out what's best for the family really... and you do that by going into the home and finding out what they enjoy playing with and what they like... you get the best out of your child'

Practitioner

Initially, the parents were said to be quite doubtful about environmental print. When they tried it they were impressed at how many things their children identified. Practitioners reported that parents were keener to borrow books from the setting, took out more and that these were more diverse and more attuned to the interests of the child, including more factual books. Parents were impressed by the research on how reading can enhance a child's literacy, and were reading more to their children as a result.

- **Communication and attention**

A notable change was the amount of attention parents paid to their children, a factor sometimes reported to be lacking before participating in Making it REAL: it was said by practitioners that previously children were often expected to play alone. Alongside a better understanding of why play was essential, parents visibly focusing on what their child was doing and saying was observed to have improved. Parents were seen to be more aware of the importance of talking with their children about what was happening and what they were observing.

'The parents who participated are now well aware that if they talk to their children about the environment it supports their children'

Practitioner

Practitioners felt that Making it REAL had had positive impact on families where English was spoken as an additional language, in that parents were reassured to speak their home language, and read to their child in their first language, rather than insisting the children only tried to speak English at home.

Rather than putting the television on for the children, parents were sitting down and playing with or reading with their children. Home visiting was felt to have been instrumental to that change.

- **Improved relationships with the early years setting**

One of the strongest findings emerged around improved relationships between the setting and parents, which was largely attributed to home visiting and sharing knowledge with parents about child development and how they learn. Parents were found to be much keener on Making it REAL, once they understood what it entailed and had experienced the benefits, and then much more open and communicative with the early years settings as a result. Practitioners saw this 'softer' impact on rapport as one of the most important outcomes.

The programme was felt to have helped overcome language barriers with these parents. Both the

children and parents were said to feel more at ease. One setting had created a 'word wall' on which the parents wrote words in their own languages and which help them feel more welcomed in the setting.

'I would say that parents are more open and have become more involved, definitely'

Practitioner

Practitioners observed that parents, including but not only those who spoke English as an additional language, came into the setting more than previously, appeared more relaxed there and were much more open and communicative about what they and their children had been doing at home.

Parents began asking questions more confidently and sought advice more readily, such as around eating and sleeping. Improved trust was also said to have made parents less embarrassed and reticent about specific difficulties their children were experiencing, such as speech delays, and to allow the practitioners to make suggestions or referrals, which they may have previously resisted. Previously parents were said to be nervous about being judged on their parenting skills and thus very private and unforthcoming about what happened at home. Improved relationships were said to have a clear benefit on parents' interaction and activities with their children around Making it REAL topics.

'Our relationships with parents are definitely improving. The parents are a lot more willing to work and carry on activities at home and recognise the progress the child is making'

Practitioner

Another benefit noted by settings was that these parents were more willing to volunteer for activities or to help out in the setting, as well as being more sociable with other parents.

2.5. The future of Making it REAL

2.5.1. Local authority views

Interviewees reported that their local authorities were taking the following steps to help embed Making it REAL:

- Ensuring that Making it REAL is **part and parcel of strategic planning** at every level. In other words, both settings in all sectors and the local authority were expected to reflect Making it REAL in all planning and work programmes.
- **Training** was seen as another way to help embed Making it REAL, by training more support professionals in the local authority, as well as training more practitioners in individual settings, including children's centres.
- **Promoting and enabling peer support** across settings.
- **Train the trainers:** One local authority had ensured staff from settings already working with Making it REAL were trained to deliver courses on Making it REAL to new settings in Year 3. This not only helped address resource issues, it made the training more effective. Trainers gave their own testimonies of how Making it REAL had proved effective in their settings and were able to demonstrate what it had achieved.

'... they're doing your marketing for you if you like... saying "it does work because in my setting this has happened"'

Local authority lead

Expanding the ORIM approach to encompass more subjects, not least maths (as has already been developed by NCB) was seen as an important area for development in the future.

As it was felt to be difficult to monitor exactly what training had been received by each practitioner and setting, refresher courses were suggested, along with asking the more experienced settings to provide support to others. Having a good model for sharing information and experience

with others across an authority, as well as mechanisms to ensure mutual support were seen as essential ways forward.

'It's about that cross-fertilisation of working together and practising and sharing what works, so that people can see the difference'

Local authority lead

Using **parents as** Making it REAL '**champions**' was another method used to embed Making it REAL in an area and to help parents be interested in and accept it.

However despite huge enthusiasm for Making it REAL, particularly among settings which had already trialled it, resources were a challenge to being able to grow Making it REAL locally, fund home visits and provide free resources to families. Being able to avail of free training from local authorities was seen as vital for settings. In addition settings were expected to use the Pupil Premium where possible and run fund-raising events.

Good practice ideas were shared with other settings in several ways. Leads often took pictures or recordings of activities run by a setting and shared these, to illustrate to others how it looked in practice, or how parents responded. Examples of Making it REAL were included in newsletters sent to all local settings. Making it REAL was kept as a set item on certain agendas, such as children centres' meetings. As well as organising networking meetings, hub events and other peer support described above, local authorities often launched Making it REAL in a semi-formal way in a new setting. At these, practitioners from other settings would describe their experiences of running Making it REAL.

There were several challenges that were raised about continuing with Making it REAL after March 2016. For example, maintaining the momentum and keeping Making it REAL as a top priority, particularly if impact is slow to be evident. Making it REAL was also said to be much more time consuming at local authority level than originally anticipated. Hence maintaining as high an input of time over the future might prove tricky. Ensuring that evidence continued to be gathered, especially in terms of how the project was being implemented in PVI settings, was seen as a potential issue.

Continuing to provide free training for settings and practitioners was seen as another potential barrier and this was expected to get increasingly challenging as local authorities made further cuts.

Interviewees hoped that embedding Making it REAL as much as possible, especially at a strategic level, and securing buy-in at every level would help some of these challenges at least in the shorter term. One area was supporting children's centres to support Making it REAL in their localities. Being more realistic about the time requirements was felt to be necessary for new local authorities undertaking Making it REAL.

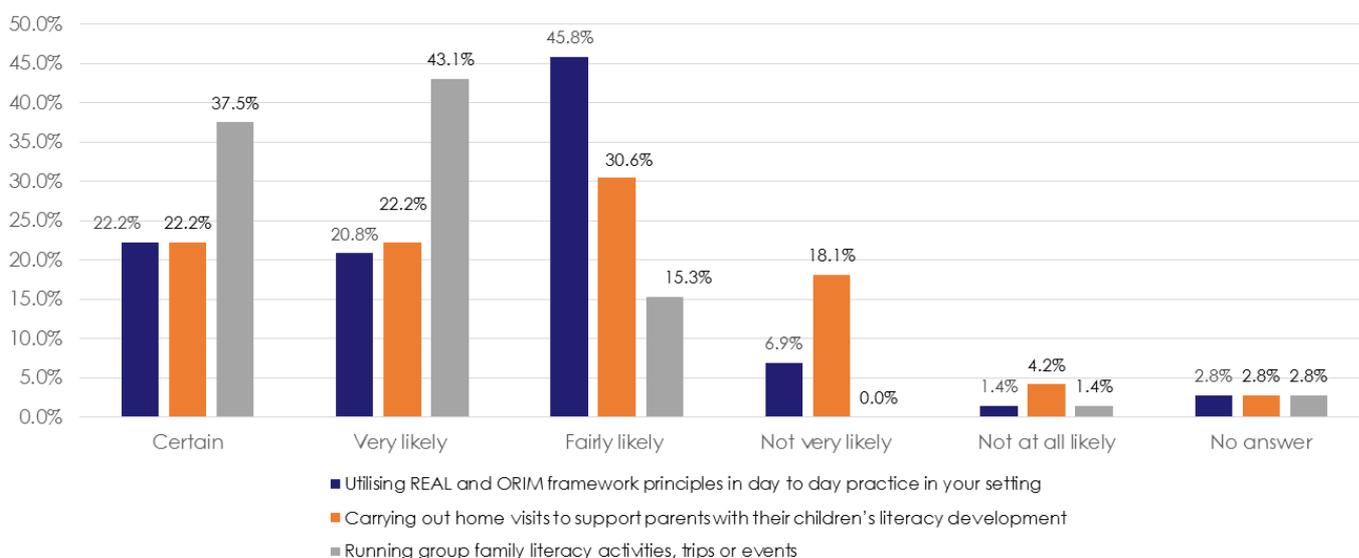
2.5.2. Practitioners views

All practitioners who responded to the practitioner survey answered 'yes' (70.8% [N = 58]) or 'maybe' (26.4% [N = 24]) to continuing with Making it REAL activities after March 2016. One respondent did not answer this question. Respondents were then asked about continuing with specific activities, namely:

- Utilising REAL and ORIM framework principles in day to day practice in their setting;
- Carrying out home visits to support parents with their children's literacy developments; and
- Running group family literacy activities, trips or events.

The activity most likely to continue was running group family, literacy activities, trips of events. However, it was also fairly likely that practitioners would continue to utilise REAL and ORIM framework principles in day to day practice, and carry out home visits to support parents with their children's literacy development. More detail is provided in Table 11.

Figure 11. Activities settings plan to continue



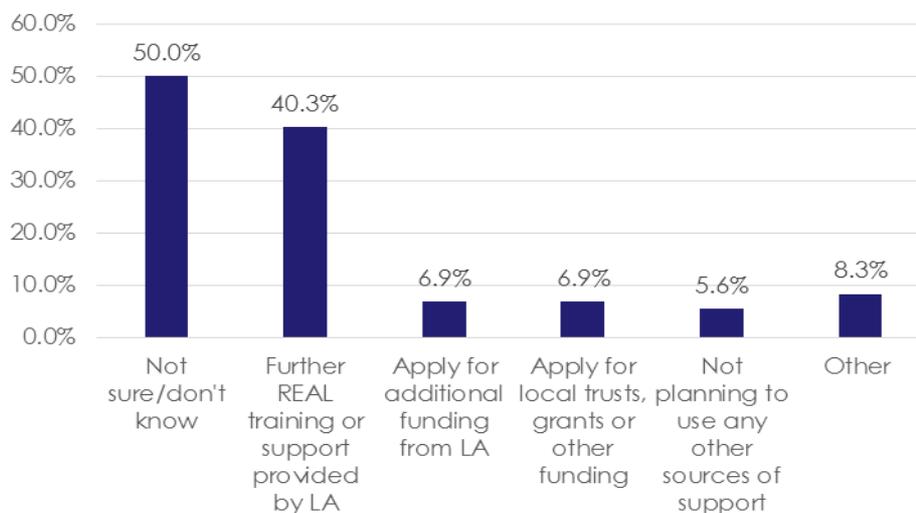
Those who had said that they were unlikely to continue were asked why. Respondents were presented with a list of reasons for not continuing to run group, family literacy activities, trips or events; and not continuing to offer home visits. Frequencies (due to low sample size) for these are shown in Table 28.

Table 28. Reasons why events and home visits are unlikely to continue

	Running group, family literacy activities, trips or events	Home visits
A lack of staff available to deliver / cover them	5	12
Lack of funding / budget	4	5
Organisational aspects/preparation is too time-consuming or burdensome	4	5
Our setting does not have enough staff with sufficient training/confidence	2	2
Our setting is/will be doing other work with families to support literacy	2	2
It is difficult to engage parents	1	1
I don't think there is a need for it	0	0
I don't think it is sufficiently beneficial	0	0
This is not a priority at the moment for our setting	0	2

Practitioners were also asked about any other sources of support they are planning to use in the future to run Making it REAL. As shown in

Figure 12, most said that they were unsure (50.0%, [N = 36]) or planned to use further Making it REAL training or support provided by the local authority (40.2%, [N = 29]). Very few planned to apply for additional funding either from the local authority (6.9%, [N = 5]), or local trusts, grants or other funding (6.9%, [N = 5]). Other comments provided by respondents included that they did not know there was additional funding available from the local authority or trust, while another respondent said they were planning to continue with Making it REAL using school funds. One responded stated that their setting had recently appointed a parent support worker using the EYPP money and part of that role would be to develop Making it REAL in the setting.

Figure 12. Sources of support practitioners planned to use in the future

Practitioners who were interviewed explained that, although the monitoring and measuring of impact was ongoing, positive results were being seen in settings, and that this was a driving factor in continuing with Year 3 of the programme and beyond.

The settings that were concerned about the sustainability of Making it REAL were in very deprived areas and worked with disadvantaged families. Making it REAL was a funded project and on top of training, mentoring and support, NCB provided local authorities with a grant to distribute to settings in any way they thought fit. This was reported to have been mainly used to fund staff training, or staff cover and to buy books and creative materials. Over Year 3 a number of settings had topped this up with the Early Years Pupil Premium, while some had tried to 'going it alone' without NCB support after being involved in the Making it REAL project in Years 1 and 2. This evaluation wanted to explore how much the REAL approach had become part and parcel of how participating settings worked and if and how they would be able to continue Making it REAL without NCB support.

'... the impact on children was measureable, so we had to continue with it... and it has become embedded. We have learned to adapt it to our environment'

Practitioner

Settings reported that they had embedded or were striving to embed what they had learnt from Making it REAL; planned to continue applying the REAL approach in the future; and aimed to eventually train all their staff, who were said to be keen and excited to apply the REAL approach. There was a clear intent to continue key aspects of Making it REAL, particularly: home visits; creative approaches to mark making and literacy; running literacy-related activities, story-telling and public events for families in the setting and beyond; and being innovative with their available resources.

'We are planning more story time with families and mark making activities with families too... We will try to do more events that involve families so it isn't just about dropping off the child and picking them up. We have seen the benefit of so many of these activities that we really want to continue.'

Practitioner

Ensuring that all staff got trained in the REAL approach, methods and skills was seen as essential to embedding the programme fully. In other words, the greatest barrier to the approach becoming rooted in day-to-day delivery, was seen to be staff not comprehending the underpinning concepts and techniques, and in turn the budgeting considerations that went with that training. Providing training (if not available free), cover for those on training courses and covering staff out on home

visits were the main financial challenges mentioned. Several settings had or planned to send staff on 'train the trainer' courses, so that they could share knowledge and skills with their colleagues in a consistent way and facilitate practice improvement across the setting.

A major perceived advantage of REAL was that it extended what settings had previously provided, and wanted to achieve, rather than being a major departure, or duplication. Most notably the Making it REAL child observational data form, along with the emphasis on home visiting and collaborating with parents, helped settings identify those who had additional needs or needed extra support. To this end, Making it REAL was found to be readily adaptable to, and to assist and augment existing work around SEND, supporting those speaking English as an additional language and work with two-year olds. As mentioned above, Making it REAL fitted well with and augmented other assessment approaches and built on previous programmes, such as 'Every Child A Talker'. Its ability to complement other methods and programmes augmented its apparent usefulness and the potential for it to become embedded in the practice of the setting.

On the whole practitioners were totally satisfied with Making it REAL and did not think there was any way to improve on the programme or that it needed to change. The main recommendations were for funding to support practitioners to attend training and for the programme to be rolled out across the country to every early years setting.

Parents were also asked about any improvements they thought could be made in the future. Generally they had really enjoyed the project and could not think of any improvements. Only one person could think of ways in which it could be improved: namely to run more literacy events and provide more home visits, for example, each focusing on a different angle or type of play.

3. Expanding the reach of Making it REAL

This chapter explores two elements intended to expand the reach of the of the Making It REAL project in Year 3: the one-day free national rollout training; and the support packages offered to 15 local authorities. Practitioners who attended the rollout training were asked to complete a feedback form and their views are discussed below. Practitioners' views on the support packages in terms of the training they received and their views about how Making it REAL was being implemented in the local authorities are also reported. Data comes from the setting record forms received from ECU; feedback forms completed by participants of the support packages; three local authority lead interviews; and consultancy forms collected and analysed by ECU.

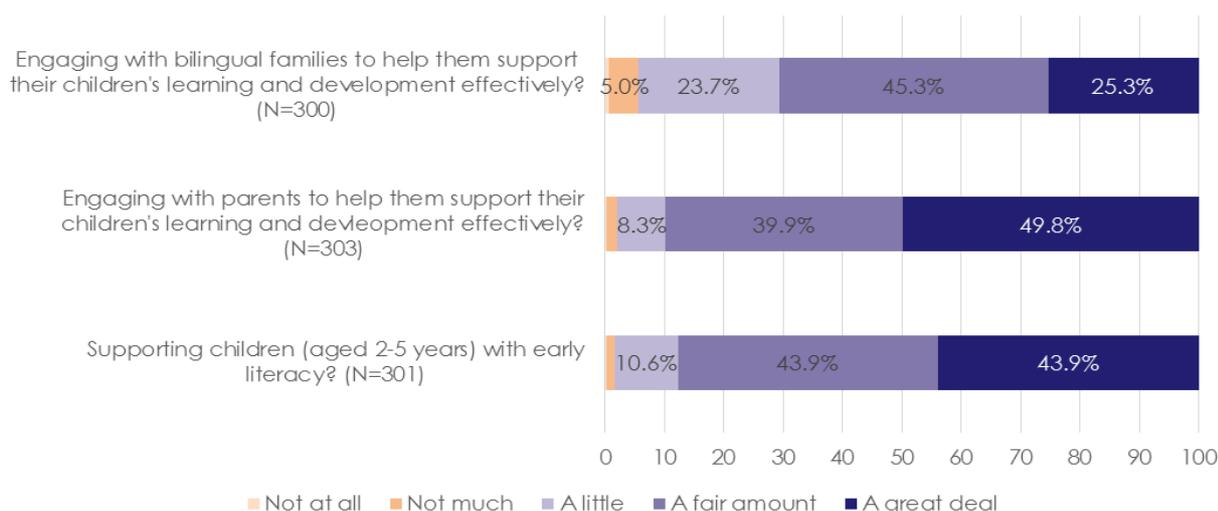
3.1. National Rollout training

As in Years 1 and 2 of the Making it REAL project the one-day national rollout training was delivered by 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. Early years practitioners who attended the training worked with children aged two- to five-years old in childminder, statutory and private, voluntary or independent (PVI) settings.

There were a total of 320 evaluation forms completed for the one-day training and predominately, respondents felt that the one-day training course had meet its aims and objectives (93.9%, [N=313]). Participants' overall assessment of the training was positive, with 72.1% (N = 297) assessing the training as excellent. Participants expressed a high level of confidence in being able to put into practice things that had been discussed and learnt on the training course as over 95% (N= 304) of participants scored this as either four (46.7%) or five (49.0%) on a scale where one meant not at all confident and five meant very confident.

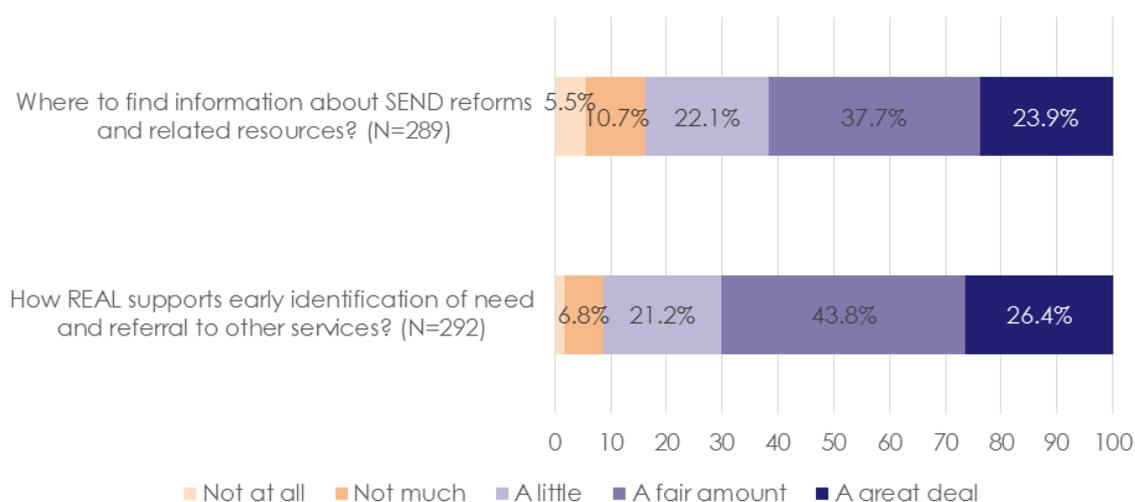
Figure 13 shows that participants' knowledge around various aspects of the Making it REAL project had improved as a result of attending the training. For example, nearly 90% of respondents indicated that their knowledge had improved a fair amount (39.9%) or a great deal (49.8%) in terms of how to engage with parents to help them support their children's learning. Similarly just under 90% of respondents believed that their knowledge had improved either a fair amount (43.9%) or a great deal (43.9%) when it came to supporting children aged two- to five-years with early literacy.

Figure 13. Level of improvement in participants' knowledge after the one-day training



Respondents were asked how the training had improved their knowledge about how Making it REAL supports early identification of need and referral to other services; and where to find information about SEND reforms and related resources. Figure 14 indicates that participants generally felt that the training had improved their knowledge either a little, a fair amount or a great deal for both areas. For example, 43.8% of participants said that the training had improved their knowledge a fair amount and 26.4% a great deal when it came to understanding how Making it REAL supports the early identification of need. Three out of five respondents reported their knowledge improving a fair amount (37.7%) or a great deal (23.9%) in terms of knowing where to find information about the SEND reforms.

Figure 14. Level of improvement of participants' knowledge for SEND and early identification of need after the one-day training



3.2. Support Packages

Neighbourhood hub events, run by three local authorities who had been involved in the Making it REAL project since Year 1, were organised to promote Making it REAL to new local authorities. Strategic leads were invited to attend the hub events through various mechanisms, namely through:

- Promotion by the Learning and Work Institute and ECU's other partners PACEY, PSLA and NDNA;
- Regional contacts held by the local authorities hosting the hub events; and
- ECU's reach to new support package areas.

Using a variety of approaches to recruit attendees ensured that family learning professionals, PVI settings, and childminders were represented.

Some of the attendees at the hub events were from local authorities that took up support packages to introduce Making it REAL In Year 3. For the 15 local authorities that took part in the support package a mixture of training and consultancy support was offered. This involved training on how to deliver Making it REAL and on-going consultancy support to help with implementation. In this section participants' views of the hub events and training; a description of the settings involved in Making it REAL through the support packages; and local authority representatives' views about the support packages is provided.

3.2.1. Views on the Neighbourhood hub events

Three neighbourhood hub events were hosted and co-produced by three of the eight existing Making it REAL local authority development areas. The neighbourhood hub events were designed

to showcase three local authority Making it REAL projects to a wider audience of strategic leads from local authorities and early years organisations interested in setting up a Making it REAL project locally.

The aims of the neighbourhood hub events were:

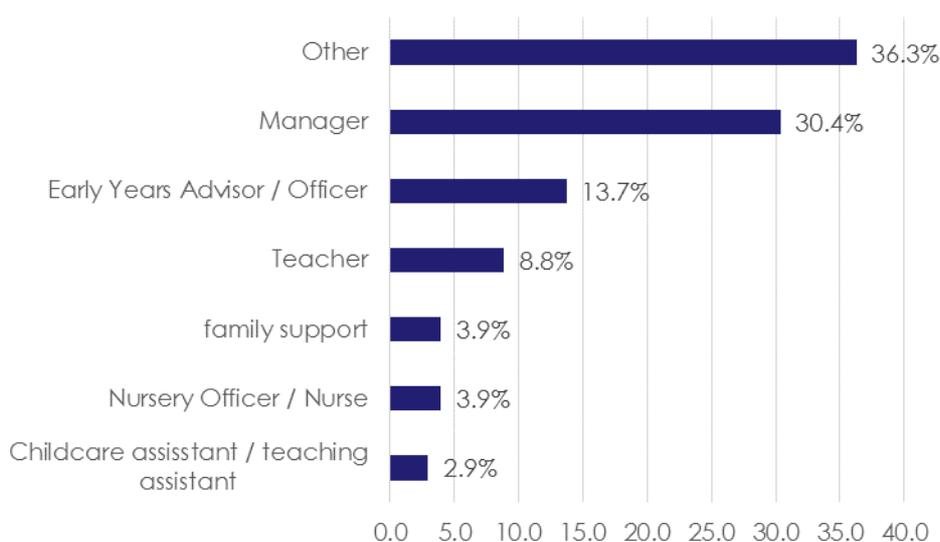
- To facilitate the **sharing and exchange of knowledge, experience and achievements in delivering Making it REAL** between a hub local authority development area and potential new areas across neighbouring regions.
- To provide information on the **use of the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)** and support EYPP uptake to deliver targeted REAL literacy interventions in areas of disadvantage.
- To **provide strategies on increasing the inclusion of families through REAL project work**, particularly disadvantaged two-year olds; children with special educational needs and disabilities; and bilingual families who are less likely to engage in services.
- To **raise the profile** of the Making it REAL project and its impact nationally to enable new project areas to be established.

The objectives of these events were:

- To provide a platform to **hear directly from the host local authority project and participants** about their experience, stories, and impact through presentations, discussions and displays.
- To provide **presentation/discussion on EYPP** including addressing challenges and opportunities for its use in implementing and sustaining REAL interventions alongside other funding streams.
- To have a **targeted approach to recruitment of attendees** linked to the recruitment of support package local authorities, partner engagement and geographic access to the hub locality.
- To provide **inclusion focused workshops** on two-year olds, bilingual families and SEND.

A total of 105 evaluation forms were completed from the three Making it REAL Neighbourhood Hub Events. Nearly half of the respondents (47.9%) were local authority employed, just over a quarter (27.1%) worked in a school and 8.3% represented PVI settings. In terms of job role just over a third of participants (36.3%) were classified as other which included consultants and school improvement officers. Nearly a third of participants (30.4%) were managers and 13.7% were early year officers / advisors (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Breakdown of participants' job roles (N = 102)



Ninety-nine percent of respondents felt that the event was either excellent (62.9%) or good (36.2%) saying:

Clear, concise, lots of practical advice and ideas of how Making it REAL can be delivered within different contexts.

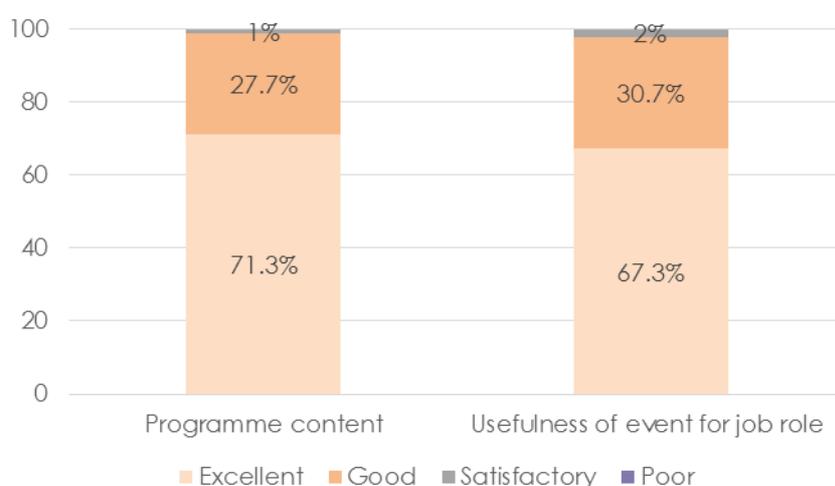
Early Years Advisor / Officer

Great for ideas/information sharing. Love the ORIM framework!

Manager of a PVI setting

Similarly, participants were asked to give their views about the content of the day. Overall, the programme content was seen by the majority as being either excellent (71.3%) or good (27.7%) and the usefulness of the day was viewed as excellent by two-thirds of respondents (67.3%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Participants' views about the hub event programme content and usefulness of the event



Respondents were also asked about their views on the presentations throughout the day. Generally participants were extremely positive:

Presentations really captured REAL and the impact it has

Manager of a PVI setting

Extremely valuable content. I particularly liked learning about how Peterborough presented their data and evidence about what the success of REAL.

Teacher at Local Authority school

At each event an area-specific presentation was given providing information on how Making it REAL was being used in that region. Of the 103 respondents who answered this question nearly three-quarters (74.8%) thought this presentation was excellent, 24.3% good and 1% satisfactory. At two of the events there was a presentation about the Early Years Pupil Premium. Of the 54 participants given this presentation nine-out of ten thought that it was excellent (44.4%) or good (48.1%) with remainder (7.4%) believing it was satisfactory. The hub events provided opportunities for discussion about the use of EYPP. The intention was to support settings to see how they could use existing funding streams to commission support to help meet their requirements for narrowing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. Feedback at the hub events however showed that local authorities and settings were in general experiencing delays in accessing EYPP funds and were not yet able to share much on practice on how they were using it effectively.

Each event then had a tailored presentation(s) covering different topics. Table 29 shows respondents views to each presentation. Again, participants were generally very positive about

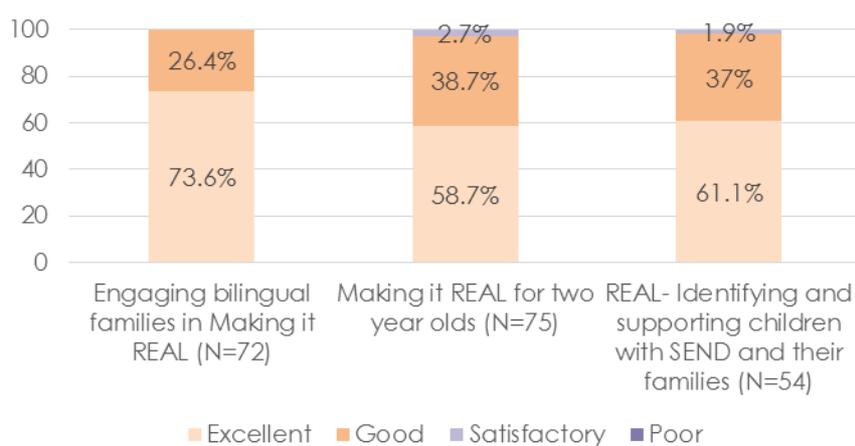
each presentation; especially 'REAL progress in Blackpool' with four out of five respondents (79.8%) believing this presentation to be excellent.

Table 29. Participants' views on hub event presentations

Event and presentation	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Poor
Event 1: Family Learning Practice and REAL (N=25)	44.0%	48.0%	8.0%	0.0%
Event 2: Home-based settings: childminders perspective (N=26)	69.2%	26.9%	3.8%	0.0%
Event 3: Reflecting on REAL (N=46)	80.4%	17.4%	2.2%	0.0%
Event 3: REAL progress in Blackpool (N=44)	79.8%	20.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Similarly, respondents were asked their views on the three workshops: engaging bilingual families; Making it REAL for two-year olds; and identifying and supporting children with SEND and their families (Figure 17). Participants were positive about each workshop, for example, nearly three-quarters (73.6%) thought the engaging bilingual families was excellent and three out of five (61.1%) respondents indicated that identifying and supporting children with SEND as excellent.

Figure 17. Participants' views on the hub event workshops



Finally, participants were asked what they would do as a result of attending the event. Two main themes emerged from the responses.

- **Implement and expand the Making it REAL project**

Participants reported feeling *energised* and *excited* after the training and were keen to either start looking at ways of implementing Making it REAL or, if they were already involved in the project, thinking about how they might improve or expand what they were doing. This included introducing or increasing the amount of home visits, organising a parent forum based on Making it REAL or implementing 'A REAL approach to Maths'.

- **Sharing information and encouraging good practice**

Participants talked about cascading the information to their teams and linking in with other practitioners in order to share the information from the event and improve practice. Several participants reflected that they hoped this would help to embed the Making it REAL project.

3.2.2. Description of settings and children involved in the support packages

Of the 15 support packages, 12 returned data to ECU consisting of setting record forms where their

project work had progressed to recruiting families. Other local authorities sent back narrative information via email or phone. Across these 12 support packages, 76 early years settings took part. A breakdown by local authority is shown in Table 30.

Table 30. Number of settings across support packages⁴⁹

Local authority support packages	Number of settings
Newham	12
Durham	9
Nottinghamshire	9
Sefton	9
Hull	7
Barking & Dagenham	7
Bolton	6
Brent	6
Warrington	5
Essex	4
Hertfordshire	2
Total number of participating settings	76

Settings were coded by type into five groupings. Setting type information was available for **62 settings**. The largest group of settings (28 in total) was Private, Voluntary and Independent settings (PVI). The next largest group was children's centres, with 21 settings registering for the project. See Table 31 for more information.

Table 31. Settings registering for the Making it REAL project (support packages) by type

Setting type	Frequency
PVI nursery, pre-school or playgroup	28
Children's Centre, including those attached to primary schools	21
Primary School or Academy nursery or reception class	8
Maintained nursery school or nursery school & children's centre	5
Total	62

In total, 273 children registered to take part in the Making it REAL project via support packages. Gender information was given for **260 children**. There were **156 boys (60%) and 104 girls (40%)** taking part. Age information was given for 254 children. A breakdown of ages can be seen in Table 32.

⁴⁹ Knowsley local authority returned information about numbers of participating children, but not about the number of settings.

Table 32. Children registered for Making it REAL by age

Children registered for the Making it REAL project (support packages) by age	Frequency
Under two	3
Aged 2	79
Aged 3	125
Aged 4	41
Aged 5	6
Total	254

Additional information provided by settings included:

- **12 individual siblings** benefitted from activities during the Making it REAL support packages. This included younger or older siblings of any age.
- A total of **107 home visits** were held across the support packages.
- **16 literacy events** were held across the support packages. Events were often extended to all the children in the setting, not just the registered project children. Settings were therefore asked to record **the total number of children attending events, which was 297⁵⁰**.
- **Two volunteers** were recorded as being involved in support package projects.

Data provided above was collected several months before the end of the projects in support package areas. Therefore the predicted final numbers are likely to be higher.

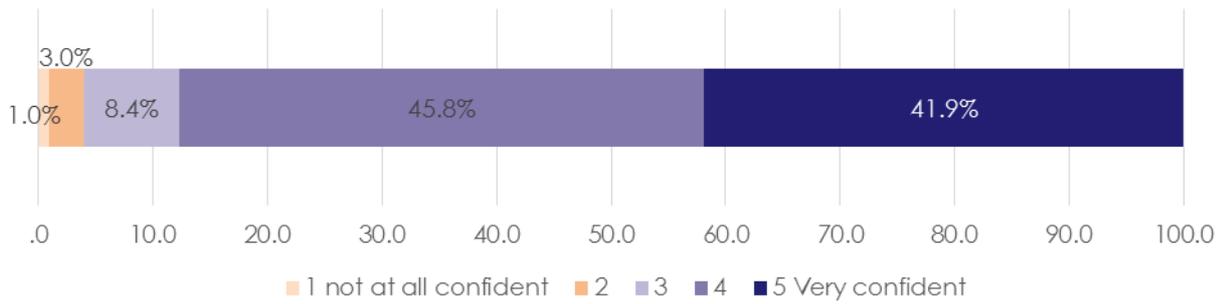
3.2.3. Views on the training in support package areas

Local authorities implementing Making it REAL through a support package were offered a one- or two-day training session for early years practitioners, delivered by an NCB associate trainer. Evaluation forms were distributed at the end of the support package sessions. A total of 225 forms were completed and the results of the analysis are discussed below.

The majority (98.1%, $N=218$) of respondents felt that the day did meet the stated aims and objectives. Similarly 96.1% ($N=207$) rated the overall assessment of the training as four (25.1%) or five (71.0%) on a scale where one was poor and five was excellent. Nearly nine out ten respondents felt confident about putting what they had learnt into practice, with 45.8% selecting four and 41.9% five on a scale where one equalled not at all confident and five meant very confident.

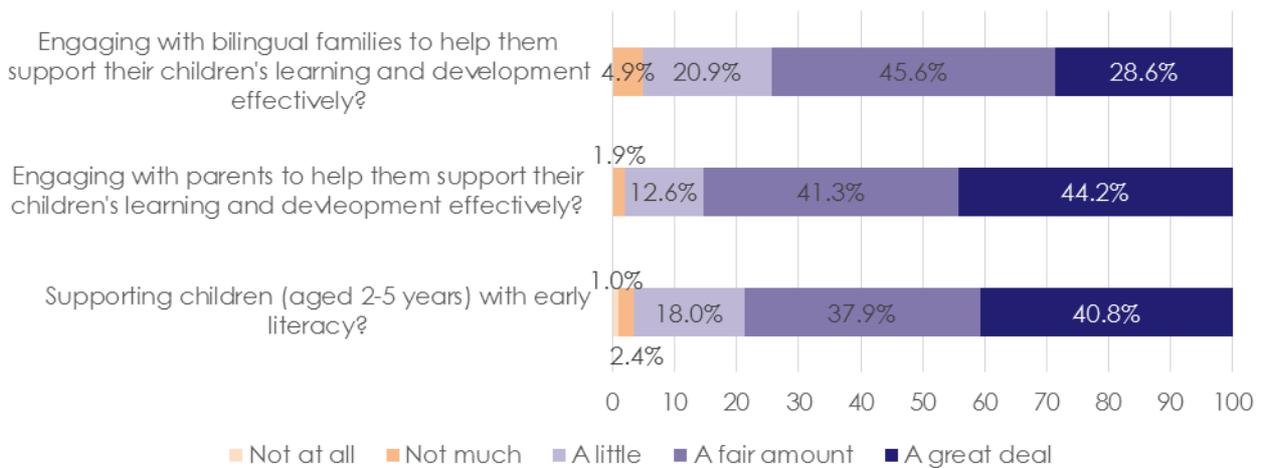
⁵⁰ These figures represent attendance totals, not individual children, as individual children may have attended more than one event.

Figure 18. Participants' views on their confidence levels about putting what they have learnt into practice (N = 203)



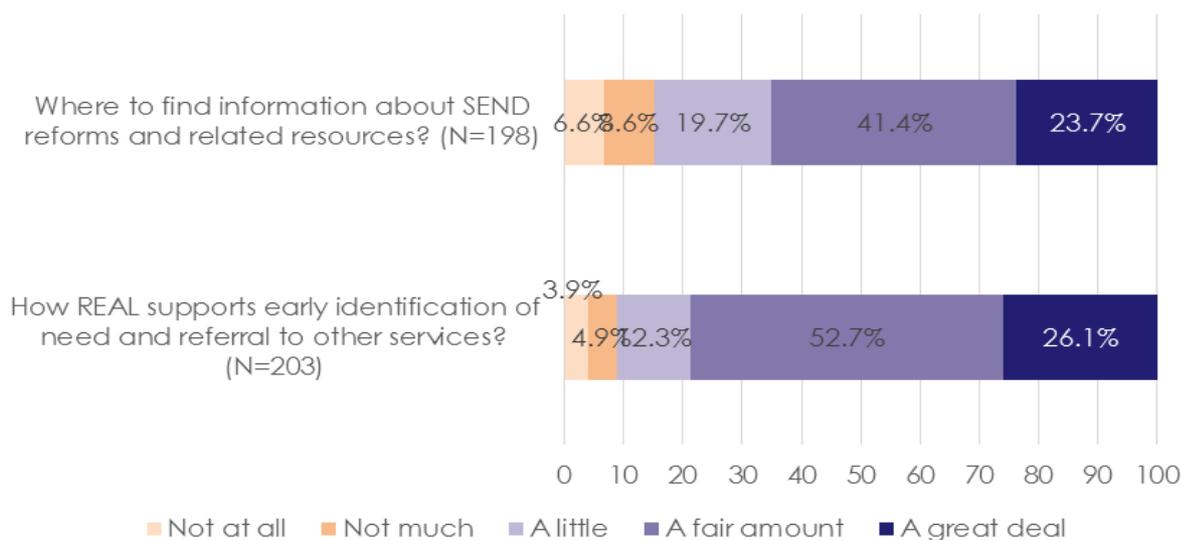
Respondents indicated how the training had improved their knowledge about supporting children (aged 2-5 years) with early literacy; engaging with parents to help them support their children's learning and development; and engaging with bilingual families to help them support their children's learning and development effectively. Figure 19 highlights that generally participants reported a fair amount or a great deal of improvement in their knowledge. For example 44.2% said their knowledge had improved a great deal in terms of engaging with parents to help them support their children's learning and development and over three-quarters indicated either a fair amount (37.9%) or a great deal (40.8%) of improvement when it came to supporting children aged two to five with early literacy.

Figure 19. Level of improvement in participants' knowledge (N = 206)



Similar questions were also asked around SEND and early identification of need (Figure 20). Although, these responses indicated a slightly lower level of increased knowledge they are still overall positive. For example, 84.8% of respondents said their knowledge had improved a little (19.7%), a fair amount (41.4%) or a great deal (23.7%) when it came to finding information about SEND reforms and related resources; and 78.8% felt their knowledge had improved a fair amount (52.7%) or a great deal (26.1%) in regards to understanding how Making it REAL supports early identification of need and referrals to other services.

Figure 20. Level of improvement of participants' knowledge for SEND and early identification of need



There were some improvements to the training that local authorities felt could be made especially in terms of helping practitioners prepare for home visits. There could be better sharing of ideas and practices when it came to delivering home visits such as talking through the preparation and planning needed of a home visits during the course and including a home visit role-play.

3.2.4. Local authority representatives' views about the support packages

Three people were interviewed: an early years team leader, who supported outcomes for children in schools and overviewed assessments; an early years advisory teacher, who supported teaching and learning approaches in children's centres and private settings; and a lead for child readiness, who specialised in communication and language.

Each of these three local authorities had diverse communities, and high levels of deprivation, sometimes concentrated in the localities which had been selected for Making it REAL pilots for those reasons. Settings trialling Making it REAL typically worked with children who spoke English as an additional language.

3.2.4.1. Getting involved in Making it REAL

A number of motivations underpinned the local authority participating in Making it REAL, principally:

- **To improve reading and writing levels** and the hope that a new initiative would help children's literacy skills when they started school, and thus get off to a good start at school;
- Making it REAL was seen to **fit well with other plans and programmes** run by these councils;
- Being **research based and evidence driven** made Making it REAL more attractive. Moreover councils expected that this would enhance their own data collection;
- The overarching nature and **adaptability of** Making it REAL was seen to lend itself to being adopted by diverse settings and sectors, including nurseries, children's centres and childminders;
- Making it REAL offered an approach for **involving parents**, which local authorities already wanted to do. They hoped that settings would help parents develop a positive home learning environment for their children; and
- It was hoped that greater parental engagement and a better home learning environment **would improve relationships in families and between the families and the settings.**

'We know a lot about language, literacy and communication, but parents often do not know what we know. But as soon as they find out they will do something about it. So it was really about finding a mechanism to present that in a ... nice way that would work with families.'

Local authority support package lead

Making it REAL was seen to complement existing literacy plans and initiatives, such as Every Child A Talker and iCan. As part of their school readiness agenda, one council had a 'family ready' and 'child ready' approach, into which Making it REAL fitted quite neatly. One area employed 'literacy champions', who were then trained in, and added Making it REAL, to their portfolio of support. Another council previously ran some community literacy events at children centres, which Making it REAL augmented.

Moreover Making it REAL fitted well with assessment and measuring tools already in use, including the Ferre-Laevers Wellbeing Assessment; the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEW) scale; and the Wellcomm Speech and Language toolkit for screening and intervention in early years.

Home visits were sometimes undertaken by some settings already. But not all, and not necessarily in a comprehensive way. The emphasis on involving parents and home visiting built on councils' desires to make this a more widespread method.

3.2.4.2. Settings recruitment and support

Recruitment

In these three local authorities, the following criteria were used to select settings:

- **Areas of relative deprivation, or settings known to work with more deprived families.**
- **Rates of eligibility for the Early Years Pupil Premium** were used as an indicator of low household income both for a locality and setting, and also with the aim that a setting could use the pupil premium to fund the staffing costs associated with Making it REAL, such as home visits, organising activities and attending network meetings.
- One council limited the pilot to **one locality with a range of providers** were represented, including nurseries, schools, children's centres and both the private and public sectors.
- Another mainly limited it to **children's centres** and one PVI, the latter to provide insight on how well Making it REAL worked in PVI settings.

Time was the chief **challenge** encountered during recruitment, especially getting enough information out to settings, encouraging them to participate and addressing any reservations, in a reportedly short time-frame. Another temporal aspect was the requirement to release staff for two consecutive days of training, and to have enough staff for home visits. Settings found this difficult, especially those in the PVI sector.

Support

The support provided to settings was mainly in the form of:

- Training, usually one day or two days and normally jointly delivered with an NCB associate;
- The NCB training packs, which were highly praised;
- Local network meetings and individual support to settings to facilitate ongoing networking;
- Email and telephone support, which was increased if a setting was facing difficulties or looked like they were about to pull out; and
- Helping settings to create action plans on how to implement Making it REAL.

Local authority leads suggested how the support could be improved. For example, the local authority providing more support as settings would continue to need on-going support such as

mentoring and networking opportunities. More time needed to be allowed for training to enable more information about the ORIM framework and home visits; and by providing more case study examples. Refresher activities and resources could also be provided.

As part of the support package, interviewees had received one-to-one support from NCB, as well as attending the local training and neighbourhood hub events. All aspects were appreciated.

'The one to one support from NCB was really important'

Local authority support package lead

As visiting families at home was new for many settings and practitioners, they felt they needed to get confident about that aspect first, before they could introduce Making it REAL.

Involving schools was reported to be relatively challenging and necessitated lots of additional information, phone calls and discussions with the schools' senior management.

Interviewees also highlighted how challenging it was to maintain their support while extending Making it REAL further to other settings. This was also seen as barrier in the future if less support was available from NCB.

3.2.4.3. Expected impact

From the point of view **of local authority programmes in** these local authorities, the main impacts were expected to be:

- Settings working with and involving parents, especially to improve outcomes;
- Using the ORIM framework in all settings, to assist planning and improve school readiness; and
- Increased tracking of children's long-term progress, starting from the age of two.

The most important change desired was to have **better relationships between the families and the settings**. Involving parents, including fathers, with the child's life in the early years setting in general and with literacy in particular was a major desired outcome. This was linked with improving parental confidence, principally about their ability to support their children's learning. Generalised routine, home visits, across all sectors and settings was seen as an essential step to achieving this, and practitioners feeling more confident about home visits and involving parents as the two intermediate outcomes to reaching that goal.

'Increased confidence in parents, increased confidence in practitioners in particular PVI. They did not want to go into the home at first. But now they don't understand why they hadn't done it sooner'

Local authority support package lead

It was hoped that Making it REAL would continue to be used as a 'toolkit' to strengthen work with families.

'I hope that home visits will become part of their practice. I really hope that those who are already convinced home visits are a good thing will carry on using them to raise parents' awareness of the four strands of REAL'

Local authority support package lead

Achieving improved literacy levels for children was the other headline outcome desired and interviewees hoped that the results at the end of Reception would attest to the effectiveness of Making it REAL. Improved confidence and communication skills for participating children was another desired outcome.

Interviewees shared examples of how Making it REAL was starting to make a difference through the home visits and literacy events. Home visits were now being completed regularly by settings who previously had not been involved in such activities. Settings were reporting finding these useful as a way to get to know families and sharing information with parents. Practitioners felt that parental

interest in their child's learning had improved, due in part to the home visits.

Partnership work with libraries had also improved. One interviewee explained how parents had been introduced to and signed up for Making it REAL through well-attended events at libraries on World Book Day.

The consultancy forms described how being involved in Making it REAL had already made changes to practice that settings felt would be beneficial. For example, one setting had decided to give parents information about activities to do at home (using examples from Making it REAL) at their induction when their child starts at the setting.

Monitoring impact

All three interviewees reported an increased emphasis on collecting and using data. However, as some Making it REAL projects were at an early stage of delivery, exact details of future monitoring, tracking and evaluation methodologies were still to be decided. The following planned methods were mentioned:

- Monitoring numbers of children, practitioners, families and other demographics;
- Tracking children's skills and abilities from the start;
- Interviewing parents at the start and end of their involvement in the programme; and
- Developing case studies on how settings implemented Making it REAL, including interviewing parents to ascertain their views and experiences.

3.2.4.4. The future of Making it REAL

These three local authorities perceived a number of challenges, relating to the continuation of Making it REAL and the ability to embed and sustain it, especially to maintain the same level of support. Perceived challenges around staffing costs and capacity included:

- The cost of delivering training. Local authorities were not sure if NCB could provide it free for them again, and if not if they could afford to run it.
- Support time to keep in touch with all the settings in an area and ensure they are on track and have the up to date information and resources.
- Settings' capacity to conduct homes visits, despite their accepted value.

The fact that Making it REAL was applied in a range of situations and proved adaptable to diverse children's needs, families' circumstances, demographics and early years settings, may in itself facilitate it being embedded by a range of settings and local authorities. The model of working through local authorities and securing their buy-in, along with training and supporting local authority personnel to train and support local early years practitioners, emerged as quite effective in getting understanding of and support for Making it REAL at strategic and other levels.

4. Conclusions

This section of the report discusses if the targets and aims of the project have been met in the third year of delivery. The conclusions have been organised to discuss the impact of the project on children and their parents and then the two aims of the Making it REAL programme in Year 3: ensuring Making it REAL is embedded and self-sustainable; and encouraging disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds to take part in the programme.

4.1. Impact on children and parents

The previous two evaluations of Making it REAL focused on the impact of the project on children and parents. The Year 3 evaluation has shown a continuation of these positive views and experiences of Making it REAL, and data on children's outcomes showed improvements across: listening and attention, understanding, speaking, reading and writing; as well as increased levels of book-sharing, mark making, and library membership.

4.1.1. Parent and child experiences

The positive practitioner feedback on the training and subsequent implementation of Making it REAL translated into positive parent and child experiences. Parents were observed to be more knowledgeable and confident in their own ability to support their children; and have a better understanding of how best they could help children's reading, literacy and communication. For example, the parents involved started visiting their local libraries more, had more books at home and borrowed more books from the settings and libraries. Making it REAL outings to the library were said to have '*opened up another world*' for them. Previously many had not known where their local library was, or what was on offer, or how to use it. Across all the settings and demographics, parents were said to be more confident to read to their children, were reading more and making stories a fixed part of the daily routine.

Parents also commented on this high level of engagement with practitioners. Almost three quarters said that Making it REAL had helped them a great deal in supporting their children to: learn about books; make marks and say what they mean; use environmental print, such as signs, notices and logos; and join in with songs or rhymes.

4.2.2. Impact

This evaluation illustrated good levels of impact upon children across the project span of around five months. Practitioners highlighted an increased interest from children in reading, stories, and books. This was also highlighted in the observation data provided by local authorities, where analysis showed that nearly half of children involved became library members over the course of REAL and an increase from one third, to two thirds of children sharing books.

Another positive outcome for children was their improved language and communication skills. This was highlighted by practitioners, as well as evidenced through increased vocalisation amongst two-year olds (in analysis of observation data), and increased ratings in children's speaking abilities. Furthermore, parents highlighted that children were speaking more clearly, were more confident to talk and used more words.

Children were seen as engaging in more mark making by practitioners. This was also evident in the observation data provided, with an increase in the frequency with which children engaged in drawing and mark making. Parents made similar comments that their children were being more creative, undertaking more mark making and had better fine-motor control of pens or other mark making equipment.

The Making it REAL project has continued to have a positive impact on the children and parents involved in the project. The Year 3 aims of embedding Making it REAL and building a self-sustaining model for the future; and targeting disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds are important objectives to ensure the future and reach of Making it REAL. The following sections will discuss the extent to which each aim has been achieved.

4.2. Embedding Making it REAL and building a self-sustaining model

One of the key aims of Year 3 was to ensure Making it REAL was embedded and sustainable in the original eight local authorities who participated in the previous years of the project.

Many findings suggested that NCB have been successful in the building of a self-sustaining model. Specifically, the reasons local authorities wanted to remain involved with Making it REAL mostly related to their positive experiences in the first two years. In many cases, they also felt that the first two years had evidenced the benefits of Making it REAL. Furthermore, many reported that there was buy-in from strategic levels, due to the wide sharing of data from earlier years. For the three hub authorities, local authority leads reported that they were keen to share their experiences of what worked well and to improve children's outcomes. Therefore, it is likely that local authorities will want to continue to engage in Making it REAL in the future. Given the large number of settings involved with Making it REAL over the three years, NCB have worked successfully towards building an embedded model.

NCB made important changes in Year 3, to help meet this objective of a self-sustaining model. Firstly, the direct support provided by NCB was reduced in Year 3, meaning less funding for settings, no associate support in local network meetings and a greater requirement on local authority leads to manage their own data from participating settings. Secondly, following the provision of training for trainers, local training was co-delivered by a local authority lead and NCB associate. The successful contributions of these approaches to building a self-sustaining model are discussed below.

4.2.1. Providing reduced support

4.2.1.1. Project activity

In spite of less direct support from NCB, there was a high level of project activity across the eight local authorities. For instance, nearly a thousand home visits were conducted across the eight local authority projects with nearly all settings offering two rounds of home visits during the project. A handful of settings (seven) also offered a third home visit. Similar good levels of activity were recorded in terms of the literacy events held by settings. There were 235 events provided. In the majority of cases, settings held the three required literacy events. As a result of these events, 3,841 children attended events (1,167 of whom were registered for REAL). Therefore, this shows that a high level of project activity took place, even though less direct support was provided. This suggests that Making it REAL could continue to run as an embedded model.

Similarly, all local authorities exceeded their target of registering 50 children for Making it REAL. This suggests that local authorities are able to ensure sustainability in recruiting independently. In addition, Year 3 of Making it REAL had wider beneficial reach (as in previous years) with 283 individual siblings of the 522 who participated, and many children attended literacy sessions who were not actually registered on Making it REAL. As such, local authorities were able to reach far greater numbers of children than initially targeted. Similarly, 273 children registered to take part in the Making it REAL project via support packages, and 12 siblings, and an additional 37 non-registered children attended literacy events (support package delivery was not complete at the point of data collection indicating a likely greater reach post March 2016).

4.2.1.2. Support provided to early years settings by local authorities

These findings indicate that numerous outcomes were achieved, in spite of less direct support by NCB to local authorities. Local authorities were able to provide a substantial amount of support to early years settings, showing that local authorities have become equipped to take Making it REAL forward in the future. A recap of the support local authorities provided includes:

- **Information about Making it REAL** provided in person, along with written information.
- **Co-training practitioners** on the two-day training course, alongside an NCB associate trainer.
- **Support in planning how Making it REAL would be implemented.**
- Three regional **Hub events** were arranged and facilitated to enable mutual support and help

practitioners share issues and learn from each other.

- **Network meetings** which were timed to follow the first round of home visits or other activities, so that practitioners could feed their experiences and queries into the discussions.
- **New settings were linked with settings which had delivered Making it REAL for longer.**
- **Practitioners were given individual telephone and email support** by local authority leads as and when needed. Although more time consuming, additional personal visits to practitioners, if they were really stuck, proved very worthwhile.
- **Support in delivering home visits.**

4.2.2. Co-training model

Another substantial change to the third year of Making it REAL was the introduction of the co-training model. In previous years, Making it REAL training has solely been delivered by NCB, but in Year 3 the training was co-delivered by local authority representatives and NCB associate trainers.

4.2.2.1. Train the Trainer

Adopting a Train the Trainer approach, was a useful tool for ensuring sustainability. The feedback from this session showed that local authority leads were confident in training and particularly commented on increased knowledge and skills in delivery. This suggests that this approach can be used to build future capacity for project delivery.

Some of those local authority representatives who had been trained to deliver the training package had also done so on their own in the course of the Year 3 project and in so doing had extended the Making it REAL programme to more settings and practitioners in their local authority area.

4.2.2.2. Training evaluation

The success of the co-delivery approach, was evident in the positive participant feedback forms collected after the two-day training. All 131 trainees believed that the training day had reached its stated aims and objectives and the majority were very positive about the overall assessment of the training. Generally speaking participants felt confident in being able to implement what they had learnt at the training. Practitioners appreciated that the training was over two days, as this helped them assimilate the new information and approach more easily. In addition they found it very helpful when given the space in the training to draw up plans on how they would implement Making it REAL in their own settings, as finding time for planning was often difficult.

As with the co-delivered training, the feedback about roll-out sessions and support packages was very positive with the majority of respondents saying that the day met the stated aims and objectives. Similarly most felt they were confident to put what they had learnt into practice.

4.2.3. Challenges

The above conclusions indicate that numerous positive steps were made towards the self-sustainability of Making it REAL. However, it is also important to consider the challenges to this. Despite huge enthusiasm for Making it REAL, particularly among settings which had already trialled it, limited resources were a challenge to being able to grow Making it REAL locally, fund home visits and provide free resources to families. Furthermore, concerns were raised about measuring and evidencing long-term impact, meaning that momentum may be lost. However, interviewees hoped that embedding Making it REAL as much as possible, especially at a strategic level and securing buy-in at every level would help some of these challenges at least in the shorter term. Being more realistic about the time requirements was felt to be necessary for new local authorities undertaking Making it REAL.

4.3 Engaging disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds

One of the original aims of Making it REAL was to deliver the programme primarily to disadvantaged families and families where children might be considered in need of additional support for their early literacy development. All the settings from the project areas were in very deprived areas and worked predominantly with disadvantaged and low income households. In Year 3 the aim was to build on this inclusion of disadvantaged families by encouraging settings, through increased information and emphasis in the training, to target children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds. Practitioners who were interviewed described how Making it REAL's focus on SEND, EAL and two-year olds, was appreciated and helped these settings ensure they kept these groups in mind, even if they already had processes in place to support them. Settings sometimes prioritised one or more groups for Making it REAL input.

Making it REAL also assisted parents whose first language was not English. The content of the Making it REAL training enabled practitioners to offer evidence-based information on how to support children who are bilingual, for example by continuing to speak their home language to their child and to not avoid doing so, or insisting on the child speaking English, which sometimes families had previously believed was best.

A recurring finding in training was an increase in knowing where to find information about SEND reforms, suggesting that there was an increase in this knowledge as a result of Making it REAL. Therefore, this feedback suggests that this approach was successful in engaging children with SEND.

The Making it REAL project successfully engaged with disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds. For instance, the reach to children with SEND was close to the national percentage occurrence of children with SEND. However, as expected, the number of children from these specific groups was comparatively lower than other children. As such, analyses suggested that achievement progress was less significant for children who were SEND or EAL, but this is likely to be due to the smaller sample sizes. In order to understand this further, more research needs to be conducted with a greater number of children from these groups.

Evidence of further successful engagement of children with additional needs in Making it REAL comes from other specific findings. For example, there was an increase in the number of children receiving a referral after Making it REAL, suggesting that engaging with this project gave rise to increased opportunities for early identification and referral. There was also an increase in the communication of two-year olds, across Making it REAL, showing a progression from babbling to use of words.

4.4. Conclusions

In conclusion, substantial steps were made towards achieving the objectives of building a self-sustaining model and including disadvantaged families and children with SEND, EAL and two-year olds in Making it REAL. The high degree of positive feedback about the programme, combined with positive impact findings from child observation data, demonstrate the importance of continuing with Making it REAL. This evaluation suggests that, with appropriate funding support, NCB have equipped local authorities and settings well enough to continue with this programme independently. Furthermore, the focus on including families from specific disadvantaged groups in this third year of Making it REAL was seen to be an important approach by practitioners, and there is scope for follow-up work to extend the reach of the programme to more families of young children with EAL, SEND and two-year olds.

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