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

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

*Berni Graham, Vanessa Greene, Emma Wallace*

National Children's Bureau: working with children, for children

Registered Charity Number 258825.

8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE. Tel: 020 7843 6000

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# Executive Summary

## Background to Making it REAL 2013-2015

- This report presents the findings of the evaluation of the first year of Making it REAL (2013-2015) which delivers an evidence-based family literacy intervention for two to five year olds. The evaluation was carried out by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) Research Centre on behalf of the NCB Early Childhood Unit (ECU) and Department for Education (DfE).
- Making it REAL builds on an evidence-based programme *Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)*<sup>1</sup> which involves practitioners in working with parents<sup>2</sup> to help them support their children's literacy development within four key strands of literacy: environmental print, books, early writing and oral language. The intervention uses the ORIM Framework, which is based on the idea that there are four main ways in which parents can help support their children's literacy development relating to: Opportunities for literacy; Recognition of children's literacy development; Interaction around literacy; and Models of literacy users<sup>3</sup>.
- Making it REAL 2013-2015 is funded under the DfE National Prospectus Grant and aims to provide a replicable scalable model of the Making it REAL approach and embed it nationally through two strands: (i) A National Rollout of one-day Making it REAL training to early years settings across England and (ii) Local Authority Development projects led by ECU. The latter involves eight local authorities delivering a prescribed programme over a two-year period. Each year practitioners receive two days of training on the Making it REAL approach and deliver the project to a number of families by providing home visits, group activities and trips.

## Evaluation aims and methodology

- The main aim of the Year One evaluation was to report on the delivery of the first year of the project and the extent to which intended outcomes have been achieved. In particular, the evaluation examines the extent to which the project is progressing towards the overall aim of delivering a model others can adopt and embedding it nationally. It examines any positive outcomes identified to date in three areas (i) children's literacy outcomes (ii) parents' skills, confidence and behaviours in supporting their children's early literacy development, and (iii) the skills, knowledge and practice of practitioners working with parents and children in early years settings.

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<sup>1</sup> The original model was developed and tested by two projects: (i) Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project – for details see: Nutbrown, C., Hannon, P. and Morgan, A (2005) *Early Literacy Work with Families: research, policy and practice*. London: Sage. <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ecu/making-it-real-2009-12>. And (ii) NCB Making it REAL Lottery project (2009-2012). For details see: <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ecu/making-it-real-2009-12>

<sup>2</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

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

- The evaluation of the National Rollout of the one-day Making it REAL training involved self-completion census surveys of all practitioners who attended the training at three time points (before, after, and six months later)<sup>4</sup>.
- The evaluation of the Local Authority Development projects<sup>5</sup> was designed to be more detailed. In addition to the three-wave practitioner survey described above, the evaluation involved: pre-project and post-project observational measure forms completed by practitioners for each child/parent; a parent postal self-completion survey; and qualitative research in four case study local authorities and eight case study settings. This comprised interviews and discussion groups with the local authority leads, setting managers, practitioners, and parents.<sup>6</sup>

## Key findings

### *Delivery*

- **The National Rollout and Local Authority Development projects were broadly successful in meeting overall targets set for levels of training and delivery work with families.** Between April 2013 and March 2014, the National Rollout delivered 72 local training courses (meeting the target of 70) and four large regional training events to a total of 1,526 practitioners. The Local Authority Development projects successfully engaged 497 families in the full Making it REAL project. The 64 settings involved ran a total of 187 literacy group activities (average of 2.9 per setting versus a target of 3) and delivered a total of 921 home visits with families (average of 1.85 per family versus a target of 2).

### *Outcomes for children*

- **The project is perceived to have contributed strongly to positive outcomes for children across all four areas of literacy** (environmental print, books, early writing and oral language) in particular via the Local Authority Development projects. There is also indicative evidence of perceived impact on children and parents as a result of practitioners attending the National Rollout of one-day training and subsequently incorporating ideas into their practice in some settings (based on practitioner reports).

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<sup>4</sup> Survey findings among National Rollout training attendees are based on the 1,333 practitioners who attended 66 local training events and three regional events between July 2013 and March 2014. A pilot of the evaluation survey was carried out with the participants who previously attended six local training events and one regional event between April and June 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Sometimes referred to below as the 'Development projects' for brevity.

<sup>6</sup> The surveys were intended to be broadly representative of practitioners, parents and children. Strong response rates were achieved to the post-training surveys and pre-project and post-project observations completed by practitioners. However, note that some level of survey non-response should be borne in mind in the case of the parent feedback survey (response rate of 44%) and practitioner six-month follow-up surveys (response rates for the Development project and National Rollout were 56% and 34% respectively) and it may be that responders were among the most engaged with the programme. The qualitative work provides illustrative examples of some of the ways in which the Development project have been experienced and is perceived to have impacted among a small number of case study settings and families, and are not necessarily generalisable.

- In the Local Authority Development projects there were increases between pre-project and post-project practitioner measures of the proportions of children observed to: 'know one or two rhymes' (up from 24% to 61%); share books 'most days' (up from 43% to 74%); make drawings and marks and say what they mean 'most days' (up from 38% to 69%); and identify 'more than two words, letters or logos' (up from 6% to 35%).
- Among practitioners who attended the National Rollout training and who said they had changed practice as a result of Making it REAL (this was 78% of all practitioners), just over half reported improvements in children's level of positive literacy activity across all four areas of literacy six months after attending the training.
- **There is also evidence that the intervention may have wider benefits to children's development beyond supporting early literacy, in particular in terms of early identification of children's additional needs and increased referrals of families to specialist services,** primarily as a result of increased engagement in the home setting. Seven in ten practitioners (71%) reported that Making it REAL had had at least 'some impact' on linking children and families to other services and had helped them identify additional needs in one or more of the target children (68%). Practitioners also noted that Making it REAL had had 'some' impact (37%) or 'a great' impact (18%) on the earlier identification of additional needs in siblings.

#### *Outcomes for parents*

- **The Local Authority Development projects were successful in giving most parents a greater understanding of and confidence in their role as early educators, enabling them to do more and new things to support children with early literacy, and in facilitating improved relationships with staff in settings. National Rollout training participants also reported perceived benefits for parents in some settings.**
  - The majority of parents responding to the Development Projects feedback survey indicated they now do new things at home to help their child learn (89%). In qualitative interviews parents described spending more quality time listening to and interacting with children to support their literacy and gaining genuine and newfound pleasure from doing so. Many also described doing things differently, for example, reading stories more interactively and creatively with their child, or supporting children's progression by praising them or prompting them in a neutral way, rather than correcting mistakes or giving negative feedback. The majority of parents surveyed reported they were now 'very confident' when talking about their children's development (76%); over half of parents (54%) were observed by practitioners to be asking questions and starting conversations with practitioners about their children's learning more frequently following the project.

- Three in ten of the practitioners who attended the National Rollout of one-day training, and who had changed practice as a result of following the training, reported that parents were now attending more activities and events at the setting six months after the training (this was 21% of all training attendees responding to the follow-up survey).
- **The Development projects were successful in engaging many fathers and male carers as well as mothers, which may be valuable in contributing to children receiving increased attention from male as well as female adult role models.** A father or male carer was present for 121 of the first home visits and 96 of the second visits; 66% of practitioners in the six-month follow-up survey reported that Making it REAL had had at least some impact on the numbers of fathers and male carers involved in children's learning.

*Outcomes for practitioners and early years practice and quality*

- **Measures of practitioners' knowledge and confidence in working with parents to support children's literacy improved in a number of key areas in the Local Authority Development projects, and to a smaller degree among National Rollout participants. Many practitioners also described numerous ways in which they had changed their practice, not only with target families, but by embedding these changes in the wider setting.**
  - In the Local Authority Development projects, between the pre and post-training surveys, there were increases in the proportion of practitioners saying they had 'a great deal or a fair amount' of (i) knowledge in supporting children with early literacy (up from 64% to 88%), and (ii) confidence in engaging parents to help them support their children's development (up from 62% to 93%). Slight increases were also seen for each of these measures among practitioners who attended the National Rollout one-day training (six percentage points in each case).
  - The proportion of Local Authority Development projects' settings who said that supporting children's early literacy featured in their setting 'a great deal' increased between the pre-training and six-month follow-up survey (from 40% to 67%). A similar, but smaller, increase was reported by National Rollout attendees (up from 49% to 62%).
  - Individual Local Authority Development projects' practitioners described how Making it REAL had augmented their practice in various ways, and that this had been embedded in the wider work of the setting. This included: incorporating ideas of environmental print, embedding mark making activities throughout the setting, not just in drawing/painting areas; greater engagement with parents and home visiting and more value placed on these; creating more opportunities to promote and include literacy; and following children's lead more and adjusting to how they preferred to learn.

- Among the 78% of National Rollout training participants who said they had made changes in their practice as a result of the training, over half (56%) said ORIM and REAL activities were now used in curriculum planning.
- **Some practitioners had started to find that Making it REAL was proving useful in supporting their settings' quality ratings.** Among the Development projects' practitioners who reported using a quality framework in their setting, almost eight in ten (22 of the 28) perceived that Making it REAL had contributed to rating improvements. Among national training participants who had changed their practice following training, a quarter stated that they used REAL and ORIM activities in the Ofsted Self Evaluation process (26%).

*Design features and delivery considerations identified as important in the success of Making it REAL*

- Engaging children effectively:
  - **The content of home visits was key to children's engagement in Making it REAL.** Strong engagement in learning arose from excitement, enjoyment and a sense of feeling special that was generated among children by the focused attention they received from their early years practitioners visiting them at home, and from having a box or bag of activities they could regard as their own.
- Achieving sustainable change in parents' skills, confidence and involvement in learning activities with their children:
  - **Home visits were likewise seen as invaluable** in providing opportunities to build stronger relationships with parents in a relaxed way and build parents' confidence in talking with practitioners and getting involved in literacy activities with their children.
  - **The low cost and accessible nature of the literacy activities** promoted among parents was regarded as important to parents' ability to continue supporting their children after direct participation in Making it REAL ended, and an important comparator to some other family literacy interventions.
- Enabling practitioners to take forward changes in their practice:
  - Making it REAL's distinctiveness in providing **concrete methods** to help establish more trusting relationships with parents along with a **clear framework** (the ORIM Framework) which enabled them to provide suitable ideas for parents was regarded as key to success. Practitioners found ideas and guidance on involving children in environmental print and mark making particularly useful in extending their existing practice in early literacy.
  - The **quality and design of training was rated highly by participants.** The training was delivered by experienced ECU associate trainers, and incorporated practical sessions, as well as

theory based learning opportunities. These enabled practitioners to benefit from peer support and ideas. *All* practitioners who attended the Development project training said it met its aims and 63% reported that they felt *very* confident about putting the training into practice. Ratings were only slightly lower among practitioners who attended the National Rollout training (98% said it had met its aims, 65% rated it as 'excellent' and 51% said they felt *very* confident to put it into practice).

- **Discussions with case study local authorities, practitioners and parents about their experiences of Making it REAL highlighted a number of key issues important to consider for the successful delivery of Making it REAL in practice. These may be useful to bear in mind in Year Two of Making it REAL and for future delivery in general.** Considerations related to budgeting and resourcing, as well as some challenges in supporting two-year-olds, parents who are more reluctant to engage in services, and parents with English as an Additional Language. Key points are discussed in Section 5 of the main report.

*Outcomes in terms of embedding Making it REAL for the longer term*

- As above, many settings had made changes to some elements of setting-wide practices meaning that **Making it REAL is already resulting in the successful embedding of many REAL 'principles' at some level.** However, it was **too early for most settings to judge whether they would continue with the more resource intensive elements of Making it REAL** after funding ended (e.g. home visits).
- **Two out of the four case study local authorities had also chosen to build Making it REAL into local authority level planning.** In the other two areas, it was not clear whether Making it REAL could be prioritised and sustained through local authority funding in the context of severe budgetary constraints facing local government.

## Conclusions

**Making it REAL was successfully delivered in Year One and has already achieved positive outcomes in terms of starting to embed Making it REAL in many participating early years settings and achieving positive outcomes for children and families.**

*Local Authority Development projects*

The vast majority of the individual practitioners and parents participating in Making it REAL in the Development project settings reported positive experiences and outcomes. Promisingly, **positive outcomes were reported for two-year-olds as well as three and four-year-olds.**

In this context, the **practitioner training and delivery models adopted in the Development project strand are proven to be effective models** and a solid basis on which to build further in Year Two.

There are minor aspects identified in the study where **small scale refinements to approaches might help optimise effectiveness further.** This includes supporting practitioners to be more confident when first conducting home visits, and further advice including sharing the most effective practice in supporting parents who are more reluctant to engage with services, and parents with English as an Additional Language. Some practitioners requested additional guidance on tailoring for two-year-olds which has already been planned for in the second year of Making it REAL: ECU developed practice examples and guidance to support working specifically with two-year-olds during Year One and these have been incorporated into both the National Rollout and the Local Authority Development projects' training.

Whilst the primary outcomes for children relate to literacy, it is also promising that, via the closer relationships facilitated between practitioners and families, **there are strong indications that the intervention delivers wider benefits in terms of early identification of need, and onward referral to additional support.** It may be helpful to evidence the prevalence of such outcomes further in the Year Two evaluation (for example, by measuring actual prevalence in the post-project practitioner observation forms for each participating child).

It is promising that key principles of Making it REAL are starting to be embedded in the wider practice of settings, based on training two practitioners per setting over two days. **The next step in Year Two will be to explore the contribution made by rolling out training to up to two additional staff, its sufficiency to facilitate fuller embedding of the approach and its sustainability in these settings over the longer term.**

It will also be **critical to explore the extent to which settings are able to secure local funding to continue Making it REAL after the project ends in 2015,** particularly in terms of delivering home visits which are the most resource intensive element of the approach. Year Two of the evaluation will include questions about future intentions of settings in terms of local sustainability, to explore experiences of the relative costs and benefits to their settings and the children and families they support.

#### *National Rollout of one-day Making it REAL training*

The Year One evaluation findings provide clear evidence that **the National Rollout of one-day REAL training model, whilst being relatively light touch and with no specific project design input from ECU, has been proven to make some difference in practitioners' practice in settings.** The majority of attendees have been provided with the motivation and know-how needed to make at least some changes to their practice. For example, 78% of practitioners who attended the training said they changed an element of practice, while a third (33%) indicated that there had been an increase in the number of literacy workshops and events since attending the training.

The reporting of **perceived improvements in children's outcomes among a significant proportion of the practitioners who made changes to their settings' practice following the one-day National Rollout training, is**

**also promising.** However this does not necessarily provide conclusive proof that the one-day REAL training did result in improved literacy for children, given that outcomes among individual children and parents themselves have not been assessed. As discussed above, delivery of high quality home visits were identified as a key ingredient for the success of Making it REAL in achieving change for children and parents in Local Authority Development projects' settings. In this context, it is promising that 11% of National Rollout training attendees have newly started doing home visits since the training.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to Making it REAL (2013-2015)

The Making it REAL project builds on an evidence-based programme *Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL)*, originally developed and tested by the University of Sheffield in collaboration with Sheffield Council.<sup>7</sup>

REAL is a family literacy intervention based on the central idea that parents<sup>8</sup> and families are a child's first, and most important, educators and that what parents do at home with their children has an impact on their social, emotional and literacy development.

It involves practitioners engaging and working with parents to help them support their children's development within four key strands of literacy, identified as: environmental print, books, early writing and oral language. As presented in Figure 1, the REAL approach uses the Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Models (ORIM) Framework, which is based on the idea that there are four main ways in which parents can help to support their children's literacy development: opportunities for literacy; recognition of children's literacy development; interaction around literacy; and models of literacy users<sup>9</sup>.

The REAL approach inspired the Lottery-funded Making it REAL (2009-2012) project<sup>10</sup>, led by the Early Childhood Unit (ECU) at NCB<sup>11</sup> in collaboration with the University of Sheffield. This offered training to practitioners to support children and families through a series of four home visits and four literacy events each in Oldham and Sheffield.

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

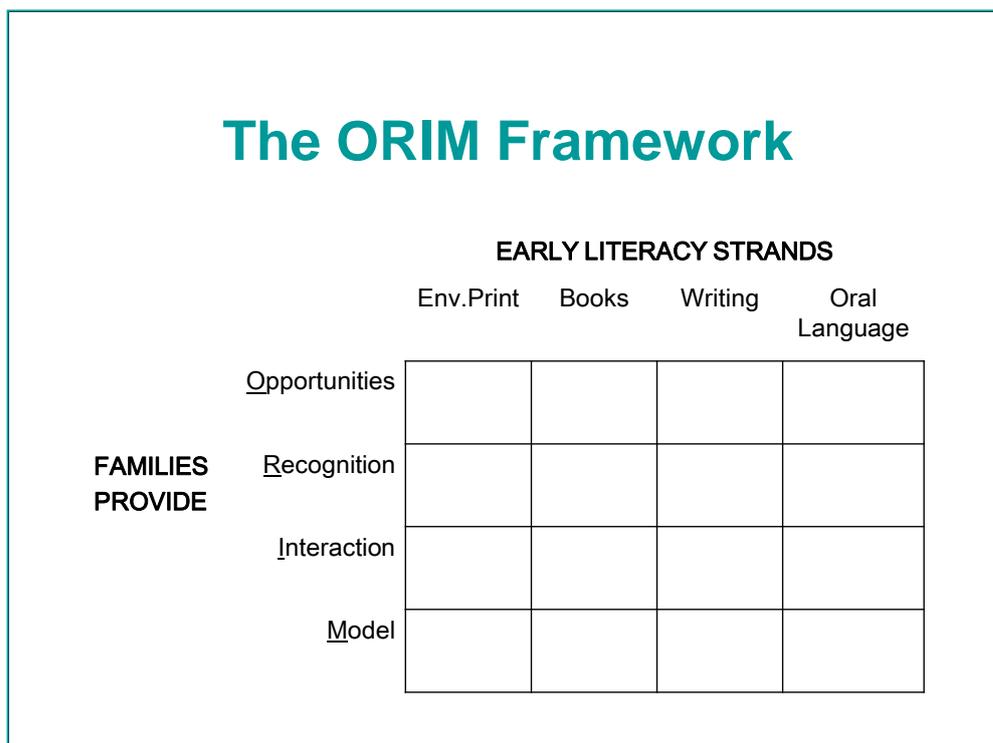
<sup>8</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

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

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ncb.org.uk/ecu/making-it-real-2009-12>

<sup>11</sup> <http://peal.org.uk/real/making-it-real-2009-12.aspx>

**Figure 1: The ORIM Framework<sup>12</sup>**



## 1.2 Making it REAL project design and approach

Building on the success of the original Sheffield University REAL project and the lottery-funded Making it REAL project (2009-2012)<sup>13</sup>, **Making it REAL (2013-2015)** further adapts the REAL approach and widens its reach, aiming to provide a replicable, scalable model and to embed it nationally. Specifically, it involves two strands of work: a National Rollout of one-day REAL training and eight Local Authority Development projects.

The **Local Authority Development projects** involve eight local authorities in delivering a prescribed programme over a two-year period. This evaluation focuses on the first year of delivery. Specifically, between September 2013 and March 2014 local authority leads, setting leads and practitioners received training on the REAL approach and worked together to deliver the project to a number of families in each school/setting through providing home visits, group literacy events, and trips. In Year Two, the same local authorities will be involved in a similar process, but with minor refinements and developments to

<sup>12</sup> Source: [http://www.real-](http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf)

[online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.real-online.group.shef.ac.uk/docs/THE%20ORIM%20framework%20POSTER%20FINAL.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> (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>

the approach offered. A detailed description of the Local Authority Development projects<sup>14</sup> can be found in Section 2.1.

The **National Rollout** provides free one-day Making it REAL training sessions to early years practitioners working with children aged two to five years old in childminder groups, statutory and Private, Voluntary or Independent (PVI) settings. The training is delivered by ECU in partnership with the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), Pre-school Learning Alliance, and National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA). Participants are then free to take forward any aspects of REAL they feel appropriate in their settings. A full outline of the National Rollout can be found in Section 3.1.

## 1.3 Evaluation of Making it REAL

### 1.3.1 Evaluation aims

The main aim of the Year One evaluation was to report on the delivery of the first year of the project and the extent to which intended outcomes have been achieved. In particular, the evaluation seeks to help understand the extent to which the project is progressing towards the overall aim of delivering a replicable scalable model, and embedding it nationally by examining any positive outcomes identified to date, in particular:

- **Children's outcomes** in the key areas of literacy.
- **Parent outcomes**, including their confidence, attitudes and behaviours towards supporting their children's early literacy development.
- **Practitioner outcomes**, including knowledge of how to support children in early literacy, confidence to engage parents, particularly disadvantaged parents, and practitioners' practice.
- **Outcomes for the wider early years setting**, including quality improvement.

In addition, for the Local Authority Development projects, the evaluation has examined, in a small number of case study authorities and settings, the process of delivery in more detail, and the barriers and enablers experienced, in order to help inform the future delivery of Making it REAL.

### 1.3.2 Evaluation methodology

#### 1.3.2.1 Overall approach

The evaluation involved a range of quantitative and qualitative methods.

For both the Local Authority Development projects and National Rollout of one-day Making it REAL training, the evaluation involved:

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<sup>14</sup> Sometimes referred to in the text as the Development projects for brevity.

- **Self-completion census surveys of all practitioners who attended the training and were involved in delivery at three time points** (pre-training, post-training, and six months later after they had experienced delivery). These surveys measured changes in self-reported outcomes over time, as well as (at baseline) practitioners' views of training and (at follow-up) views of what outcomes had been achieved as a result of REAL. Surveys were not designed to track the progress of individuals, but provided cross-sectional data at each time point.

The evaluation of the Development projects was designed to be more detailed, and, in addition, the evaluation involved:

- **Pre and post-observational measure forms completed by practitioners for each child/parent:** Two comparable practitioner observation forms were designed to track individual children's outcomes in key areas of literacy and perceived levels of parents' confidence, one pre-intervention and another post-intervention.
- **A parent postal self-completion feedback census survey distributed to all participating parents:** A short survey was designed to gain a broad range of parents' views on the programme and self-report on impact. Questions were designed to be as accessible as possible and included a range of pictures to illustrate question topics.
- **Qualitative research in four case study local authorities, and eight case study settings** (two in each area). This involved interviews with the local authority leads (N=4), setting leads (N=6) and practitioners (N=13) as well as discussion groups with parents (N=36). The aim of the case studies was to explore experiences of set up and delivery and perceived impacts in more detail. They are also useful in identifying areas for further potential consideration in the future implementation of REAL.

### 1.3.2.2 Evaluation of programme outcomes

Outcomes from the Local Authority Development projects have been assessed via a thorough three-strand approach:

- Self report of outcomes resulting from participation, based on surveys designed to be representative of practitioners and parents.
- Objective comparison of changes in self-reported measures of key outcomes collected from practitioners at the level of individual practitioners, children and parents.
- Qualitative exploration of the nature and range of outcomes, and perceived mechanisms of change among a purposively selected qualitative sample.

Note that given a comparison sample among settings who had not experienced the programme is not available, the evaluation relies on data from beneficiaries only. As such there is no 'counter-factual' measurement of what happens without Making it REAL to enable definitive attribution of any changes reported.

However, use of qualitative methods to explore parents' and practitioners' perceptions of the reasons for change, alongside quantitative measures of changes itself allow us to make some judgements about the contribution that Making it REAL has made to outcomes, especially outcomes for parents and practitioners, but also to some extent outcomes for children too.

For the National Rollout, practitioners' outcomes have been quantitatively assessed in a similar way via self report of impact, and by comparison of changes in self-reported measures. However, parent and child outcomes have been assessed via practitioner reports only. No qualitative work was carried out.

### **1.3.2.3 Interpretation of findings**

It is helpful to bear in mind a number of issues in the interpretation of the findings.

Data on outcomes rely mainly on the self report of practitioners and parents, rather than objective measurement. There is a potential risk of bias towards positive reporting of outcomes among participants. In addition, in the case of the parents' survey, the six-month follow-up surveys of practitioners, and the practitioner observation of children and parents' forms, there is some level of survey non-response and it may be that responses reflect the views of the most engaged practitioners and parents. Levels of non response are especially high for the National Rollout six-month follow-up survey so this data may be especially prone to bias. However, the consistency of findings between the different strands of data collection and from different audiences mean that we can be fairly confident that the overall direction of change emerging from the findings (of positive change) is accurate. However, it needs to be borne in mind that measures may represent over-estimates of the level of impact in some cases, even if the direction of change is accurate.

When analysing data on changes in child and parent outcomes measures as reported by practitioners in the pre and post-observation forms, statistical tests have been applied to assess the statistical significance of the changes, and only changes that are significant have been referred to in the discussion (although full data may be presented in charts and tables). Given that children's development is rapid during the early years, initial analysis was carried out to explore the extent to which there was a significant relationship between age and the outcomes of interest, and whether it would be meaningful to control for age as a potential confounding factor during analysis. Based on this analysis, age was found to have only a very weak or no relationship with children's outcomes when statistical tests were carried out on two key measures. As such, age was not controlled for and can be largely ruled out as a likely confounding factor in these cases.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Parametric and non-parametric tests were carried out on two measures, 'joins in with songs and rhymes' and 'uses environmental print', to consider whether there was a significant relationship between age and the outcome measures whether age should be controlled for during analysis. There was found to be no relationship between age in 'joins in with songs and rhymes' at the first observation and only a weak relationship at the second. Similarly, there was only found to be a weak relationship between age and 'uses environmental print' in both the first and second observations.

In comparing outcomes reported between different waves of the practitioner survey, it was not appropriate to apply standard statistical tests of difference between scores at each stage because it was not possible to link data to individual sample cases. As a result, it was not possible to measure change over time at an individual level between waves<sup>16</sup>. Such data has been presented descriptively and is still useful in generating a picture of measures of outcomes at different points in time (before and after the Making it REAL training, and at the six-month follow-up stage). However, any conclusions about the nature of change must be tentative, particularly when differences in measures between time points are small, or in cases where sample sizes are small.

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

Qualitative findings from the case study research are based on a relatively small sample of local authorities, settings, practitioners and parents. They are useful for illustrating and understanding in depth some of the ways in which the programme has been delivered and experienced. However, it needs to be borne in mind that findings from the case study work are not necessarily generalisable to all participating local authorities and settings in the same way that the survey findings are.

Further detail on the methodology, including the data collection and analysis methods, sample sizes and survey response rates, can be found in Appendix 1.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

**Chapter 2: Local Authority Development projects<sup>17</sup>.** This chapter includes a background and overview of the Development projects. It presents findings regarding outcomes, and perceived outcomes, for the children and parents who participated in Making it REAL. Outcomes in terms of practitioners' knowledge, confidence and practice are discussed, as is quality in settings as a whole.

**Chapter 3: National Rollout.** This chapter presents an overview of the National Rollout and the perceived outcomes for children, parents, and practitioners' knowledge, confidence and practice, as well as practice within the wider setting.

**Chapter 4: REAL training.** This chapter discusses both the two-day Making it REAL training and National Rollout of one-day training. It presents feedback from practitioners who attended the training, including what practitioners considered the most useful aspects of the training to be.

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<sup>16</sup> Analysis of change in longitudinal samples depends on being able to match participants across waves. Likewise it is not possible to carry out statistical tests that can be applied when comparing independently drawn cross-sectional samples because the assumption of independence does not apply (i.e. participants are common across survey waves).

<sup>17</sup> The Local Authority Development projects may be referred to as the 'Development projects' throughout the report.

**Chapter 5: Learning from experiences of set up and delivery in practice.**

This section reflects on local authority leads', practitioners' and parents' experiences of the set up and delivery of Making it REAL, including the key challenges encountered and the ways sites found to address them. As well as identifying some tips for successful delivery, it also usefully identifies a number of issues for consideration for the future implementation of Making it REAL and for relevant training, guidance and support provided.

**Chapter 6: Looking forward.** This section discusses the next steps for Making it REAL including practitioners' and settings' plans for the future.

## 2. Local Authority Development projects

### 2.1 Project design and approach

#### 2.1.1 Overall design and approach

**Eight participating authorities** were selected by the Early Childhood Unit (ECU) from among the 30 local authorities in England with the lowest Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile results for children aged five in 2012, with the intention of also achieving a strong regional spread.

In Year One, each local authority was required to recruit around **eight settings**, each of which was required to involve **two practitioners** delivering Making it REAL primarily among **eight main families**. Specifically, the project involved the following activities for each participating setting:

**Table 2.1: Outline of Making it REAL activities**

Activity	Time frame
Two members of each setting/school to attend the two-day Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) training.	September and October 2013
Two staff members in the setting to engage and work directly with eight children (aged two to five years old) and families, with an emphasis on children needing more support and on families identified as being disadvantaged <sup>18</sup> .	November 2013 to March 2014
Aim to carry out at least two home visits with each main family.	November 2013 to March 2014
Aim to carry out three group literacy events or trips (at the setting and at external locations) for these eight families, plus eight or more additional children to be included in an event or other early literacy intervention (e.g. join the library).	November 2013 to March 2014

<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents/carers less engaged with the setting/school.

## **2.1.2 Training and support for participating local authorities and settings**

The training aimed to enable practitioners to use the REAL approach in early literacy work with families, including:

- To learn about the REAL approach to early literacy work with families.
- To share examples of existing practice.
- To understand and develop their own practice based on REAL and the Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Models (ORIM) Framework.
- To enable reflection on working with parents<sup>19</sup> in a range of environments, including home visits, and identify the strategies required to do so.
- To plan for a project, explore next steps, and support increased confidence to take work forward.

Pre-reading material was provided to practitioners. Over two days, the training was delivered using a combination of activities including presentations, group work, practical exercises and reflection. A training pack was provided to each participant that included information about underpinning research, resources, and practice examples.

Following training, and during delivery itself, light touch, on-going support was available for settings from ECU and the local authority lead. Examples of local authority support included visits and telephone calls from local authority advisory teachers to discuss ideas for home visits and events, acting as a 'listening ear' when problems arose, and being in touch with settings at times when monitoring and evaluation paperwork was due. In particular, local authority leads were required to run 'network meetings' among the settings in their area to allow experiences to be shared and concerns discussed. ECU support involved attending network meetings, responding to queries from the local authority and coming to mutually supportive agreements about how to resolve problems and overcome challenges.

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<sup>19</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

## 2.2 Key findings

### 2.2.1 Project delivery outputs

#### Summary

- **The eight Development projects were broadly successful in meeting overall targets set for levels of involvement and delivery work with families.** Projects were delivered within 64 early years settings by 135 practitioners and included a strong mix of setting and practitioner types.
- **Settings successfully engaged 497 children, aged two to five years old, in the full Making it REAL project.** Participating children represented a good mix in terms of gender, ethnicity and age, including 74 two-year-olds specifically targeted to experience the project. **Further, 534 additional children participated in at least one literacy event or activity.**
- **Practitioners carried out a total of 921 home visits with families,** an average of 1.85 per family, just short of the target of two visits per family.
- **Settings delivered a total of 187 group trips and literacy events** (a mean of 2.9 per setting). Attendance levels were reasonable, as just over two thirds of families (64%) attended two or more events.

#### 2.2.1.1 Participating local authorities, settings, practitioners and families

##### Local authorities

The local authorities recruited to the project reflect a strong regional range (representing the North East, North West, Midlands and London). In interpreting the findings, it is also helpful to understand that they included the two authorities who had already been involved in the 2009-2012 Big Lottery-funded Making it REAL project (and who therefore had some advisors and teachers already experienced in REAL activities to lead practice) as well as six new areas where most settings were implementing Making it REAL for the first time.

##### Settings and practitioners

As shown in the tables below, targets in terms of numbers of settings and practitioners recruited into the project and attending the training were

successfully met (64 settings and 135 practitioners<sup>20</sup>), and a diverse mix of settings and types of practitioners participated. This means the evaluation is able to reflect on how REAL has worked across a range of contexts.

It is interesting to note that a fifth of those attending the training were in managerial positions (8% local authority early years advisors/officers and 12% setting managers/leaders). In some cases, these would have been involved in supporting the delivery of Making it REAL among families by other staff, rather than delivering Making it REAL directly themselves. It is helpful to bear this in mind when interpreting findings from the 'practitioner' surveys, which were based on all the Making it REAL training participants.

**Table 2.2: Profile of settings**

Setting type	%	N
Private, Voluntary and Independent setting (PVI's)	38	24
Primary school (some with Children's Centres attached)	35	23
Children's Centre	14	9
Nursery school	11	7
Childminder network	2	1
Total	100	64

**Table 2.3: Profile of participants**

Job role	%	N
Nursery officer/nursery nurse/early years practitioner	25	34
Teacher (Qualified Teacher Status (QTS))	24	32
Childcare assistant/teaching assistant/early years worker	17	25
Manager/deputy manager	12	16
Early years advisor/officer	8	11
Family support/outreach worker	6	8
Head teacher/assistant head teacher	3	4
Early years practitioner (Early Years Professional Status (EYPS))	1	1
Child minder	1	1
Health and social care (e.g. speech and language therapist)	1	1
Missing data	2	2
Total	100	135

## Children and families

### *Approaches to selection*

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

<sup>20</sup> This met the target of 64 settings (eight in each local authority) and 128 practitioners (two in each setting).

Qualitative interviews in the eight case study settings illustrate the key types of criteria that settings used in targeting the project during the first year.

- **Age:** Settings aimed for a relatively representative range, mainly across three to five year olds. Two-year-olds were also generally included if they already attended the setting, usually accessing the free entitlement on offer to two-year-olds in low income families.
- **Children where there were concerns about their development and needs,** including:
  - Those assessed as 'not thriving', or not doing as well as could be expected, e.g. with low confidence or speech and language issues.
  - Where staff had observed low levels of engagement or interaction between parents and their child.
  - In households where English was spoken as an additional language and where children were observed as not thriving.
  - Children with moderate needs not already being addressed by services.
  - Children in need and those on the cusp of child protection were prioritised at times, but not necessarily so. Settings felt a balance was needed and that it would be wrong to only include children under child protection measures.
- **As a secondary criterion, some schools prioritised children who were thought most likely to progress into compulsory schooling at that school.**
- **Parents likely to be easier to engage and/or those whom staff had already established a relationship** were also included for balance alongside those chosen because there was little previous contact with the practitioners or where challenging family circumstances were known to be present. In some cases this was to avoid a stigmatised image of the programme. However, some case study settings, especially those new to REAL, decided against only including families they perceived as the most challenging to engage in order to allow practitioners to get up to speed with the techniques and practice.

Based on the above, it is clear that in the case study settings the project was effectively focused on targeting children with literacy support needs and parents who seemed to lack confidence. While settings had not been asked to exclusively target families considered by settings as 'disadvantaged'<sup>21</sup>, when interpreting the case study findings it needs to be borne in mind that this group may be somewhat under-represented in Year One in the case study settings and possibly further afield in the wider population of settings involved in the project. In Year Two, where this is the case, settings may need additional support to consider how best to reach out to a greater proportion of lesser-engaged families.

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<sup>21</sup> For the purpose Making it REAL, the term 'disadvantaged' was defined as parents/carers less engaged with the setting/school.

*The number and profile of participating children and families*

In total, **537 children and families** were recruited to take part in the Making it REAL project. Forty children and families did not continue with the project for a variety of reasons, such as the child moving to another early years setting. While they did not continue with the project, it is important to note that some of these children did receive a home visit and other support. However, **a number of tables below and subsequent discussions are based on the 497 children who took part for the whole duration of the project.**<sup>22</sup> The mean number of children per setting was eight, but it ranged from four to eleven children.

As shown in Table 2.4 below, among the 497 children who participated in the whole Making it REAL programme, there were slightly more boys than girls (56% compared to 44%) and a wide range of ethnic groups were represented. The majority of children were aged three (51%) or four (24%) years old, while 18% (91 children) were two-years-old. Of the two-year-old children, 74 were specifically targeted to experience the project as two-year-olds, whilst the remainder were 'older twos' who turned three shortly after beginning the project. Any findings regarding two-year-olds in particular are based upon the 74 who were recruited specifically to the project.

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<sup>22</sup> A further 16 two-year-olds were included in a small pilot across settings. They are not included in this data as they received a slightly different intervention to other children, and data is not therefore comparable.

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

		%	N
<b>Gender</b>	Boy	56	276
	Girl	44	221
	Total	100	497
<b>Age</b>	One year old	1	5
	Two years old	18	91*
	Three years old	51	253
	Four years old	24	119
	Five years old	2	11
	Missing data	4	18
	Total	100	497
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White (White British/Irish/Gypsy or traveller/other)	60	300
	Asian/Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Other)	19	94
	Black/Black British (Caribbean, African, Other)	10	48
	Mixed (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian, other mixed)	7	34
	Other (Arabic, any other ethnic group)	3	16
	Missing	1	5
	Total	100	497

\* 74 two-year-olds were recruited specifically to the project while 17 were older two-year-olds who turned three shortly after beginning the project.

## 2.2.1.2 Delivery of Making REAL activities

### Home visits

#### *What did home visits involve?*

Practitioners in the case study areas outlined what the delivery of home visits involved for them. They described how home visits required developing material matched to a child's development levels and known interests, e.g. preparing a box or bag of learning resources for the child which would be used extensively in the visits. They said that these typically contained a story or nursery rhyme book, paint, paper, scissors, a scrapbook and glue, and other activities. As part of the modelling for parents, the items were relatively low-cost and simple to acquire. Children and parents were usually invited to add to a box or bag over the course of the project as they desired, and some clearly did so.

Case study practitioners described how a major aim of home visiting was to encourage parents to join in, ask questions, and carry on with the activities afterwards. They recounted how the practitioners played with the child during the visits and, in so doing, tried to explain to the parents why they were doing the particular activities in a certain way thereby modelling ways of interaction for them. For example, they demonstrated how to explore and enjoy a story together without necessarily reading all the words; how children enjoy texture, such as shaving foam or lentils when mark making; the joy and purpose of early mark making and the diverse ways of doing so; how to make use of accessible and low-cost resources; and how to interact, speak to and encourage their child both in these activities and generally.

Individual practitioners described how successive visits often focused on discrete aspects of REAL: for instance, the first visit might concentrate on mark making and the second on promoting key aspects of speech and language. Some individual practitioners also described how the content of the home visits was integrated with the group trips and activities: for example, practitioners might bring photos taken on trips to home visits as a point of engagement.

#### *How many home visits were delivered to families?*

The expectation within the project design was that two home visits would be delivered to each family.

Based on monitoring data collated by ECU, 921 home visits were carried out among the 497 children who participated for the full duration of the Making it REAL project<sup>23</sup>, which is a mean of 1.85. Only six settings were unable to deliver the two visits for most families: 91% of settings (58) achieved at least two visits for the majority of the participating families.

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<sup>23</sup> This excludes the 40 children who were initially recruited but who did not participate for the full duration of the programme.

Among case study settings, most practitioners said they delivered two home visits per family. One setting in one local authority case study area and all the settings in another area conducted three visits for all families, the latter as part of their wider plan to provide early help to disadvantaged families. In addition, another case study setting provided three visits if they felt the family needed more than two.

### **Group trips and events**

*What did the group trips and events involve?*

Practitioners in the case study settings outlined what the group trips and events involved for them in their area.

Group literacy events were required for the eight main children plus at least eight additional children. In practice, the eight case study settings either organised them for 16 children or for *all* the children in a setting. As well as being part of the REAL model, widening the group out was felt to help reduce any potential stigma around the project and the eight core children, but also to enable more children and their families to benefit from the REAL ideas and practices.

Common types of trips run within the case study settings included:

- **Visits to the local library**, for example to explore its facilities, demonstrate the ease of access and encourage families to join and/or participate in 'story time').
- **Environmental print walks** where families and children were asked to explore, identify and discuss examples of environmental print, on a pre-planned walking route. Practitioners sometimes planned a 'treasure hunt' where children had to identify specific items along the way.
- In some cases, settings took families to **other local provision that provided learning opportunities for young children**. For example, in one area, families from two settings were taken on a trip to '7 Stories' which is an enhanced early learning library facility on seven floors, each of which provides a different type of early literacy experience. The facility provides a range of group activities, such as story time, as well as resources for children and families to explore independently. In another area, a setting visited a local pottery café where children could paint their own mugs. In another local authority area families visited a bookshop where the children chose and bought a book.
- A number of settings held group activities within the setting which the larger group of 16 families attended or all families from the setting were invited. These included mark making, messy play events and making your own play dough.

*How many trips and events did settings run?*

The expectation was that each setting would run three trips or events for families. Based on data from monitoring reports completed by settings and

returned to ECU, for the most part **settings appear to have met their target of three events each as 187 events were held with a mean of 2.9 per setting** (five events shy of the 192 target).

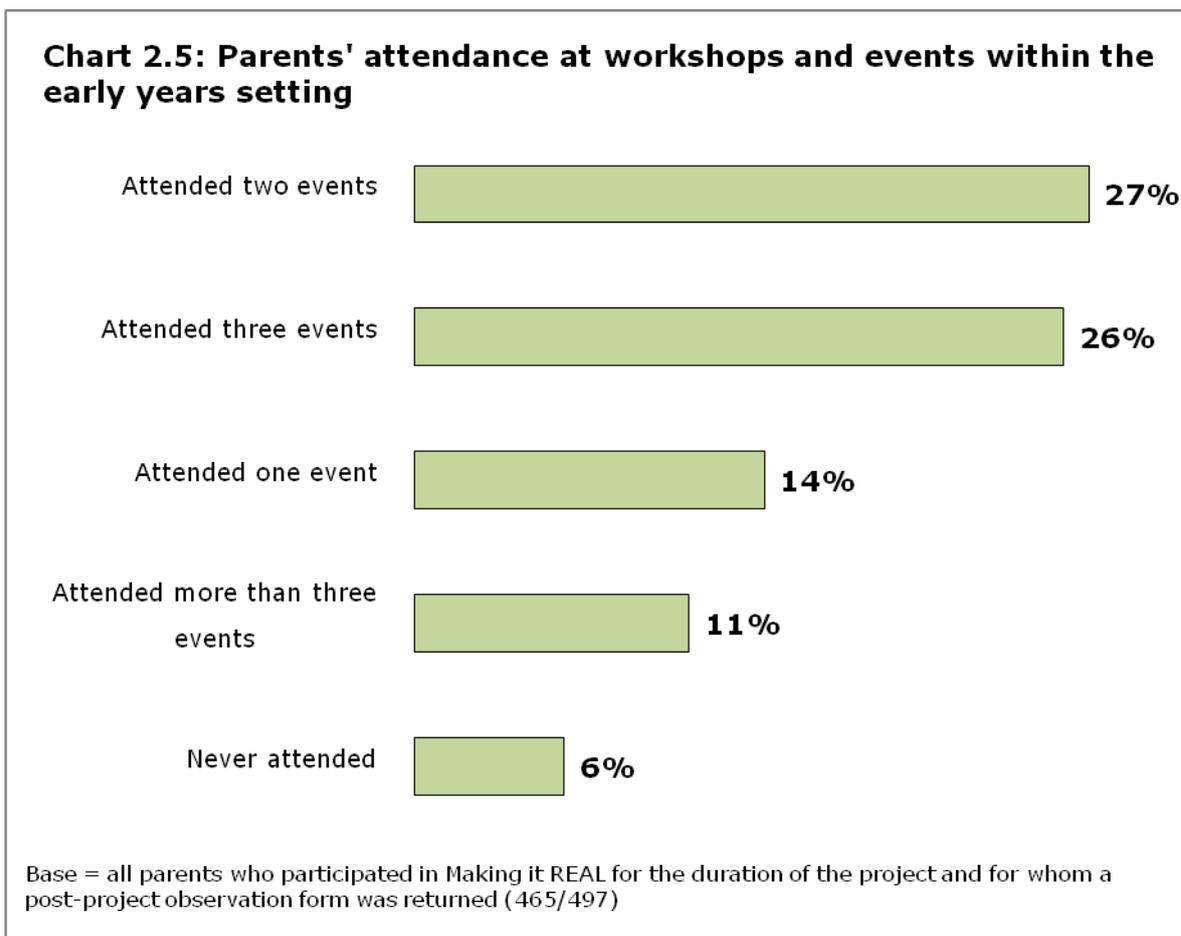
Group literacy events were required for the eight main children plus at least eight additional children. In practice, the eight case study settings either organised them for 16 children or for *all* the children in a setting. Again, based on data from monitoring reports, settings were successful in including other children and families and **534 additional children participated in at least one literacy event or activity.**

*What were attendance levels among families?*

The expectation was that families would be encouraged to attend as many of the events in their area as possible.

Chart 2.5 below outlines the levels of attendance reported by practitioners in post-project observation forms among the 497 children and families who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project.

The majority of families attended at least one event (78%) and just over two thirds attended two or more (64%), but around one in fifteen (6%) did not attend any.



## 2.2.2 Outcomes for children and siblings

### Summary

- **Children’s outcomes improved in a number of key areas measured during the evaluation.** Statistical tests, carried out on child-level observations of participating children aged two to five years old, found there was a positive change in all four key areas of literacy targeted by the project between pre-project and post-project observations:
  - **Engaging with and sharing books:** The proportion of children observed to have shared a book ‘most days’ rose from 43% to 74%.
  - **Awareness of and engaging with environmental print:** The proportion of children aged three to five years old who identified ‘more than two words, letters or logos’ rose from 6% to over a third of children (35%).
  - **Drawing and mark making:** The proportion of children who made drawings and marks and said what they meant most days rose from 38% to 69%.
  - **Development of oral language:** The proportion of children observed to ‘know one or two rhymes’ rose from 24% to 61%.
- **Additionally, benefits were reported in terms of children’s confidence and engagement** within the early years setting itself.
- **Key success factors identified from children’s engagement in Making it REAL were the enjoyment and excitement that children experienced from participating in home visits in particular and other key features of the approach which made them feel ‘special’.** This included the focused attention they received from their early years practitioners visiting them at home, and having a box of activities they could regard as their own.
- **Increased opportunities to achieve early recognition of additional needs and referral to additional support were identified as a major additional outcome from the programme, arising mainly due to the increased engagement in the home setting.** Over seven in ten practitioners (71%) reported that Making it REAL had had at least ‘some impact’ on linking children and families to other services; 68% said it had helped them identify additional needs in the target children.
- **Some benefits accrued for siblings as well as the target child.** A high number of siblings were noted as present during home visits and practitioners surveyed indicated that **Making it REAL also had ‘some’ impact (37%) or ‘a great’ impact (18%) on the earlier identification of additional needs in siblings.**

This section discusses the experience of children in the Making it REAL project and considers outcomes for the following four key areas of literacy targeted by the programme, based on practitioner observations of children shortly after attending the Making it REAL training and again six months later. Statistical tests were carried out in the following areas:

- Engaging and sharing books.
- Awareness of and engaging with environmental print.
- Drawing and mark making.
- Development of oral language.

Findings are presented for children aged between two and five years as a whole, but also additionally for the sub-sample of two-year-olds, as this is a group of particular interest to the programme going forwards and on which there will be a greater focus for the Year Two evaluation<sup>24</sup>.

Interviews with parents and practitioners give context to these findings, highlight some additional reported outcomes achieved for children, and are helpful in illuminating the nature of children's experiences, and what aspects are perceived to have driven the successful engagement of children in Making it REAL. However, note that in terms of qualitative reporting of outcomes, while many parents reported on changes that they perceived to have been directly attributed to Making it REAL (for example because of the timing and scale of change they had seen), for others attribution was not so clear cut as the child had started in the early years setting and Making it REAL at the same time, and/or the child generally developed over the same period. As such, some parents did not always feel clear about the extent to which Making it REAL was the key cause of change. However, practitioners were more confident in their assessments about how much to attribute to Making it REAL, for example, by comparing outcomes with participating children's previous assessments, and their projected trajectories and with peers who were not included in Making it REAL.

### **2.2.2.1 Children's overall experience of Making it REAL**

Parents' and practitioners' views of how children experienced Making it REAL were explored in the qualitative case study interviews.

Many parents interviewed were keen to stress how much their children enjoyed being part of Making it REAL and responded readily to the different aspects of it, be it the home visits, outings or activities based in the settings. Parents recounted how items given or created during the home visits were treasured and commonly taken to bed by the child, such as their individual bags and boxes, glitter bottles and books. One parent commented:

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<sup>24</sup> Measures of change over time are based on the sample of children for which pre-project and post-project observation forms are available (443/497 children). Statistical tests to measure if changes over time were statistically significant have been carried out for this sample. However, note that due to the small sample size tests were not carried out on individual two-year-old data. Further methodological information is provided in Appendix 1.

*"...daughter loved it, don't do things like that at home, when she was doing it thought it was amazing."*

*(Parent)*

All parents interviewed in the case studies settings reported some kind of change in their child which represented a progression in their children's literacy development, and more details on this are provided in the next section. Sometimes parents had noticed developments across multiple areas of literacy, and in other cases parents had noticed differences in just one (e.g. perhaps mark marking but not rhymes). Sometimes this reflected that a child was already well progressed in a particular area of literacy, as one parent noted: *"no, she is always going around singing to herself, she was doing that before"*. Individual practitioners described focusing on just one or two areas of literacy in specific home visits, and so this may have also been a factor.

**Children's enjoyment of Making it REAL and the way it made children feel excited and special was identified as playing a very significant role in achieving successful engagement of children in Making it REAL activities.**

In particular, children felt 'special' as a result of being visited by their early years practitioner, and on the basis of being provided with their very own exclusive box/bag of activities and toys. Many parents described how children were very proud of their box/bag, carefully looked after it, and were often protective of their exclusive access versus other siblings in the household. Practitioners also recounted how children became excited and proud about the home visits, looked forward to subsequent visits even more and boasted about it to their peers. A number of practitioners even commented how other children began asking for staff to visit their homes as a result.

*"... [parent said] daughter was so excited and she said, she's been waiting for hours for you to come, she was bouncing up and down on the step and [saying] 'this is my house, this is my toys, this is mine, this is mine'... they're just sharing their life with you I suppose, ...so it definitely has developed the children's confidence to talk to us more."*

*(Practitioner)*

*"They were really fascinated, the next time we've seen them in nursery they was really like, 'you've been to my house', and yeah, they really enjoyed it."*

*(Practitioner)*

### **2.2.2.2 Engaging with and sharing books**

Visiting the library was a key aspect of the Making it REAL project, highlighted by a number parents as an enjoyable group activity and discussed in Section 2.2.3. Reflecting this, practitioner observations indicate **a significant increase in the proportion of children who were a member of the library** at the end of the project (73%) compared to the start (27%).

The tables below present findings for all children observed (aged two to five years old) but also provide a break down to give a view of findings for two-year-olds observed. These tables also present a calculation of change for all children observed (two to five years old), between measures at the pre-project and post-project observation.

**Table 2.6: Is the child a member of a public library?**

		Yes %	No %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	27	70	3	443
	Two-year-olds	26	74	0	68
Post-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	73	18	9	443
	Two-year-olds	55	20	25	68
Change (%)	All children (2-5 years)	46	52	6	-

*Base = all children who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (443/497).*

Practitioner observations of children also indicated **a statistically significant increase in how often children shared a book.**<sup>25</sup> During the post-project observation it was reported that almost three fifths of children (74%) shared a book 'most days', an increase from 43% in the pre-project observation. Notably, practitioner observations indicated an increase in the proportion of children who began sharing books, with a reduction in those who 'never' shared a book.

**Table 2.7: How often does the child shares a book?**

		Never %	Once a month %	Once a week %	Most days %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	16	13	28	43	0	443
	Two-year-olds	15	15	22	49	0	68
Post-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	1	3	19	74	3	443
	Two-year-olds	0	0	16	84	0	68
Change (%)	All children (2-5 years)	15	10	9	31	3	-

*Base = all children who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (443/497)*

<sup>25</sup> A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M = 3.71, SD = 0.57) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M = 2.98, SD = 1.09). This was further confirmed through a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

Children's greater engagement with books and stories was noted across the four case study areas. For example, a number of practitioners commented that children often took the lead in borrowing books and story bags from the setting, were doing so much more than before, and generally showed much more interest in books and stories than previously. One practitioner noted:

*"They all really enjoy the books, ... really engaged, and using the props, they didn't realise you could use props with a story, so that they could actually play with the props and not realise they was reading a book, so they're still acting it out."*

(Practitioner)

Parents described their children bringing the books and story bags to bed with them and asking their parents to read to them more. One parent discussed noticing a change in their child, having previously assumed that their son did not like books:

*"...now first thing he does when gets home... just thought he was not that interested in books"*

(Parent)

Individual parents attributed an increased awareness and interest in books directly to the child having visited the library for the first time as part of the Making it REAL programme.

### **2.2.2.3 Awareness of and engaging with environmental print**

Practitioners were asked to rate the extent to which children aged three to five years old noticed and engaged with environmental print. A comparison of observations indicates **a statistically significant positive shift in the proportion of children aged three to five years old who identified 'more than two words, letters or logos'**, rising from 6% in the pre-project observation to over a third of children (35%) in the post-project observation. There was also a reduction in those who didn't 'appear to notice print'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed that scores at the second observation (M = 3.74, SD = 1.18) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M = 2.22, SD = 1.24). This was further confirmed through a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**Table 2.8: How often does the child recognise environmental print?**

	Doesn't appear to notice print %	Stops to look/ points to print %	Points to print and comments/ asks what it says %	Identifies one to two letters, words of logos %	Identifies more than two words, letters or logos %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	38	24	20	10	6	1	365
Post-project observation	4	13	20	26	35	2	365
Change (%)	34	11	0	16	29	1	-

Base = all children aged three to five years old who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (365/497).

In the qualitative focus groups and interviews, parents and practitioners reported that their children were showing more awareness of environmental print.

*"She recognises signs and colours ... [says] daddy 'yellow, yellow'"*  
(Parent)

Parents noted that their children enjoyed keeping scrapbooks and recounted their children's increased recognition of shops' and other outlets' logos, signs, bus numbers and destinations when out and about. Indeed, three parents reported that this increased awareness had made going to the supermarket as a family a more enjoyable experience as children commented on and engaged with the shopping task by making lists and trying to match or identify brands and labels.

*"[partner] takes children to [shop] every Saturday when it's usually chaos. And I said to him give him a list ... he knows what a tin of beans looks like ... and he came back saying 'shopping's no problem'"*  
(Parent)

### 2.2.2.3 Drawing and mark making

As outlined in Table 2.9, practitioner observations of children indicated a **statistically significant increase in how often children made drawings and marks and said what they mean**. Over two thirds of practitioners (69%) reported children doing so 'most days' in the post-project observation, an increase from 38% in the pre-project observation. As before, there was a notable shift in the proportion of children engaging in drawing/mark making who had never done so before.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed scores at the second observation (M = 3.63, SD = 0.655) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M = 2.59, SD = 4.9). This was further confirmed through a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**Table 2.9: How often does the child draw/make marks and says what they mean?**

		Never %	Once a month %	Once a week %	Most days %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	21	15	26	38	0	443
	Two-year- olds	32	8	25	36	0	68
Post-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	2	4	23	69	3	443
	Two-year- olds	1	1	23	61	14	68
Change (%)	All children (2-5 years)	19	11	33	31	3	-

Base = all children who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (443/497).

These findings mirrored the views of practitioners and parents interviewed. Many practitioners discussed how children were much more interested in mark making, carried out drawing and mark making in different ways and they noted children appeared to enjoy doing so more. Similarly, parents noticed differences in how much their children wanted to draw and 'write' but also in how they were holding pens and crayons:

*"Suddenly he's drawing and loves it"*

(Parent)

*"Yeah, they're more engaged because of it's a bit more exciting now"*

(Practitioner)

### 2.2.2.4 Development of oral language

Practitioners were asked to rate the extent to which all children observed engaged in songs and rhymes at the point of each observation. Findings outlined in Table 2.10 indicate **a statistically significant increase in the extent to which children did so**. At the time of the post-project observation, over three fifths of children (61%) were observed to 'know one or two rhymes', an increase from 24% of children observed at the time of the pre-project observation.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> A paired t-test on group mean scores was conducted and confirmed scores at the second observation (M = 4.41, SD = 0.895) were significantly higher than scores at the first observation (M = 3.24, SD = 1.273). This was further confirmed through a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

**Table 2.10 How often does the child join in with songs and rhymes?**

		Shows no/very little interest in rhymes %	Listens to rhymes and watches as others sing %	Joins in with rhymes %	Knows some words/parts of rhymes %	Knows one or two rhymes %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	8	24	28	17	24	0	443
	Two-year-olds	10	21	28	16	25	0	68
Post-project observation	All children (2-5 years)	1	3	13	19	61	3	443
	Two-year-olds	0	4	6	24	53	14	68
Change (%)	All children (2-5 years)	7	20	15	2	38	3	-

Base = all children who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (443/497).

Practitioners were also asked to consider the extent to which two-year-olds, specifically, vocalised and used words. Observations indicate a moderate positive shift in the proportion of two-year-olds who were observed to use 'three words together', rising from 42% in the pre-project observation to 56% post-project.

**Table 2.11: How often do two-year-olds vocalise and use words?**

		Babbles e.g. baba, gogo %	Uses a range of single words to comment e.g. bird %	Uses two words together e.g. more juice %	Uses three words together e.g. go shop today %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation		9	19	28	42	1	68
Post-project observation		0	9	14	56	21	68
Change (%)		9	10	14	14	20	-

Base = all children specifically targeted to experience the project as two-year-olds and for whom a pre-project and a post-project observation form was returned (68/74).

In the qualitative focus groups and interviews, both practitioners and parents commented on how much more the children were speaking and singing, both at home and in the early years setting, and how more fluent and clear their speech was. Speech and language among bilingual children was also said to have improved dramatically.

*"Before she did not talk - now never stops"*

*(Parent)*

### **2.2.2.6 Children's confidence and engagement with early years settings and staff**

**Children were described by practitioners as being more confident and relaxed** in the setting and perceived to have a better relationship with staff as a result of their involvement in Making it REAL. A number of practitioners discussed how some children had been rather quiet, shy and reserved previously. Taking part in Making it REAL was said to have made them feel *'special'*, less *'scared of the teachers'* and more open and comfortable in the setting.

Thus, Making it REAL was seen to have increased children's engagement with the setting and staff and, in turn, potentially enhanced children's capacity to take advantage of the opportunities for learning that were on offer.

To a small extent, the behaviour of some children was also reported to have improved as a result of being part of Making it REAL. A number of parents commented that their children's concentration and ability to focus on one activity at a time had been enhanced, as illustrated by one parent:

*"...before would fly from one thing to another and never settle. ... really hyper"*

*(Parent)*

### **2.2.2.7 Early identification of need, links and referrals made to other services, and other outcomes for children**

Being included in Making it REAL had provided a number of knock-on benefits for the children and their families in terms of early identification of need, and linking with other services.

On one hand, the additional contact with families, especially through home visits, had made the practitioners aware of other agencies involved with the family, such as social services. In one case it was mentioned that a child was getting speech and language therapy but this was news to the setting, although they had spotted speech problems. As a result they offered the child greater input around this:

*"Mum didn't think it was important to share that, because she didn't realise.... we knew there was something there, actually the child wasn't speaking ...When we went home she said, 'oh she's got a speech [therapist], she goes to the hospital'. And we said, 'mum, that's so*

*important to share because we can help you bring in the targets... and we can get a key worker. We could support you. And she ... didn't realise that it's a joined up approach. It was like that's her home life. That's separate."*

(Practitioner)

On the other hand, several examples were given of issues being assessed for the first time, such as the need for speech and language therapy, or of more family-wide problems coming to light, such as domestic violence and housing. In the six-month follow-up survey of practitioners, 71% reported that Making it REAL had had either 'some' or a 'great impact' on linking children and families to other services: 68% said it had helped them identify additional needs in the target children; while 55% reported that it had also helped identify additional needs in the target children's siblings. The greater contact resulting from the home visits in particular was felt to have assisted the identification of other needs and provided an opportunity to discuss these and get agreement to make referrals.

*"I think because it was in the home ...She felt comfortable actually talking about it.... would never have found that out at the school gates"*

(Practitioner)

### 2.2.2.7 Impact on siblings

Findings suggest that, in a number of cases, a family's involvement with Making it REAL had a wider reach than just the participating child.

Monitoring reports on home visits completed by practitioners indicated that a number of home visits and events were also attended by siblings: **175 siblings were noted as being present for the first home visit and 164 for the second**. As outlined further in Section 2.2.3, parents reported that being involved in Making it REAL had given them new ideas on how to support their children's early literacy development and learning, and some discussed using these ideas with their other children.

Practitioners surveyed indicated that Making it REAL also had some (37%) or a great (18%) impact on the earlier identification of additional needs in siblings.

**Table 2.12: Has the Making it REAL project had any impact on earlier identification of additional needs in younger siblings?**

No impact %	Some impact %	Great impact %	Missing %	N
26	37	18	18	76

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76/135).*

## 2.2.3 Outcomes for parents and carers

### Summary

- **There is clear evidence that the majority of parents gained from their involvement in Making it REAL.** The main reported changes found across all evaluation data sources were positive:
  - **Improvements in parental engagement and relationships with the setting:** over four-fifths of practitioners (82%) reported that Making it REAL had either 'some' or a 'great' impact on improving parent-setting relationships; and over half (54%) reported an increase in parents asking questions or starting conversations about their child's learning.
  - **Parents showing a greater appreciation and understanding of and confidence in their role as early educators, doing more with their children and approaching this differently:** most parents (89%) who responded to the parent survey indicated they did new things at home to help their child learn. Around three quarters reported that Making it REAL activities had helped 'a great deal' to support their children in: joining in with songs and rhymes (78%); making and explaining marks (77%); using environmental print (72%); and learning about books (71%).
  - **Improved relationships and communication between parents and their children:** within qualitative focus groups, a number of parents reported engaging more often with their children, and in new ways. This included encouraging children through praise rather than correcting mistakes, avoiding negative comments and encouraging children to describe their art work in their own words or engage in books more creatively.
- **Home visits were seen as invaluable** in providing opportunities to build stronger relationships in a relaxed way, enhance parents' confidence in talking with practitioners, and get them involved in literacy activities with their children.
- **The presence of fathers and male carers during home visits was also a strong feature of the project:** 121 fathers were present for at least some of the first home visit and 96 for the second.
- **The accessibility and low cost nature of activities** promoted through Making it REAL was identified as important for parents' ability to sustain these ideas after the Making it REAL support had ended.

This section combines feedback from parents<sup>29</sup>, gathered by the parents' survey and the focus groups with data from the practitioners' post-training surveys, qualitative interviews and the two observations of children and their parents<sup>30</sup>, conducted by practitioners shortly after attending the Making it REAL training and again six months later<sup>31</sup>. Across all the settings most engagement was with the children's mothers, as they were usually the primary carer and/or the parent with whom the setting had greatest contact. A discussion of fathers' involvement can be found below in Section 2.2.3.5.

The main effects consistently found across all the different data sources were:

- Improvements in parental engagement and relationship with the setting.
- Parents greater appreciation of their role as early educators and doing more with their children in relation to early literacy.
- Changes to parents' relationships and communication with their children.
- Improvements in links and referrals made to other services.

These are discussed in turn below, drawing on the available data for each.

### **2.2.3.1 Perceived improvements in parents' confidence and engagement with early years staff about their children's learning**

There is clear evidence of perceived improvements in parents' engagement with settings as an outcome of Making it REAL, although not for all parents.

In terms of positive outcomes, in the six-month follow-up survey, 82% of practitioners reported that Making it REAL had had either 'some' or a 'great impact' on improving relationships between parents and the setting overall, and none said there had been *no* impact.

Almost all parents responding to the follow-up parents feedback survey reported they were at least 'quite confident' to talk to staff about their child's development (97%), including 76% who said they felt 'very confident'. However, it needs to be borne in mind that only 44% of parents participating in Making it REAL responded to the survey (as is sometimes to be expected with a postal survey), and it may be that responders included the more engaged or more confident people. Reflecting this, among practitioners responding to the six-month follow-up survey, 54% said there had been an increase in the extent to which parents were asking questions and starting conversations with them about their children's learning, but three in ten (29%) said there had been no change in this.

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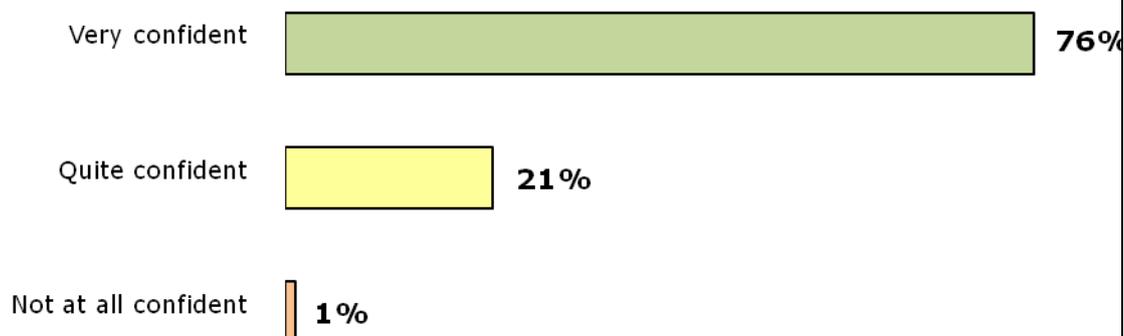
<sup>29</sup> As outlined in Appendix 7.1, 497 parents, with whom practitioners had worked with under this project, were sent a self-completion questionnaire. This received 220 responses, a response rate of 44%.

<sup>30</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

<sup>31</sup> Findings reported here are based on the observations of 443/497 children, aged two to five, who were involved in the project for its duration, for whom both pre-project and post-project observation forms were returned. A further 54/497 children had a single observation.

**Chart 2.13: Measures of parent confidence from parent and practitioner surveys**

*How confident do you feel now when talking about your child's development?*



*Has there been an increase or decrease in the frequency of parents asking questions and starting conversations with practitioners about their children's learning?*



Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of the project and who responded to the parent survey (220/497) and all practitioners who participated in the project and completed a six month follow up survey (76/135). Missing data ranged from 3 - 17%

In terms of how measures of practitioners' perceptions of parents' confidence compared in observations, recorded for each parent at the start and end of Making it REAL, there is evidence of change for many parents, but not of positive outcomes for all parents. The most notable shifts were in parents appearing 'very confident', rising from 24% to 50% between the pre-training survey and the six-month follow-up, and the reductions in parents appearing 'not at all', or 'not very confident'. However, practitioners perceived there to be a residual 5% who appeared 'not very confident' and a further 15% who appeared only 'quite confident' (rather than confident or very confident).

These findings were supported by the interviews and focus groups with practitioners and parents. Both parties had noticed an improved relationship and an increase in parents' confidence to initiate and have discussions with staff about their child. Practitioners felt that on the whole the parents involved in Making it REAL had opened up more to them over the course of the project. Indeed the eight core parents were said to have a much closer and open relationship than the parents not included in the home visits. In one setting the lead practitioner described a parent who had previously appeared scared of

staff and normally 'ran away' if a staff member tried to approach them. Now this parent had agreed to work as their parent volunteer next year. Parents were said to want to discuss with staff the activities, Making it REAL and otherwise, they had been doing with their children and what ideas they had followed, such as mark making and using environmental print for shopping lists:

*"... [they] come in and say, 'oh yes, we did this and we did that' and they would come in and tell me that they have been doing things, so I knew that they were taking it on board ... and they all came back and said, 'yeah we did it and he was walking around [supermarket] going, yeah we've got the bananas, yeah we've got the tea, we've got the milk."*

(Practitioner)

Improvements were attributed to several factors, including parents feeling more respected and confident, having more insight into the early learning process and being able to speak the same 'language' as practitioners, such as 'mark making'; and practitioners and parents feeling they shared a common interest in the child. The home visits were felt to have particularly boosted relationships and trust a great deal.

*"So you have parents coming back and talking to you about their reading or what they're doing at home and things whereas before parents were, well, we don't really talk about stuff like that, so."*

(Practitioner)

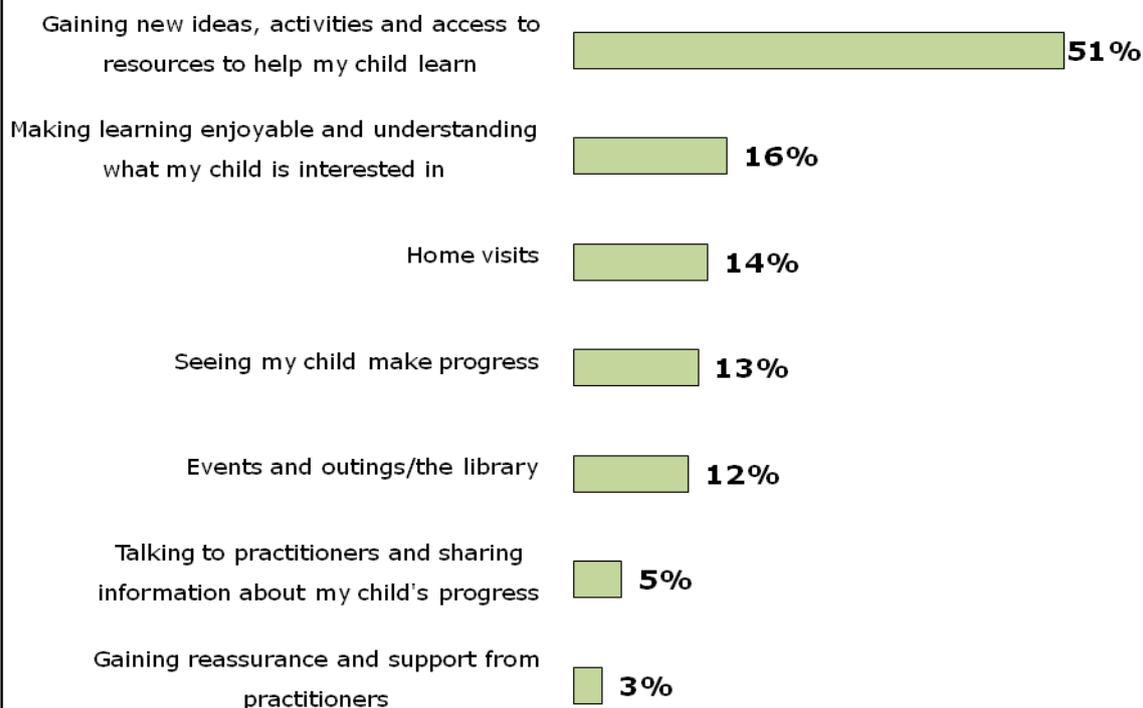
### **2.2.3.2 Parents' increased understanding and confidence in their educational role and undertaking new or different activities with their children**

#### ***Overall views***

Feedback about Making it REAL was overwhelmingly positive, and most parents found Making it REAL had helped them develop their role in supporting their children's literacy.

In the parents' survey they were asked what had been the most helpful aspects of Making it REAL. By far the highest number (51%) indicated that gaining new ideas, activities and access to resources to help their children learn was the most helpful; followed by finding out what their child was interested in and how to make learning enjoyable for them (16%); home visits (14%); seeing their child make progress (13%); and events, outings and trips to the library (12%).

**Chart 2.14: If you think about all of the Making it REAL home visits, events and activities, what has been the most helpful to**



Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of the project and who responded to the parent survey (220/497).

In the focus groups many parents were amazed at how much their children were learning, developing and absorbing at this age. **Most felt that their involvement with Making it REAL had helped them understand how important their role was in their child's early learning** in general, especially how much their day-to-day actions and interactions mattered. Several practitioners commented that parents could tend towards the view that all learning goes on in the setting and that that is the practitioner's role, rather than the parents, but that the Making it REAL project had helped change that.

*"They do the teaching and we don't, that's not my job as a parent."*

(Practitioner)

Even those parents, who had been previously conscious of their role, reported that they had previously lacked **ideas and knowledge on how to promote their child's learning**, but that Making it REAL had helped fill that gap. Apart from the general information about learning, parents were very appreciative of the ideas and tips they had been given through this project.

*"How to do things or do them differently...Parents do need ideas... we do want to do more, but we need details and boost as well...encourage us."*

(Parent)

As the above quote illustrates, increasing parents' understanding also **boosted their confidence to participate and initiate learning activities with their children**. For example, parents' confidence in **reading** grew with the project. In one case cited, the parent had insisted that the practitioner read to their child in the first home visit. But on the second visit they wanted to do the reading and merely asked for some guidance.

*"...and the next time we went I didn't have to say anything. She was like, 'I want you to listen to me and my child read this story because he really likes it and he's going to tell you word endings of the story' and she was really confident. "*

(Practitioner)

The Making it REAL input had helped reassure parents in many ways: not just about what to do with their children, but what might be considered 'normal' development at a given age; it also helped allay anxieties about the quality of their parenting. Parents said they had a better appreciation of how much **modelling** they were providing and how important that was, such as when writing a list.

*"... watching me reading instructions. ..Made me more mindful to give him opportunities ...never realised before."*

(Parent)

### **Helping parents with the four key areas of literacy**

The vast majority (89%) of parents who responded to the parent survey indicated they now did new things at home to help their child learn as a result of their involvement in the project. As presented in the table below, when asked what these were, activities relating to three of the four areas of literacy came out on top, including environmental print, books and especially early writing. However, oral language activities were less frequently mentioned.

**Table 2.14 What do you now do at home now to help your child learn?**

	%	N
Make marks and early writing, draw and paint, make models	51	99
Read books, use the library or talk about stories	44	85
Notice environmental print, play with letters	27	53
Play more games	14	27
Sing rhymes and songs	7	14
Listen and talk, expand language, use both English and home language	7	13
Use computers	5	10
Go out on visits	3	5

*Base = all parents who participated in Making it REAL for the duration of the project , responded to the parent survey and indicated they now did new things at home to help their child learn (196/497).*

However, when parents were prompted about how much Making it REAL had helped them with each of the four different strands, oral language came out equal to the other areas. Roughly three quarters of parents felt that the Making it REAL activities had helped them 'a great deal' to support their children through: joining in with songs or rhymes (78%), making and explaining marks (77%), using environmental print (72%) and learning about books (71%).

The qualitative case study data back up these findings. Parents were asked open questions about whether they now did anything different with their children and if so what and why. Their answers suggest that they had adopted many of the different elements of Making it REAL, such as mark making, reading, environmental print and using local amenities. Some examples are provided below. Individual parents said they had also had the ORIM Framework explained to them and felt they had benefited from this learning. However, positive feedback was not universal. In one case study setting, **three parents felt that staff had not explained the purpose of Making it REAL or the significance of the activities** being provided for them and their children in terms of promoting learning. Whilst two of them reported ways in which their child's development had progressed as a result of participating (for example, one said their child was now more interested in books as a result of visiting the library for the first time), parents did not feel they had learnt new things themselves, and said that they did not realise this was the purpose of Making it REAL.

Many parents reported that they were **incorporating environmental print and other aspects of REAL into normal outings** and had not known beforehand how it could enhance reading. They found that including the REAL ideas such as environmental print, looking for signs, counting or singing helped make a walk in the park or going shopping much more interesting for everyone:

*"Normally when went out and about you're not looking for signs - makes it more interesting .... a great idea."*

(Parent)

Many parents reported being more aware of the significance of early **mark making**, but also of the need to avoid steering it. The range of methods to enhance early writing came as a complete surprise to parents, both in itself and in the variety of materials that could be used. For example, parents were letting children 'write' their own captions to pictures of their days out in their scrapbooks, rather than correcting or criticising, or 'pushing them to get it right':

*"...something they've done and not us make them do it ... I want to get involved in there and change it, but I know not to."*

(Parent)

Parents recounted that they now approach and **read books and stories** very differently. They had taken on board the benefits of making this process as interactive as possible, enjoying a book together and the fact that they did not necessarily have to focus on the words or get to the end of the story.

*"They showed you how to read it different, what questions to ask them."*

(Parent)

*"Totally different than when they went to school - sounding out letters - different to talk about the story... makes it easier for the children to understand ... still doing it today."*

(Parent)

Parents also liked the point that any type of reading opportunity and material was said to be of value. In other words comics and reading about favourite characters, such as Peppa Pig, were just as important to the development of reading skills as 'real' books.

### **Other benefits of Making it REAL for parents**

Generally, the **accessibility and inexpensive nature of** items which could be used surprised and pleased parents, and was regarded as important for low income parents' ability to sustain their activities with children after the Making it REAL programme ended. Previously, they had not fully appreciated how much use could be made of ordinary household objects to create fun and for arts and crafts, and had found commercially available arts and crafts materials prohibitively expensive. They were surprised but pleased to see that their children got as much stimulation and enjoyment from low-cost resources.

*"...before would always go and buy toys - house full of toys... more relaxed now just think: just because I'm not spending money does not mean I'm not being good to my child."*

(Parent)

Parents said that they felt more able to come up with ideas of things to do and, for example deal with rainy days when they were stuck indoors:

*"I can just get a bit of paper and a few pens and she's away"*

(Parent)

Individual practitioners highlighted this was a unique benefit of Making it REAL, compared to some other literacy interventions that often relied on providing a one-off pack of relatively expensive resources to families.

During focus groups, parents reported an **increase in the use of libraries** and that they were deliberately making more trips for the sake of the child's learning, such as going somewhere on the train just for the experience. They said Making it REAL had made them **more aware of activities they could pursue nearby**, such as city farms, which they were not always previously aware of. Individual parents also described how visiting new places with practitioners had increased their confidence to do so independently. For example, one parent described how she now felt able to go to places that required a trip on public transport which had been too daunting previously. Another referred to increased confidence in going out with other groups of parents.

### 2.2.3.4 Reported changes to parents' relationships and communication with their children

Practitioners used home visits, events and outings to look at how parents interacted with their children, and over the course of this project many observed that this had improved dramatically. Parents similarly reported improvements in this area. One point of change was parents' recognition of their child's autonomy and learning ability:

*"...typically in this area a lot of them can be quite babied... the dummies and bottles and pushchairs remain for a long time."*

(Practitioner)

In the parents' survey, 16% of respondents indicated that the most helpful part of Making it REAL was making learning enjoyable through gaining an understanding of what their child was interested in. Several parents said that the project had helped them understand how much their child could initiate for themselves and the need to respond to what the child identified as their likes and needs, such as playing outdoors, or with sand or water. In turn this enhanced their confidence in their parenting.

*"...how to keep [child] occupied... Knows what she likes now, otherwise would not have a clue."*

(Parent)

Parents often reported being impressed at their children's abilities, what they could do, play with and how they played. They were both observed and reported themselves **listening to their child more and discussing things more with them**. Another message parents had taken on board was the **value of spending time and interacting with their child**. They described now spending discrete 'quality' time with their child and felt that this had already resulted in a closer bond between them. Those with more than one child and/or busy schedules spoke about deliberately changing their routines to create specific one-to-one time with each child, despite the demands of work, housework or anything else. Previously, they had not been aware that this was not happening or the importance of it.

*'Not that I didn't spend time with her before but when I put her to bed, I'd quickly read the book and that was it. Now look at pictures, do a lot more stuff with her... new way to do stuff, do a lot more stuff with her now.'*

(Parent)

*"This made me think, 'half an hour, ironing can wait, spend a bit more time with her' ...made me actively want to do more."*

(Parent)

Changes were reported in how the parents spoke to their children. Parents said they were speaking more with their children and, moreover, that the way they spoke had changed. Staff commonly echoed this. One aspect was a realisation of the negativity of their previous discourse and how this could impact on their child.

*"The main one is the not saying 'no'. I've never, ever, not said 'no': 'It's not that: it's that'. So, that I know is 100% from the programme"*

(Parent)

As part of this, parents said they were now aware how easy it was to 'demoralise' a child about their work and as a result had started to ask their child about what they were doing or discussed their work in a more open and positive way. For example, letting a child explain their picture in their own way words, or asking them questions in 'a more positive way':

*"Made me think [child] has been spending twenty minutes on what she thinks is a house and I've gone over there and crushed it - more like a realisation."*

(Parent)

*"I'm doing that more - before would have said 'No, that's not green, that's yellow'. Now will say 'umm try again' 'tell us more'... never looked at it like that before."*

(Parent)

Parents for whom English was an additional language were very pleasantly surprised to be encouraged to speak their own language with their children. Before, they had felt confused by which was best or had presumed it was best for their child to push English or had tried to combine both.

*"... thought they had to speak in English, but they can't, so they don't bother with either."*

(Practitioner)

### **2.2.3.5 Involvement of fathers and grandparents**

While many of the parents involved in Making it REAL were mothers/female carers, the presence of fathers and male carers during home visits was also a strong feature of the project.

Monitoring reports on home visits completed by practitioners indicated that **121 fathers were present for at least some of the first home visit and 96 for the second** and practitioners surveyed indicated that **Making it REAL also had some (41%) or a great (25%) impact on fathers' and male carers' involvement in their children's learning** while 17% reported it had no impact.

Within the case study focus groups with parents, a number discussed sharing ideas gained through Making it REAL with grandparents, such as a new approach to reading books.

### **2.2.3.6 Mutual support**

Practitioners also observed that some parents involved in Making it REAL had formed friendship groups, which they hoped would help provide mutual support.

*"Every day after preschool they sit out there for about 15 minutes having a chitchat, they're going to each other's houses, they take their children to the park, and I don't think that would've happened before."*

(Practitioner)

## 2.2.4 Outcomes in terms of practitioner confidence, knowledge, skills and practice

### Summary

- **Practitioners' knowledge, confidence, skills and practice improved in a number of key areas measured during the evaluation**, between the pre-training and six-month follow-up practitioner survey:
  - **Knowledge of REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it with families:** the proportion of practitioners who reported 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of knowledge in this area rose from 7% to over nine in ten practitioners (91%).
  - **Knowledge of supporting children with early literacy:** the proportion of practitioners who reported 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of knowledge increased from 64% to 88%.
  - **Confidence in engaging parents, and specifically disadvantaged parents, to help them support their children's early learning and development:** although parental engagement was far from a new concept to practitioners, many indicated that Making it REAL had built upon and improved their existing knowledge and practice. The proportion of practitioners who reported having at least 'a fair amount' of confidence to engage parents rose from 62% to 93%; while the proportion who reported having at least 'a fair amount' of confidence to engage disadvantaged parents rose from half (50%) to 88%.
- In the qualitative interviews, a number of practitioners discussed how, in the beginning, home visits caused them anxiety but this had improved since attending the training and gaining experience. Practitioners viewed home visits as the most effective aspect of the Making it REAL approach.
- There were a minority of practitioners who remained somewhat less confident than others about visiting families at home (34% of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey indicated they were only 'quite confident' to do so), highlighting the benefit of giving this special prominence in training and support.
- **On the whole, practitioners understood, liked and used the REAL principles and ORIM Framework.**
  - Individual practitioners described how Making it REAL had augmented their practice in various ways, for instance: incorporating ideas of environmental print, and greater attention to mark making; more emphasis and value placed on engagement with parents and home visiting; creating more opportunities to

promote and include literacy; and following children's lead more and adjusting to how they preferred to learn.

- While many had experience of previous initiatives and frameworks to improve early literacy, ORIM was distinguished because of its strong research base, practical detail, accessibility and flexibility. Moreover it was described as easy to remember and to apply in practice in different circumstances, not least in children's own homes.

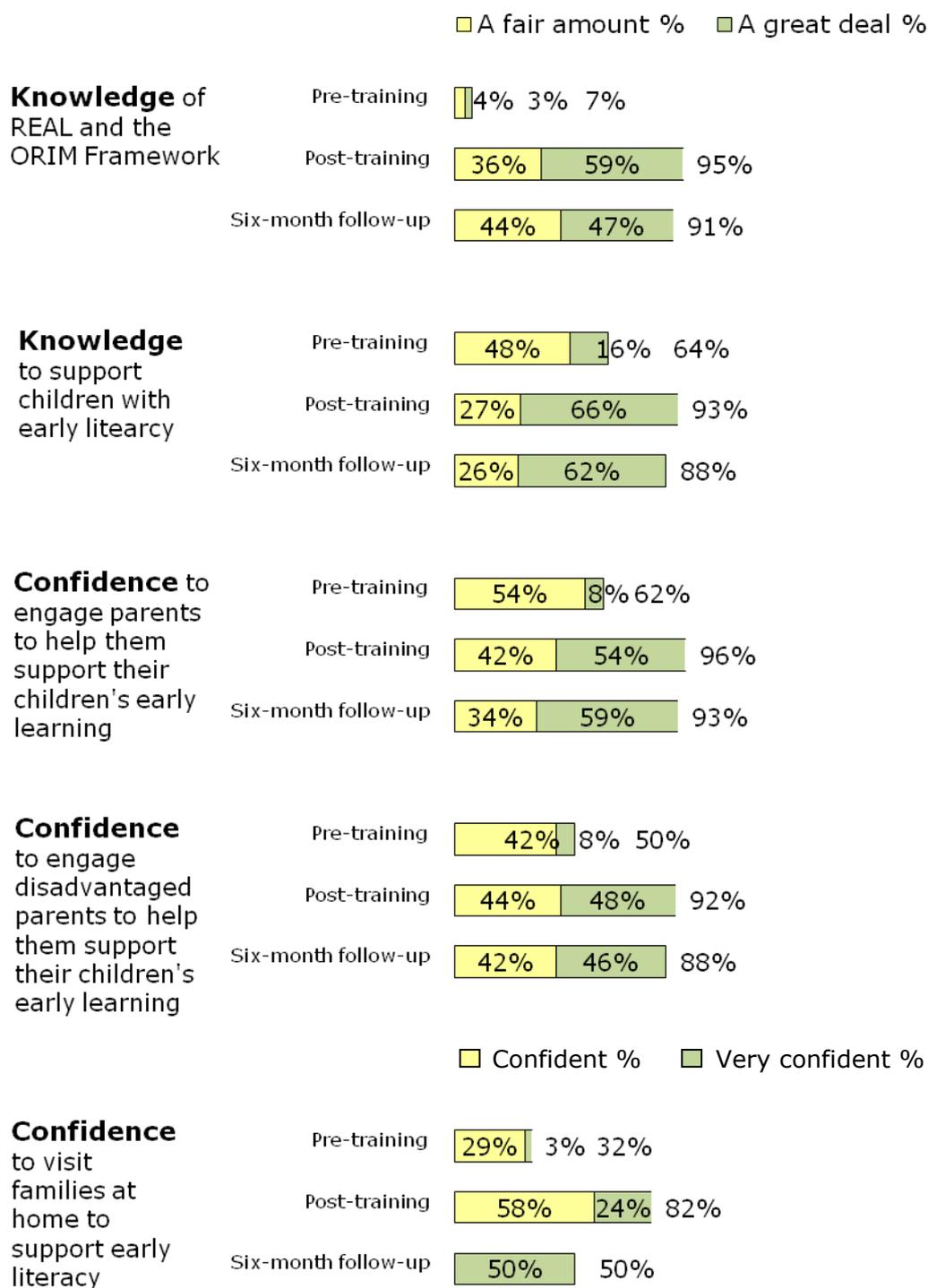
#### **2.2.4.1 Overall changes in practitioners' knowledge confidence and skills in supporting children with early literacy**

While some aspects of Making it REAL were not totally new to all practitioners or settings, such as the engagement of parents or home visiting, the emphasis on these aspects was said to be greater in Making it REAL. As such, most practitioners said that, as a result of attending training and delivering Making it REAL in practice, they now had a fuller appreciation of why parental engagement was critical, and were more confident, pro-active and, they hoped, more effective in making it happen.

A consistently high proportion of the 135 practitioners who attended the training reported in the post-training survey that the training and pre-course reading improved their knowledge or confidence 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' in: using REAL and the ORIM Framework (95%); supporting children with early literacy (89%); and engaging parents to help support their children's early learning and development (91%), including specifically, disadvantaged parents (87%).

And as Chart 2.15 below shows, practitioners' self-reported levels of confidence and knowledge of key aspects also increased between the pre and post-training survey. Furthermore, although there is a slight drop in ratings of confidence six months later (which might be expected as the initial 'buzz' from positive learning at the training is replaced by experience of delivery in practice), very positively, much of the increase in ratings of knowledge and confidence were sustained.

**Chart X: Measures of practitioners' knowledge and confidence in the pre-training, post-training and six month follow up surveys.**



Base = all practitioners who attended the REAL training and who responded to the relevant surveys: pre-training (90/135); post-training (135/135); six month follow up (76/135). Missing data ranged from 1% - 9%.

Whilst reported outcomes are high for all aspects, positive reporting are greatest for knowledge of how to support children with early literacy; confidence to engage with parents to help them support their children's early learning; and development and knowledge of REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply them with families.

Regarding knowledge of REAL and the ORIM Framework, the main change in detailed measures was in the proportion of practitioners who said they had none/not much/only a little knowledge, which was successfully reduced from 87% down to 2% between the pre and post-training surveys. This highlights how the Making it REAL programme successfully introduced its key ideas to many practitioners for the first time.

For other outcome areas, the main increase was in the proportion who said they had a great deal (rather than just a 'fair amount' of knowledge or confidence). This highlights that practitioners felt that they had reasonable levels of prior knowledge and confidence, but that Making it REAL was effective in building further on that. For example, the proportion who said they had a great deal of knowledge in how to support children with early literacy rose from 16% of respondents in the pre-training survey to 62% in the six-month follow-up survey (and the proportion saying 'a fair amount' fell from 48% to 26%. (See Appendix 2 for full tables).

**Reporting of positive outcomes was slightly less prevalent in terms of confidence in visiting families at home to support early literacy.** In the pre-training survey, almost half of respondents (46%) reported to be only 'quite confident' to visit families at home to support early literacy. While this fell to one in ten (10%) in the post-training survey, it rose to just over a third of respondents (34% or 26 respondents) six months later. These 26 respondents represented a broad range of job roles and setting types.<sup>32</sup>

This was also reflected in feedback from qualitative case study interviews regarding experiences of the training and of implementation of REAL in practice (Sections 4 and 5). As such it may be beneficial for some practitioners to have even greater emphasis on these aspects in Making it REAL training and to have further access to follow-up support from colleagues and network meetings.

**Not all practitioners reported having a full understanding of Making it REAL.** While almost half (47%) of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey reported having a 'great deal' of knowledge of REAL and the ORIM Framework, a similar proportion (43%) said they only had 'a fair amount'. Those reporting lower levels of knowledge were found across all practitioner roles and settings. In the qualitative case studies, one local authority lead described how some practitioners had mistakenly understood the Making it REAL approach on early writing to include encouraging children to trace around

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<sup>32</sup> Managers/deputy managers of a PVI setting or Children's Centres (eight), teachers (QTS) working within a school (seven), nursery officers/nurses in a stay and play group and school (three), childcare assistant/teaching assistants in Children's Centres (two) and an early years practitioner (one) working within a Children's Centres. The remaining five respondents were early years advisors/officers who supported practitioners.

letter and number templates. This indicated the importance of support for practice from the local authority leads as well as local networks.

However, on the whole, case study interviewees said they had learnt a lot from Making it REAL. They liked the fact that REAL was based on research and robust evidence and felt this made the programme and methods more trustworthy and more likely to endure than many other initiatives. Their understanding of the important role that parents play in their children's education was augmented by the reading and training, a point returned to later.

Practitioners also felt they learnt a lot about the incremental way in which children learn, how individual learning styles can differ and how to respond to these in practice, 'go with the flow' and use 'opportunities'. They reported understanding more about alternative print formats and about the development of early writing and speaking skills.

*"...we think about literacy completely differently now... so many opportunities... walking down the street... seeing signs...they were always there, but..."*

(Setting manager)

The main changes in practice which case study participants recounted (and which are discussed in more detail in later sections) were:

- Changes in how staff engaged with and spoke to parents, explored further below.
- Conducting home visits and applying REAL principles in practice during home visits. Many settings visited said they planned to continue these in future - beyond their direct involvement in the Making it REAL project.
- Organising outings and centre-based activities based on REAL principles to promote literacy for groups of children and families and using the ORIM Framework in those activities.
- Being more creative in their practice and applying REAL and ORIM in different practice applications.
- Modelling how to pursue activities for other staff and for parents.
- Allowing the children more free rein to take the lead in choosing what they wanted to do and how, which the practitioners would follow and build on.
- Some setting-wide changes, expanded on below, such as including more mark making, environmental print and creating more opportunities for early literacy.

The remaining part of this section provides more detail about outcomes in terms of practitioner knowledge and skills regarding REAL and ORIM and engaging parents.

## 2.2.4.2 Practitioners' awareness and knowledge of the REAL principles and ORIM Framework and how to apply it in practice

Reflecting the findings from the quantitative surveys outlined above, many case study interviewees reported gaining, for the first time, an understanding of the REAL principles and the ORIM Framework as a result of attending the training.

### **Practitioners were very positive about the ORIM Framework**

All of the eight case study settings reported now using ORIM. Practitioners said they liked the framework, felt they had grasped how to apply it and were doing so more and more. Although certain components of REAL might have already been familiar, the overall framework was generally new and they found 'it made sense' and gave them fresh ideas and methods to pursue.

Despite a welter of rules and regulations, it was felt that there were few hands-on frameworks such as ORIM which combined research evidence with detailed practical instruction. At one and the same time, ORIM was said to help use and ground other learning principles and activities, while providing its own flexible framework which practitioners could develop and build on.

*"When we were doing an event .. I used it to help me think about where would I draw out the... parents' modelling and what would I try and give them some instructions on ...definitely, we've talked about using it in other ways with staff to look at as a tool, so it's a very useful tool that crosses over."*

(Practitioner)

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) stresses parental engagement and several settings had undertaken previous projects such as Parent, Early years and Learning (PEAL)<sup>33</sup>; Every Child a Talker (ECAT)<sup>34</sup>; and WellComm<sup>35</sup> which focus on speech and language development; as well as other programmes. All these were said to have been useful and provided training and resources. The perceived differences with Making it REAL were: that it built on but could also accommodate other initiatives like these; that it used the ORIM Framework; that it was based on an evidential underpinning; and that it provided concrete ideas and incorporated opportunities for staff to discuss and practice how to deal with real life scenarios.

*"...facts and figures... How it's been researched and how beneficial it could be."*

(Practitioner)

ORIM was also said to have reinforced the benefits of existing practice, such as story-telling, books, singing, the desirability of providing good outdoor facilities and of making the indoor and outdoor space more continuous. Besides the

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.peal.org.uk>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/2011/10/every-child-a-talker-guidance-for-early-language-lead-practitioners/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm-speech-and-language-toolkit-early-years>

application to date, many staff stated they also aimed to use it as a basis for planning in the new academic year.

**Many practitioners said that having the ORIM Framework to draw on in their practice boosted their confidence.**

They found it provided lots of ideas and stimulated creativity when applying it in their own practice, such as looking for and pursuing opportunities, or thinking of exciting and original ways to do mark making. During the first home visits, keeping ORIM in mind had calmed some staff's nerves, provided them with something to refer back to and, in turn, boosted their confidence.

**ORIM was said by most to be very simple to use, easy to remember and accessible and flexible to apply, and they reported many examples of how they had put it into practice**

They reported that it did not require extensive, unusual, or new materials. Moreover, the principles could be adapted to different circumstances. For example, opportunities, modelling or environmental print could be brought into play just as easily when walking down the road, at home, or in the early years' setting. Using ORIM, and the ideas on modelling in particular, one practitioner felt able to advise a parent how television soap operas might be providing negative modelling and language for their child.

The framework was described as easy to convey to parents, many of whom showed familiarity with the ORIM acronym in focus groups. Parents were said to like the open and creative aspects and the ideas underpinning the model, and to have responded well to its accessibility, such as using the library, mark making with food, baby lotion and other items already in the house, the importance of positive verbal interaction and modelling.

*"for example a parent came to me and said, he can't say pen, he says 'en', ... from REAL it talked about role modelling and not saying 'no', ..., so you'd say, 'oh pen'. So you don't say, 'it's not en it's pen'. So it's just role modelling for them ... And then extend the language by adding the thing as well."*

(Practitioner)

Practitioners liked the different aspects and some settings said they developed each in their practice at different times in different situations, such as the multitude of mark making possibilities.

*"...shaving foam, jelly, any opportunity... carrots, broccoli."*

(Practitioner)

**Environmental print was found to be the newest individual aspect that practitioners said they benefited from learning about, followed by the role of mark making.**

Practitioners were least likely to be already familiar with environmental print as a method. That was followed by ideas for mark making and how it helped lay the foundations for early writing. Practitioners outlined how their understanding had developed in these areas, and they were incorporating these in their practice. For example, one setting pinned up photographs of familiar local shops and other recognisable aspects, such as the local buses and bus stops. Another

asked parents to bring in empty food boxes and packaging and used these in the home corner and shop area. One created more signs combining words and pictures, such as 'sand', 'water', 'paint' and placed these on the corresponding objects.

### **2.2.4.3 Practitioners' confidence and skills to engage with parents**

Both the quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of positive outcomes with regards to knowledge and skills in engaging with parents.

While engaging parents was not a new impetus, the training was said to have helped practitioners place more value on the learning potential within the home environment, the input of parents as the 'primary educators', and on the importance of establishing good relationships with parents.

*" ..they're always home with them, always learning there, they're role models"*

(Practitioner)

Among the data presented in Section 2.2.4.1, it is particularly notable that *all* practitioners responding to the six-month follow-up survey said they had 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of confidence in engaging with parents in general, an increase from 62% of respondents to the pre-training survey. Similar high numbers (88%) reported having 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' of confidence to engage disadvantaged parents in the six-month follow-up survey, an increase from 50% of respondents to the pre-training survey.

In the qualitative case study interviews, many practitioners said that the practical aspects of training sessions and network meetings (e.g. role plays and planning), combined with subsequent application, had played a key role in boosting confidence and had given practitioners an opportunity to try out and develop their practice ideas and skills with the support of peers.

While on the whole practitioners interviewed in case study settings reported that a focus on engaging parents was nothing new, many stated that the training and evidence presented had substantially increased, or at least reinforced, their understanding in this field. While some early years settings were said to have previously tried to link the home and the setting better, what was different with Making it REAL was the greater consciousness of how much the child learned in the home and the importance of establishing a trusting rapport with parents for this and other reasons.

A number of practitioners said that as a result of Making it REAL, they now made sure they talked to parents much more about early literacy skills and passed on REAL ideas to them, for example, the importance of reading, in any format – not just books – and, in a very real sense, approached them as partners.

*"Putting more value on the parents' role. There's always been an idea of home learning but it's a bit more, it's increased that for me."*

(Practitioner)

Practitioners said they had gained more ideas and 'a road in' on how to actively engage and explain things to parents, for instance how to involve children in any activities around the house and the importance of these interactions.

The practical sessions within training days as well as the opportunities for discussion were said to have helped staff develop their practice in how they actually converse with parents. Practice points mentioned included knowing how to address individual parents whatever their background and circumstances, ensuring they understood what was being said and avoiding jargon, especially but not only where English was an additional language. Role plays during the training had helped trainees realise not only how much jargon is commonly used but also how much of a barrier it could create.

*"professionals tend to presume that parents know new 'buzz words'... parents may be smiling and nodding but don't have an idea what you're talking about."*

(Practitioner)

A few practitioners spoke about learning the need to minimise the communication of negative news to parents and to focus on communicating positives. For example at pick-up time, they now felt it was important to focus on the positive aspects of the child's day, such as 'the nice picture' they drew and share these with parents, rather than always telling parents about their child's misdemeanours:

*"That could change that child's evening."*

(Practitioner)

Some reported that the training had given them the understanding and confidence to tackle certain issues, such as parents' use of mobile phones on outings:

*"We, as practitioners, always talk to the children when we take them out, but the parents not so much, and when we went [on outing] I actually said 'no mobile phones allowed and if it rings please don't answer it, because this is a time for you to spend with your child', because otherwise they would have sat on the bus on their phone..."*

(Practitioner)

As a result of the training, the home visits and the other Making it REAL activities, several practitioners reported feeling much more relaxed with parents, which further facilitated the relationship.

#### **2.2.4.4 Home visiting and practitioners' confidence and skills to support early literacy at home**

Prior to the Making it REAL training, few (17%) of the settings conducted home visits to support early literacy but, as a result of participating in Making it REAL, all the settings conducted home visits. Furthermore, all settings interviewed in the qualitative case studies expressed a desire to continue doing so beyond the end of the Making it REAL project, but were also conscious of the associated challenges. On one hand, they were convinced by the results they had seen so far that home visits brought certain advantages but, on the other hand, they were aware of the cost implications of staffing and providing cover for home visits. It should be noted, that many of those interviewed were not the most senior management who would be the final decision makers.

Practitioners' reports about their confidence prior to doing any home visits varied. In the pre-training survey three-quarters said they felt either 'quite confident' or 'confident' to visit families at home to support their child's early literacy (75%), with about one fifth reporting that they were 'not very/not at all confident' (22%). By contrast, in the qualitative case study interviews, nearly all the practitioners reported being somewhat nervous before the home visits.

By all accounts, it was a novel experience for all concerned. Parents had their own apprehensions and were primarily anxious about how they might be judged. Staff were just as worried about being found wanting, albeit on different criteria. Practitioners spoke about the strangeness of working outside their setting. They were worried about the best activities to plan, how to get the child and parent to engage and how their input would be received. Concerns about personal safety did not feature highly.

Possibly some of the discrepancy in self-reporting is due to time and hindsight: maybe practitioners were more aware of their previous anxiety after the event. The later surveys suggest that confidence increased with training and experience. Responses to the six-month follow-up survey show an increase in the number of respondents who reported being 'very confident' (from 3% to 50%) but just over a third only feeling 'quite confident' (34%). As discussed in Section 4, this is an area that many case study interviewees said they wanted further detailed training on.

In the end, carrying out the home visits helped all parties relax and the practitioners felt more confident about conducting home visits. Interviewees attributed this to their successful experiences of home visiting and to all parties apparently enjoying them. The practitioners learnt from practice and observed the positive impact this method of interaction had had on the parents and the children, and on their relationships with the staff. Practitioners stressed that the quality of the interaction, establishment of trust, and confirming the idea that staff were there to support parents had proven just as important as the activities demonstrated. The more relaxed atmosphere created by the home visits were observed to improve relationships with all, including the more disadvantaged parents.

In turn the home visits provided the practitioners with more ideas of how to further engage the family in their child's learning. As noted elsewhere, the visits

often doubled as informal assessments of the home environment, such as how much books featured in the home, who else was around and what early learning activities were most likely to work with that child and their parents.

*"we learned an awful lot just in one visit about a couple of the families...People open up more I think in their own homes"*

(Practitioner)

*"... it gives you an insight as to what's going on, whether they have got books, is the television on all the time? It's sort of suggesting... that actually home is a learning environment as well..."*

(Practitioner)

## 2.2.5 Outcomes in terms of practice and quality in settings as a whole

### Summary

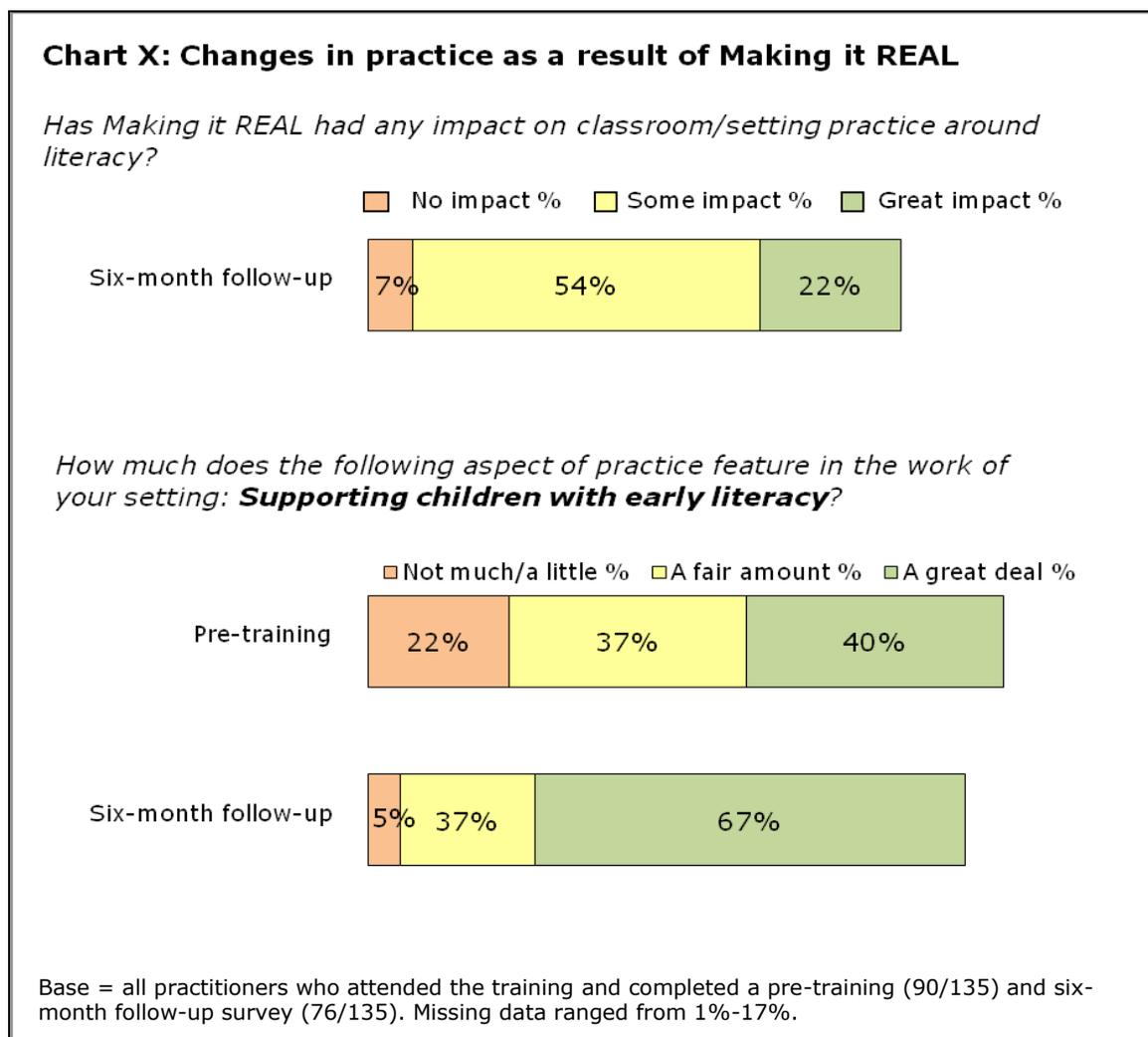
- **There is significant evidence that Making it REAL has resulted in changes to wider practice in settings**, as findings from the pre-training survey, six-month follow-up practitioner survey and qualitative interviews show:
  - The proportion of settings which said that supporting children's early literacy featured in their setting 'a great deal' increased substantially from the pre-training to the six-month follow-up survey (from 40% to 67%).
  - Individual Development project practitioners described how Making it REAL had augmented their practice in various ways, and that this had been embedded in the wider work of the setting. For instance, they described incorporating ideas of environmental print; embedding mark making activities throughout the setting, not just in the art/drawing/painting areas; greater engagement with parents and home visiting and more value placed on same; creating more opportunities to promote and include literacy; and following children's lead more and adjusting to how they preferred to learn.
- Of those who responded to the six-month follow-up survey and were aware that their setting used the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERs) or a similar framework (28 settings), the majority (79%) felt that adopting Making it REAL had had a positive impact on their ratings. It was too soon for settings to know if Making it REAL had had any impact on Ofsted inspections, but many settings felt that the parental involvement would be positively regarded by Ofsted.

### 2.2.5.1 Overview of changes in practice reported within settings as a result of Making it REAL

It was interesting to explore if participation in Making it REAL had impacted on the settings' practice as a whole. As well as being important for understanding the efficacy of Making it REAL in general, this could be material to its sustainability and was explored in both the surveys and in the qualitative interviews.

Overall, more than three-quarters of participants responding to the six-month follow-up survey reported that Making it REAL had had either a 'great impact' (22%) or 'some impact' (54%) on their setting's practice around literacy. There was also a slight increase in the total who reported that 'supporting children with early literacy' featured 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' in their setting (88% compared with 77%) and a large increase in the proportion who said it featured 'a great deal' (67% compared with 40%).

Only a small minority of practitioners in the six-month follow-up survey said that Making it REAL had had no impact (7%), or that supporting children with early literacy continued to feature only "a little" or "not much" in their setting (5%).



## **2.2.5.2 Main areas where changes in setting practice were reported by practitioners**

Among the case study participants, the main areas of change outlined by practitioners were as follows, and are discussed further below:

- including wider groups of children and parents in Making it REAL activities.
- sharing assessment information from home visits with other staff.
- passing on the Making it REAL training principles to other staff in the setting.
- integrating ORIM and REAL principles across the wider setting to provide more focus and support around early literacy.

### **Including more children and parents in Making it REAL activities**

Settings often widened the Making it REAL outings to include all children of a certain age or the whole setting and their parents. This was done both to reduce any potential stigma for the core group, but also to spread the ideas and share the advantages with as many families as possible. For example, one setting organised a trip for all the children by train to a train station, and others put on messy play and mark making sessions for all parents and children.

### **Sharing information gathered during homes visits with colleagues**

During home visits practitioners were able to observe the child in the environment in which they were more comfortable. At times this shed a new light on the child's development. For example, children who staff had judged to have speech and language delay sometimes verbalised quite freely at home. Observations were shared with key workers and prompted a redirection of focus onto making the child feel more confident and relaxed to enhance how much they spoke within the setting. Other observations were also shared, such as the child's access to or use of outdoor space, or their evident interests at home, which were then followed up in the setting.

### **Passing on Making it REAL training and ideas**

Many staff who had the Making it REAL training tried to pass knowledge on to colleagues. This varied in formality across the settings visited. Sometimes the trained staff were granted specific slots during staff meetings to explain REAL, or they ran training events to share the ideas with colleagues. Trained staff also spoke of more informal methods, such as assisting individual colleagues and suggesting REAL ideas to them to include when planning. In turn they noticed some changes in their colleagues, such as listening to children more and being more conscious of modelling. Senior staff were said to have been made aware of the potential benefits of home visiting. Reception to new ideas was said to be mixed, but generally positive. On the whole, actual attendance at the training was felt to be best to ensure getting an accurate and precise understanding of REAL and perceived to be more effective than hearing snippets of the REAL principles second-hand.

### **Integrating Making it REAL in the wider setting**

Most case study settings spoke about incorporating the ORIM Framework and REAL principles across the whole setting. This included applying environmental print across the whole setting; combining images, symbols and print in more

places; enabling mark making with a wider range of objects and materials, for all children, indoors and outdoors; helping children express themselves outdoors more; making connections with literacy throughout other activities; encouraging reading of any print format, not just books; introducing story bags for all children to borrow; sending ideas home to parents about activities to pursue with their children; and trying to be more responsive to opportunities.

Although reading and books had always featured, they said they now approached reading and story-telling differently, for example, expanding the narrative more, making more of the whole experience and taking pains to explain the new approach to parents.

*"Whereas all we ever did before, we'd just read a book and let them take books home and stuff. So it's just a bit more informative of why it's really important for them to do it, so that's the messages that we're giving to our parents now."*

(Practitioner)

Again, while these were not all original ideas as such, settings reported doing them more or in quite different ways because of Making it REAL, and that it had provided fresh strategies and techniques for practice.

### **2.2.5.3 Changes in reported levels of sharing literacy resources, and holding literacy workshops and events**

The practitioner surveys specifically asked all participants responding to the six-month follow-up survey about any changes in literacy workshops and levels of sharing literacy resources. (Full data from these questions is provided in Appendix 2)

- **Literacy events:** Over seven in ten respondents (72%) reported an increase in the amount of literacy events/workshops provided in their settings in the previous six months. Reflecting this, the proportion of settings which said they ran over 10 events doubled between the pre-training and post six-month follow-up survey (from 5% to 13%), and the proportion who said they ran 'none', dropped from 21% to 1%. However, this reflects the events delivered as part of the Making it REAL programme and it will remain to be seen if this increase is sustained beyond the programme.
- **Lending books and literacy resources:** Half of the participants who responded to the six-month follow-up survey said the rate of lending books and other literary resources had risen in the preceding six months (45%) but a similar proportion said this had remained static (46%). In terms of frequency of lending, there was a reduction in those who said they 'never' lent books between the pre-training and follow-up survey (14% down to 3%) and literacy resources (39% down to 13%), but there wasn't a notable increase in the proportion lending regularly (at least once a week).

As mentioned above, a small number of qualitative participants mentioned increased lending of literacy resources. Other examples emerged of where the quality of lending improved, even if the level of lending hadn't. For example, one setting said that it had previously been standard practice to give children the opportunity to borrow a book on a weekly basis. However, as a result of Making it REAL, they described how they put more focus on encouraging children to borrow, and in following up with parents and talking to children about what they had enjoyed about the book when they returned it.

#### **2.2.5.4 Impact on quality ratings in settings**

Over a third of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey (37% or 28 respondents) indicated that the setting or school they worked in (or supported) used the **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)** or another quality improvement framework. Of these, 28 respondents, over three-quarters, perceived an increase in their quality improvement ratings as a result of using the REAL approach in working with parents or literacy.

However over a fifth (24%) reported they did not use a quality improvement framework and a higher proportion (26%) did not know whether they did or not.

There was little to report on the impact with **Ofsted** from the case study settings, although practitioners felt that the parental involvement aspects would prove helpful to Ofsted inspections. By the time of this fieldwork, only a couple of settings had been inspected since taking on Making it REAL. The practitioners interviewed had not always been involved in Ofsted visits and so were not all able to comment on this. In the inspections that were reported, staff and parents had spoken favourably to Ofsted inspectors about their experience of Making it REAL and at least one of those settings had achieved an outstanding rating overall. One local authority lead reported that the Ofsted inspector had been so impressed by Making it REAL that they had attended a home visit with a practitioner. However, in another setting, the manager had forgotten to mention Making it REAL and their Making it REAL parental involvement until the day after the inspection visit, when Ofsted told them it was too late.

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

### **3.1 Project design and approach**

#### **3.1.1 Overall design and approach**

The National Rollout provides free one-day Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) training sessions to early years practitioners working with children aged three to five years old in childminder groups, statutory and Private Voluntary or Independent (PVI) settings. Participants are then free to take forward any aspects of Making it REAL they feel appropriate in their settings.

Between April 2013 and March 2014, the National Rollout aimed to deliver 70 training courses throughout England and four large regional training events. The training was delivered by the Early Childhood Unit (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 all local authorities in England. There was a particular emphasis on promoting the training in local authorities with comparatively low Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile results for children at age five.

Partnership organisations played a significant role in recruiting groups through membership networks. They promoted the training within their publications, and met with ECU four times during the year to develop recruitment strategies. PACEY also contributed to enhancing training guidance and materials for working with childminders.

#### **3.1.2 National Rollout one-day training**

The National Rollout training aimed to enable practitioners to use the REAL approach in early literacy work with families, specifically:

- To learn about the REAL approach to early literacy work with families.
- To share examples of existing practice.
- To understand and develop their own practice based on REAL and the Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Models (ORIM) Framework.
- To enable reflection on working with parents<sup>36</sup> in a range of environments, including home visits, and to identify the strategies required.
- To identify potential resources, opportunities, challenges and sources of support.

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<sup>36</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

- To help participants feel confident to take the work forward

As with the two-day Making it REAL training, pre-reading material was provided to practitioners. Over one day, the training was delivered using a combination of activities including presentations, group work, practice exercises and reflection. A training pack was given to each participant, which included information about the underpinning research, resources and practice examples.

## 3.2 Key findings

### 3.2.1 Delivery outputs

#### Summary

- **The National Rollout was successful in meeting its delivery targets.**
  - Between April 2013 and March 2014, **72 local training courses and four large regional training events** were delivered throughout England, surpassing the target of 70 training courses.
  - Training was delivered to **1,526 practitioners** and those who support practitioners from a range of practitioner and setting types. (This evaluation reports on all 1,333 practitioners who attended the training between July 2013 and March 2014).

#### 3.2.1.1 Profile of attendees

Between April 2013 and March 2014, **72 local training courses and four large regional training events were delivered throughout England.** Training was delivered in a range of contexts and achieved a good regional spread.

A total of **1,526 practitioners** (and those who supported practitioners) attended the training. However, **it is important to note that this evaluation presents findings from all practitioners who attended the training between July 2013 and March 2014 (1,333 practitioners)**<sup>37</sup>. As detailed in the tables below:

- Almost a third (32%) were qualified early years practitioners/nursery nurses/officers (17%), early years practitioners (8%) or teachers with QTS (7%), while 15% were childcare assistants/teaching assistant/early years workers. A similar proportion (16%) were childminders.

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<sup>37</sup> As outlined in Appendix 1, reported findings on the National Rollout are based on all 1,333 practitioners who attended 66 local training events and three regional events between July 2013 and March 2014. A pilot evaluation was carried out with the remaining participants who attended six local training events and one regional event between April and June 2013.

- Notably, almost three in ten (29%) were those in a managerial position: manager/deputy manager (16%) and local authority early years advisors (13%).
- Almost a third of attendees (32%) worked within a PVI setting, while others worked within the home setting (17%) as well as Children's Centres (16%) and nursery/primary schools (10%).

**Table 3.1: Profile of those who attended the National Rollout one-day training (July 2013 to March 2014)**

	%	N
Nursery officer/nursery nurse/early years practitioner	17	228
Manager/deputy manager	16	215
Child minder	16	213
Early years advisor/officer	13	175
Early years practitioner (EYPS)	8	113
Teacher (QTS)	7	92
Childcare assistant/teaching assistant/early years worker	6	74
Family support/outreach worker	6	78
Head teacher/assistant head teacher	1	3
Other	7	93
Missing data	3	49
Total	100	1333

**Table 3.2 Profile of participants' setting types (July 2013 to March 2014)**

	%	N
Private setting	24	334
Home setting	17	208
Children's centre	16	214
School- Nursery school or Primary school	10	132
Local Authority	9	119
Voluntary setting	8	103
Stay and play group	1	9
Other	5	77
Missing data	11	100
Total	100	1333

### 3.2.2 Outcomes for children, parents, practitioners, and settings

This section discusses perceived outcomes for children, parents, practitioners and practitioners' settings since attending the National Rollout training. The findings presented draw upon pre-training, post-training and six-month follow-up surveys of those who attended the training.<sup>38</sup> Findings regarding change over time should be treated with caution as, while they are indicative of positive trends within the data, statistical tests of significance were not carried out (surveys were not designed to track the progress of individuals).

#### Summary

- **Over three quarters of practitioners (78%) who responded to the six-month follow-up survey indicated that there had been a change to practice in their setting as a result of attending the National Rollout training.** Of this group, practitioners perceived improvements in the outcomes of children and parents, but to varying degrees, in the following areas:
  - **Perceived outcomes for children among practitioners who reported a change in practice:** At least half reported an increase in the frequency of children sharing a book (56%), recognising and responding to environmental print (55%), engaging in mark making (55%) and singing rhymes and songs (53%). However, while none reported a negative outcome (decrease), two fifths (40%-42%) reported no change in these areas.
  - **Perceived outcomes for parents:** Just over a half of the practitioners who reported a change in practice also reported an increase in the frequency of parents engaging in conversations about their child's learning (53%), while almost a third (30%) indicated there had been an increase in the frequency of parents attending sessions or activities. Again, a high proportion reported no change in these areas (44% for parents engaging in conversations and 66% for parents attending sessions or activities).
- **Practitioners' knowledge, confidence, skills and practice improved in a number of key areas measured during the evaluation, between**

<sup>38</sup> As outlined in Appendix 1, while 1,260 and 1,333 practitioners responded to the pre-training and post-training surveys respectively, findings that compare change between the pre-training, post-training and six-month follow-up surveys are based only on those who attended the training between July and December 2013 (697), rather than all those who attended between July 2013 and March 2014. Data for this report was collected and finalised in June 2014. As such, those who attended from January 2014 onwards would not have had time to complete a six-month follow-up survey.

the pre-training and six-month follow-up practitioner surveys:

- **Knowledge of REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it with families:** The proportion of practitioners who reported at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge in this area rose from 10% to almost three quarters of practitioners (74%).
  - **Knowledge of supporting children with early literacy:** The proportion of practitioners who reported at least 'a fair amount' of knowledge increased from 76% to 91%.
  - **Confidence in engaging disadvantaged parents to help them support their children's early learning and development:** The proportion who reported having at least 'a fair amount' of confidence to engage disadvantaged parents rose from 60% to 84%.
- **A number of changes to practice were noted within some practitioners' settings as a result of attending the National Rollout training:**
    - Roughly a third of practitioners indicated that there was an increase in the frequency of lending books (37%) and holding literacy workshops and events (33%), while just over one in ten noted an increase in the frequency of home visits (11%).
    - Among respondents who indicated there had been a change to their settings' practice, many indicated that ORIM and REAL approaches were used for planning within their settings, including in curriculum planning (56% or 102 practitioners), to inform the settings' quality improvement plan (34% or 62 practitioners) or the settings' plan for supporting two-year-olds with funded places (32% or 58 practitioners).
  - Among participants who had changed their practice following training, a quarter reported to have used REAL and ORIM activities in the Ofsted Self Evaluation process (26%).

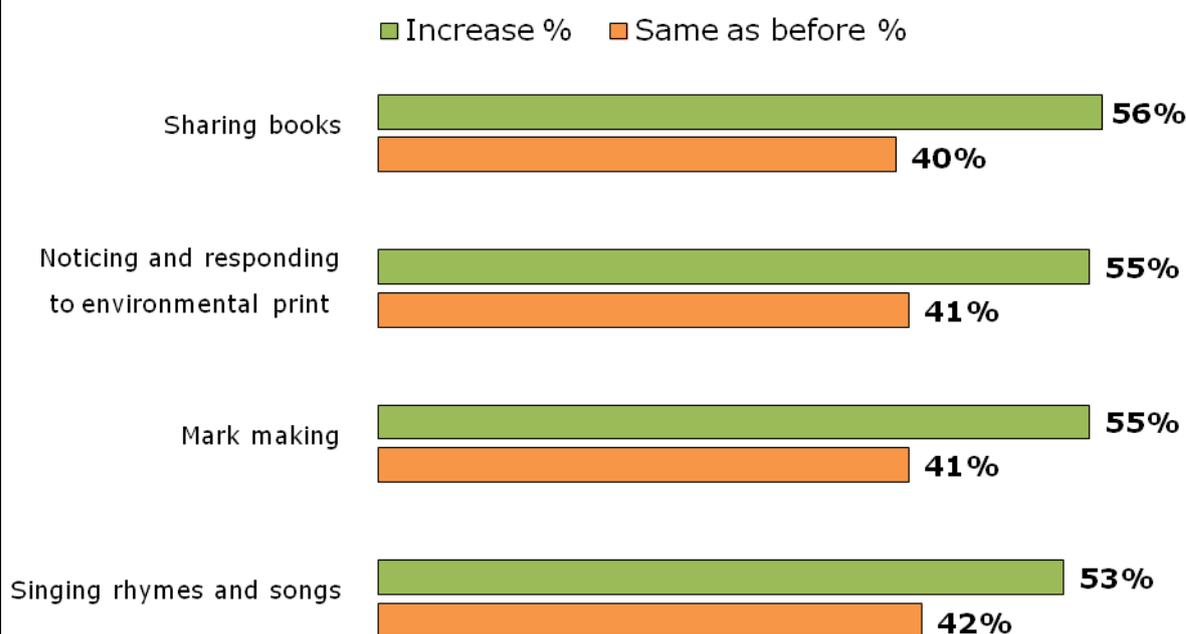
### 3.2.2.1 Reported outcomes for children

As discussed further in 3.2.2.4, over three quarters of respondents (78%) to the six-month follow-up survey reported there had been a change to practice in their setting as a result of attending the National Rollout training.

Those who reported that there had been a change (184 practitioners) were also asked to indicate whether, as a result of changes made to practice, they had noted changes in children regarding the four key strands of literacy. As **Chart 3.3** shows, **at least half (53%-56%) reported an increase in each of the key areas of literacy.**

However, while none reported a negative outcome (decrease), two fifths (40%-42%) reported no change.

**Chart X: As a result of changes made to practice, has there been an increase or decrease in the frequency of children engaging in the following:**

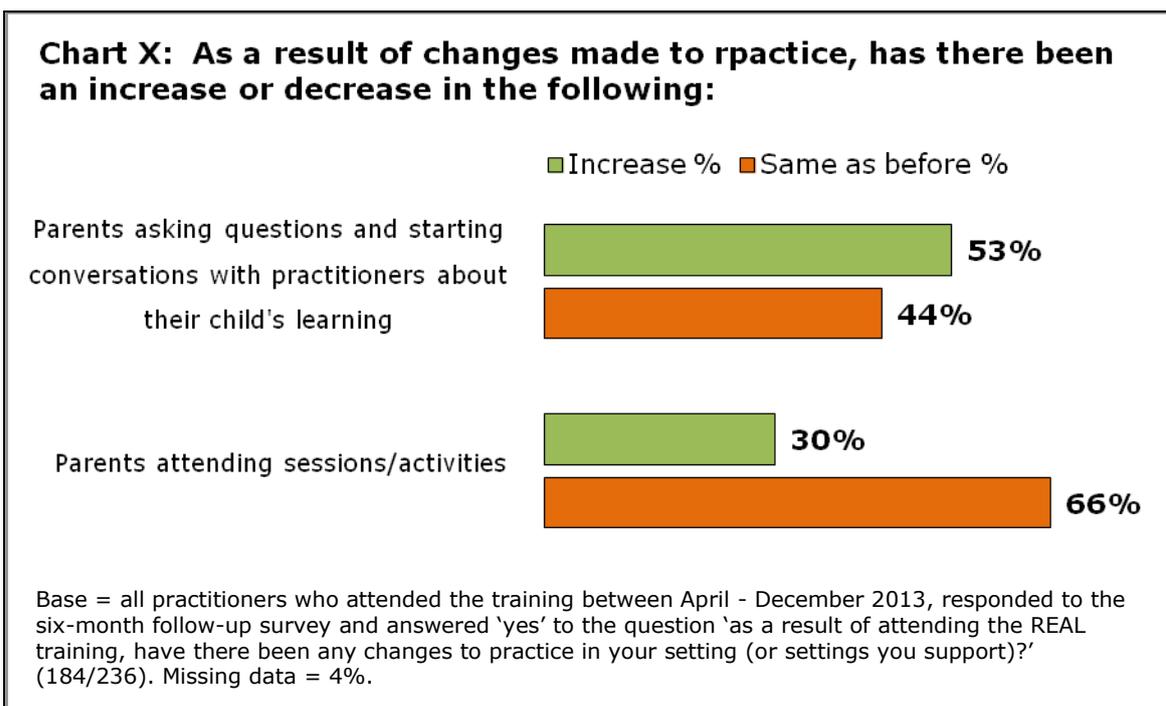


Base= all practitioners who attended the training between April - December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey and answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236). Missing data ranged from 4-5%.

### 3.2.2.2 Reported outcomes for parents

Respondents who indicated a change had been made to the practice of their setting as a result of attending the training were asked to consider whether there had been improvements in parental engagement and relationships with the setting. As illustrated in Chart 3.4 below, respondent views were mixed:

- **While over half (53%) reported there had been an increase** in the frequency of parents asking questions and starting conversations with practitioners about their child's learning, a notable proportion of respondents **(44%) indicated that there had been no change**. It is worth noting that this is similar to findings from the Development projects where 54% reported there had been an increase in the frequency of parents asking questions. Only 1% indicated there had been a decrease.
- **While three in ten (30%) reported there had been an increase** in the frequency of parents attending sessions/activities, **two thirds (66%) indicated that there had been no change**.



When asked to comment on the experience of Making it REAL overall, a number noted increased engagement of parents, as illustrated below:

*"Parents are now becoming eager to join in and take part with their children and feel a closer bond to the staff and the setting. We are now planning a future event in the summer to include parents to help organise and plan literacy activities on the day."*

(PVI setting manager, practitioner survey open feedback comment)

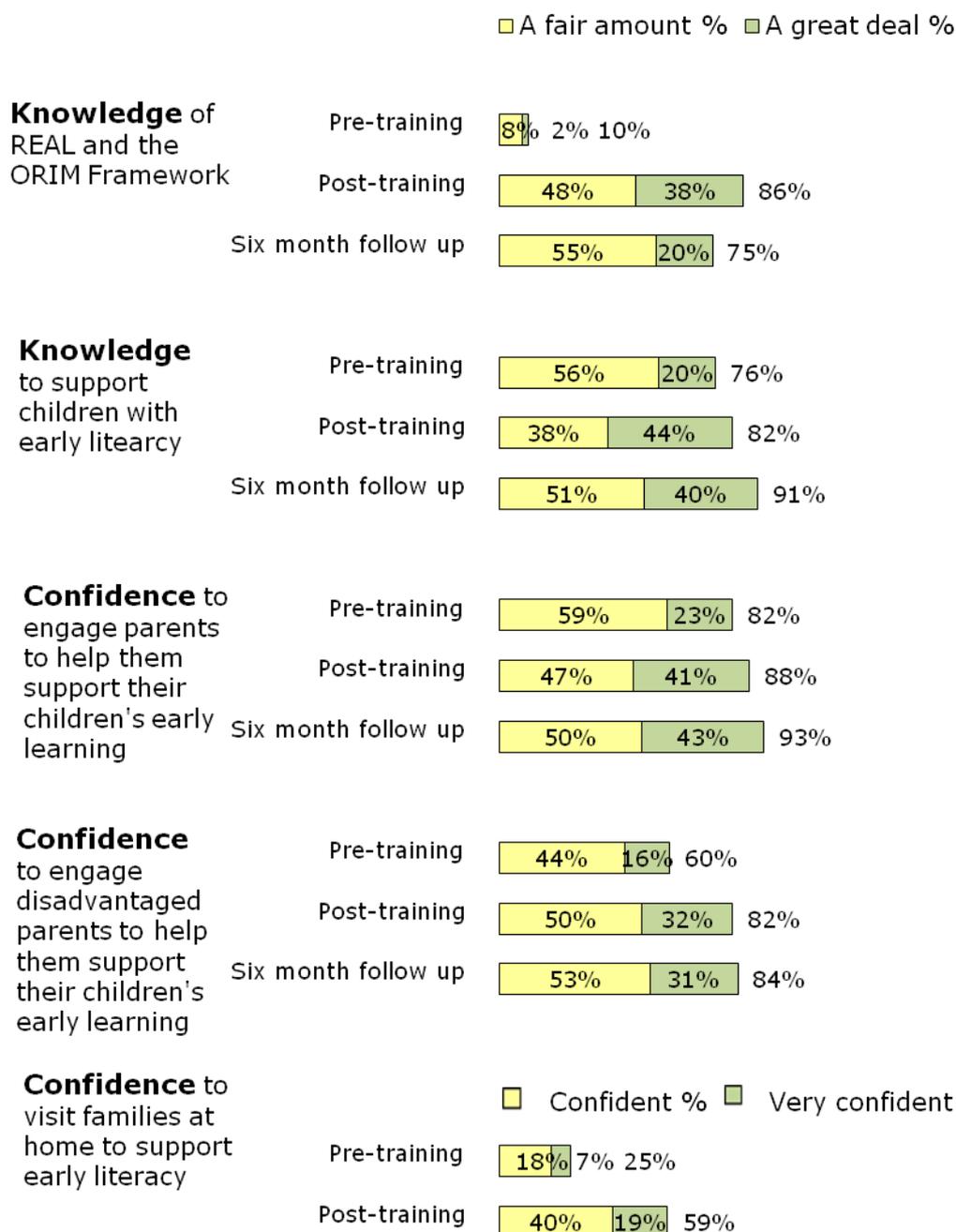
### 3.2.2.3 Outcomes in terms of practitioner confidence, knowledge, skills and practice

A consistently high proportion of the 1,333 practitioners who attended the training reported in the post-training survey that the training and pre-course reading improved their knowledge or confidence 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount' in: using REAL and the ORIM Framework (81%); supporting children with early literacy (74%); and engaging parents to help support their children's early learning and development (78%) including, specifically, disadvantaged parents (71%). Practitioners' self-reported levels of confidence and knowledge in key areas increased between the pre and post-training survey to a varying extent, though, in a number of areas, it should be noted that the baseline levels were already quite high.

However, even where the pre-training baseline level was high, there was a positive increase in the proportion who said they had a 'great deal' of knowledge or confidence (rather than just a 'fair amount'). Positively, it appears that much of the increase in ratings of knowledge and confidence was sustained or increased six months later among practitioners responding to the six-month follow-up survey. This should be treated with some caution as there was a

significant level of non response to the survey and it may be the case that more engaged practitioners responded.

**Chart 3.5 : Measures of practitioners' knowledge and confidence in the pre-training, post-training and six month follow up surveys.**



Base = all practitioners who attended the training between July - December 2013 and who responded to the relevant surveys: pre-training (691/1260); post-training (697/1333); six-month follow-up

### 3.2.2.4 Outcomes in terms of practice and quality in settings as a whole

#### ***Overview of changes in practice reported by participants as a result of Making it REAL***

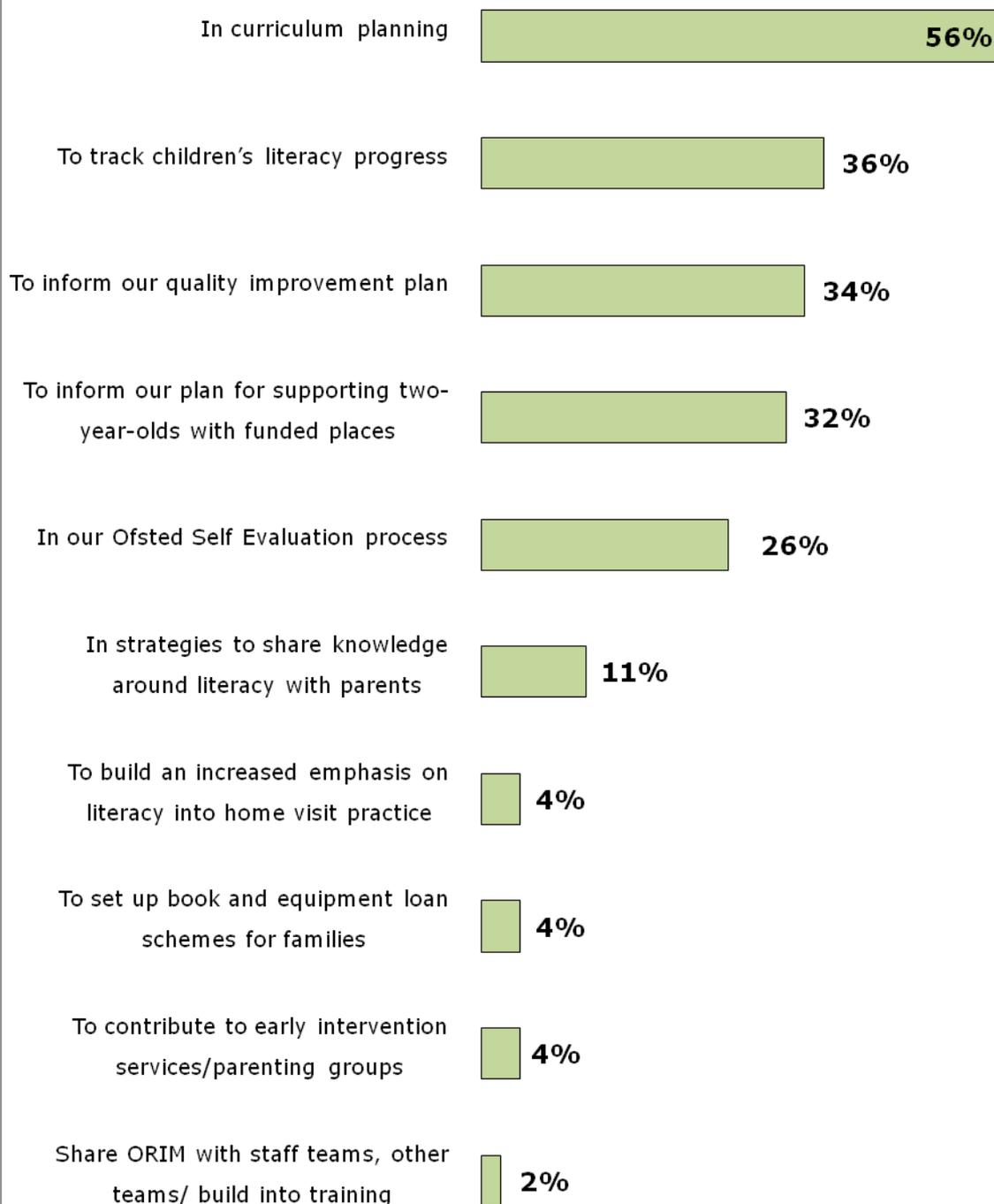
While there was little change in the proportion of respondents to the pre-training and six-month follow-up survey who indicated 'supporting children with early literacy' featured 'a fair amount' or 'a great deal' in their setting (84% compared to 87%), there was a slight increase in the proportion of those who indicated 'a great deal', rising from 49% to 62%. A comparison with findings from the Local Authority Development projects reveal a similar positive trend, though the change was slightly lower in the National Rollout, as to be expected given the Development projects received two days training and support to deliver home visits and literacy events.

Over three quarters of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey (78%) reported that there had been changes to practice in their setting as a result of attending the Making it REAL training, while just over one in ten (13%) indicated that there had been no change.

Those who reported that there was a change were asked to indicate whether the changes meant that ORIM and Making it REAL activities were used in a range of areas. As outlined in full in Chart 3.6, the following was noted:

- **Planning within the setting:** Over half of respondents who indicated that there had been a change to practice in their setting reported that ORIM and Making it REAL activities were used in curriculum planning (56% or 102 practitioners), while roughly a third reported that they were used to inform the settings' quality improvement plan (34% or 62 practitioners) and the settings' plan for supporting two-year-olds with funded places (32% or 58 practitioners). Just over one in ten (11% or 21 practitioners) reported that Making it REAL and ORIM activities were used when designing strategies to share knowledge around literacy with parents.
- **Tracking children's literacy progress:** 36% reported that ORIM and Making it REAL activities had been used for this purpose.
- **Ofsted Self Evaluation process:** Just over a quarter of respondents who indicated that there had been a change to practice in their setting reported using REAL and ORIM approaches in the Ofsted Self Evaluation process (26%).

**Chart X: Please indicate whether the changes made to practice have meant that ORIM and REAL activities have been used in the following areas:**



Base = all practitioners who attended the training between April - December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey and answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236).

### ***Changes in specific practice survey measures reported by practitioners***

In the six-month follow-up survey, practitioners reported:

- **Literacy workshops and events:** While a third of respondents (33%) indicated that there had been an increase in the number of literacy workshops and events since attending the training, almost six in ten (59%) indicated that there had been no change. Findings presented in Appendix 2 suggest that this increase may have been in settings where previously there were no literacy workshops or events held as there was a considerable reduction in the proportion of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey who indicated carrying out none (60%) compared to the pre-training survey (18%).
- **Lending books and literacy resources:** Similarly, over a third of respondents (37%) reported that the level of lending books and literacy resources had increased since attending the training, while over half (53%) reported that there had been no change. In terms of frequency of lending, there was a slight reduction in those who said they 'never' lent books between the pre-training and six-month follow-up survey (16% down to 9%) and literacy resources (31% down to 23%), but there wasn't a notable increase in the proportion lending regularly (at least once a week).
- **Engaging parents and, specifically, disadvantaged parents to help them support their child's early learning and development:** There was little change in respondents' reported levels of engaging parents at least 'a fair amount' between the pre-training and six-month follow-up survey (81% compared to 86%). However, there was a slight increase in the proportion of those who indicated 'a great deal', rising from 44% pre-training to just over half of respondents (53%) six months later. There was a slightly higher increase in the proportion of respondents who reported their setting engaged disadvantaged parents at least 'a fair amount', rising from 58% of respondents in the pre-training survey to 71% of respondents six months later. Similarly, there was a slight shift in the proportion who indicated that their settings engaged disadvantaged parents 'a great deal', rising from 30% to 38%.
- **Reported frequencies of home visits:** four fifths of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey (80%) reported the amount of home visits carried out by their settings had remained static since attending the Making it REAL training. However, just over one in ten respondents (11%) indicated there had been an increase.

Findings are somewhat different than in the Development projects, where a higher proportion of respondents indicated that there had been an increase in these areas.

### ***Outcomes for quality ratings in settings***

Among respondents to the six-month follow-up survey, almost a quarter (24%) indicated that the setting or school they worked in (or supported) used a quality improvement framework such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating scales (ECERS) (12%) or another quality improvement framework (12%). Similar to findings from the Development project, of those 56 respondents who did report the use of a quality improvement framework, a significant proportion perceived an increase to their quality improvement ratings as a result of using the REAL approach in working with parents (61% or 34 respondents) or literacy (66% or 37 respondents).

Over a third of all respondents (34%) reported that they did not use a quality improvement framework, while 17% did not know whether they did or not.

### **3.2.3 Enablers and barriers to delivery in practice**

This section discusses attendees' experience of delivery of Making it REAL, including feedback on the training as well as reported enablers and barriers to delivery of Making it REAL in practice.

#### **Summary**

- Those who reported that there had been a change to their settings' practice since attending the training identified motivation and resources received in the training, planning meetings, local project or network meetings and local authority support as helpful when delivering Making it REAL in practice.
- Conversely, those who reported there had been no change, or were unable to implement all aspects of Making it REAL, identified a lack of time, dedicated focus in the setting, and funding as barriers to implementing Making it REAL. More time to plan and work on the project was suggested as a solution.

This section discusses the enablers and barriers to putting training into practice. Appendix 2 provides a full breakdown of tables.

#### ***Enablers to delivery in practice***

As discussed in Section 3.2.2.4, 78% of respondents to the six-month follow-up survey indicated that changes had been made to the practice in their setting as a result of attending the National Rollout training.

When asked 'what do you think has helped staff in your setting or settings you support', the following was reported:

- **Motivation and resources received in the training:** Almost half who reported a change in their settings' practice (46% or 84 respondents)

indicated that motivation from attending the training helped to achieve this, while 29% (54 respondents) reported that the resources received were also helpful.

- **Planning meetings** were reported to be helpful by 45% of respondents (83 respondents) and **almost one in ten reported the set up of a local project or network** (9% or 17 respondents) was helpful.
- A fifth (20% or 37 respondents) noted the **local authority support** helped enable change.

### ***Barriers to delivery in practice***

Of the 13% (32 respondents) who reported there had been no changes to practice as a result of attending the training, the following were considered barriers:

- **Lack of time to implement Making it REAL:** Twelve respondents noted that a lack of time had been a barrier. One noted: *"It's trying to juggle all the balls without letting something drop. Having the time to implement something new."* While another reported: *"My attitude and intentions have changed but time constraints have stopped me implementing changes yet."*

Time was also noted by those who, though they had made some changes to practice, were not able to implement all aspects of Making it REAL, such as two home visits per family.

*"It [training] has enabled practitioners to be more confident than before in supporting parents' involvement and encouraging them to be more active in their child's learning, especially around reading and the written word...Many changes in the last year haven't enabled us to carry out as many open days as we would have liked but we are hoping to increase these opportunities in the very near future."*

(Manager)

*"There is only me, and I am gradually adding in activities from the course and sharing with other childminders I see."*

(Childminder)

*"I work with a local authority and I have incorporated elements of the REAL package into my training and have found this useful. Unfortunately priorities with work do not always enable us to run with programmes as much as we could. However, I enjoyed the training and found it useful."*

(Early years advisor)

- **Some settings were already doing something similar:** Eight respondents who noted no change in the practice of their setting reported the setting was already implementing similar activities which had somewhat 'diluted' the implementation of Making it REAL.

- **Funding:** A small number (three) indicated that funding was a barrier to delivery. One respondent noted, *"No budget, in fact budget has been decreased."*

***Suggested ways to overcome barriers***

**More time to plan and work on a project** was considered important, including the commitment and support from managers.

*"Time needed to communicate to relevant staff the REAL training and the value and importance of supporting families with early literacy skills in the hope that a plan of action could be discussed."*

(Manager)

## 4. Practitioner feedback on Making it REAL Training

This section presents practitioners experience and feedback on attending the Making it REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) training, including both the two-day training attended by those participating in the Local Authority Development projects and the one-day National Rollout training. The training aimed to enable practitioners to use the REAL approach in early literacy work with families.

Findings are based on practitioner post-training feedback surveys and, for the two-day training, qualitative interviews with local authority leads, settings leads and practitioners in the eight case study areas.

### Summary

- **Making it REAL training was well received and reported to be effective in providing new and useful knowledge and methods for working with parents<sup>39</sup> to support children's literacy.**
  - Just over four fifths (81%) of those who attended the two-day Development project training rated the training as 'excellent' and 63% said they were 'very confident' to put the training into practice. Ratings were only slightly lower among practitioners who attended the one-day National Rollout training (65% rated it as 'excellent' and 51% said they were 'very confident' to put it into practice).
  - Development project practitioners interviewed in the qualitative case study areas described how the practical nature of the training made it useful and engaging. Practitioners found ideas and guidance on involving children in environmental print and mark making particularly useful in extending their existing practice in early literacy. Many discussed gaining an understanding of the ORIM Framework for the first time as the most useful aspect of the training over time. Practitioners also highlighted learning strategies to work with parents during home visits and carrying out role play activities as especially useful.

### 4.1 Local Authority Development projects' two-day training

As part of the Development projects, 135 practitioners and those who support practitioners attended the two-day Making it REAL training between September

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<sup>39</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

and October 2013. Typically, each training session was attended by sixteen people (mean = 16.8; range 12-20). An outline of the aims, objectives and training delivery methods can be found in Section 2.1.

### 4.1.1 Experience of training and learning for the future

Responses to the post-training survey suggest those who attended the training considered it useful. All who attended the training (135 people) reported it met its stated aims and objectives, while the majority (81%) rated the training as 'excellent', the highest rating on a scale of one to five. When asked to rate how confident they felt in their ability to put what they had learnt into practice, almost two thirds of respondents (63%) indicated they were 'very confident', while 35% rated their confidence as four on the scale.

**Table 4.1 What is your overall assessment of the training?**

Poor 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Excellent 5 %	Missing data %	N
0	0	0	19	81	1	135

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training (135)

**Table 4.2 How confident do you feel in your ability to put what you have learnt into practice?**

Not at all confident 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Very confident 5 %	Missing data %	N
0	1	1	35	63	1	135

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training (135)

Interviewees who attended the training in the four case study areas echoed these findings and indicated it was a helpful introduction to REAL and marked the beginning of their journey with the project. One setting lead reflected:

*"The best part of the training? ...for me it was knowing that I was going into a project that had been trialled and tested... Knowing about the background knowledge of the project..."*

(Setting lead)

Many discussed, in particular, how the practical nature of the training made it engaging and useful when considering how to apply what they had learnt to their individual context, as illustrated by a local authority lead:

*"...it got us thinking about ... the key strands of everything that we were going to encounter in our practice, they covered it well in two days."*

(Local authority lead)

Similarly, a practitioner working within a pre-school discussed how beneficial it had been to have the time and opportunity to work through concepts, such as the ORIM Framework, develop examples and relate them to their own setting.

*"I think the practical activities that we did there to help us really understand what the concepts were. Because obviously somebody can explain something to you, but when we actually did it ourselves, wrote examples, it helped concentrate your brain, 'OK this is what I need to do', and it made some of the phrases and stuff that they used more understandable because we actually did them...acronyms [ORIM]...those kind of things..."*

(Practitioner)

Interviewees indicated it was **helpful to attend the training with a colleague**, as illustrated by an outreach worker responsible for implementing the project within an early years setting, who reported that the training allowed them **to reflect on their practice together and focus on new ideas** to help support children's literacy. A number of interviewees highlighted a session during which attendees planned their first Making it REAL activity for their setting as especially helpful in this sense, bridging the gap between receiving the training and putting what they had learnt into practice.

Many **valued the opportunity to meet with others working in a similar area and share experiences, knowledge and ideas** as well as talking through areas of concern. A number of interviewees suggested that this gave them reassurance and made them feel part of a project, helped by working in small groups throughout the training.

*"I think it's been helpful to get together with the other colleagues and take on ideas what they've been doing, as well, and it makes you realise that you're on the right track, as well, and sharing ideas with the other colleagues, and then you know how you're going and whether you're going in the right direction or not, and it's, a nice get together, really, as well."*

(Practitioner)

**Those who facilitated the training were considered knowledgeable** and a number of interviewees commented they had received 'helpful tips' based on the facilitators' own experiences throughout the training. One setting lead commented, in relation to the training facilitator:

*"I came away inspired and I think they were very good at, what's the word? Dissipating our fears, so they said, this is what we're scared of... but actually went and they found ways of getting us talking together to try and minimise those, I think, before leaving."*

(Setting lead)

Interviewees reported leaving the training motivated and confident to apply what they had learned. Central to this, according to a number of interviewees, was having two full days of training, which allowed them to 'absorb' what they had learnt without feeling rushed and provided an opportunity to 'pause and reflect' on their current practice of supporting children's early literacy and

approaches to working with parents. One local authority lead, however, reported that attending for two days was difficult and suggested the training be reduced to one day to help ease the pressure of arranging cover for practitioners within early years settings and schools

#### 4.1.2 Most useful aspects of the training

- **Training materials:** The majority of respondents to the post-training survey (87%) reported that the training materials would be 'very useful' in supporting their work, the highest rating on a scale of one to five. Case study interviewees agreed that the materials had since proven useful and valued the DVD of early years' practitioners discussing their experiences and activity ideas for home visits.
- **Training content: learning about REAL and the four strands of literacy:** One setting lead reported it was 'powerful' to learn about the Making it REAL project and evidence about the impact it could have on children and families, a sentiment shared by numerous interviewees. While many discussed previous experience and knowledge of supporting children's early literacy, the opportunity to refresh this knowledge and learn about the most up-to-date approaches to support children and families was considered very useful. A setting lead working within a pre-school discussed how attending the Making it REAL training had led her to focus on the four individual strands of literacy, which she found the most helpful aspect of training over the medium term.

*"Things change, research progresses and I know it's our responsibility to keep up with research, but there's not enough hours in the day and obviously there's the personal social side, the maths side, physical side but there's so much more to this and it [training] has broken it down...I wasn't aware that environmental print, language, mark making and stories were separate. I didn't, in my brain, separate that, but that has definitely helped my knowledge and confidence in supporting parents, supporting the staff and supporting the children definitely."*

(Practitioner)

Likewise, a pre-school teacher reflected that the training on books was 'refreshing' and had "*interjected some life*" into her approach to encouraging children and families to engage in books, through gaining new ideas which could be used in the home or in the early years setting.

Most notably, a number of interviewees stressed how the training on environmental print proved to be the most useful as it was a relatively new approach for them. Some interviewees discussed how the training on environmental print re-emphasised that children learn in a number of different ways.

- **Knowledge of and how to apply the ORIM Framework:** Many interviewees discussed having no or very little knowledge of the ORIM Framework before attending the training and reflected gaining an understanding of how to apply it was considered one of the most useful aspects of the training over time.

*"Opportunity, Recognition, Interaction and for me I think it's been, I think the most powerful thing is the, having the ORIM, ORIM in your mind. I know ORIM's been around a lot and I know it's been, it's vastly used but for me it was new. So I think having the ORIM Framework in your mind [when working with parents]...we gave that family an opportunity. And it gave them a chance to recognise like, for instance mark making activity..."*

(Practitioner)

Similarly, a setting lead discussed how training on the ORIM Framework had given her the 'push' to work in partnership with parents and felt, since attending, that it provided a useful 'prop' when working with families to support their child's literacy.

*"I thought the training was really, really good. I thought it was really interesting, made me think about things in a slightly different way, like the ORIM Framework, I wasn't really familiar with that, but I think everybody came out of that thinking, 'oh yeah', it was another dimension to think about."*

(Practitioner)

- **Learning strategies to work with parents during home visits**

Many considered the training on strategies to work with parents during home visits the most valuable aspect of the training and one which had proved especially useful over time. A number of interviewees discussed being anxious initially about carrying out visits to the home, as this was a new experience or an area of practice they had not done in some time.

*"It can be, it's very daunting when you've been a classroom teacher for 20 years and you never stepped into homes in those days...you didn't go visiting, and if you did it was just to hand over paperwork, it wasn't about a two way relationship... Yeah, so it was a very good hands on training..."*

(Practitioner)

For others who had recent experience of visiting families in their home, the training gave a fresh perspective. One practitioner discussed that while all children who enter their early years setting normally received a home visit, this was more of an introduction to the setting, while the Making it REAL training focused the practitioner on working in partnership with parents and supporting them to help their child's early literacy.

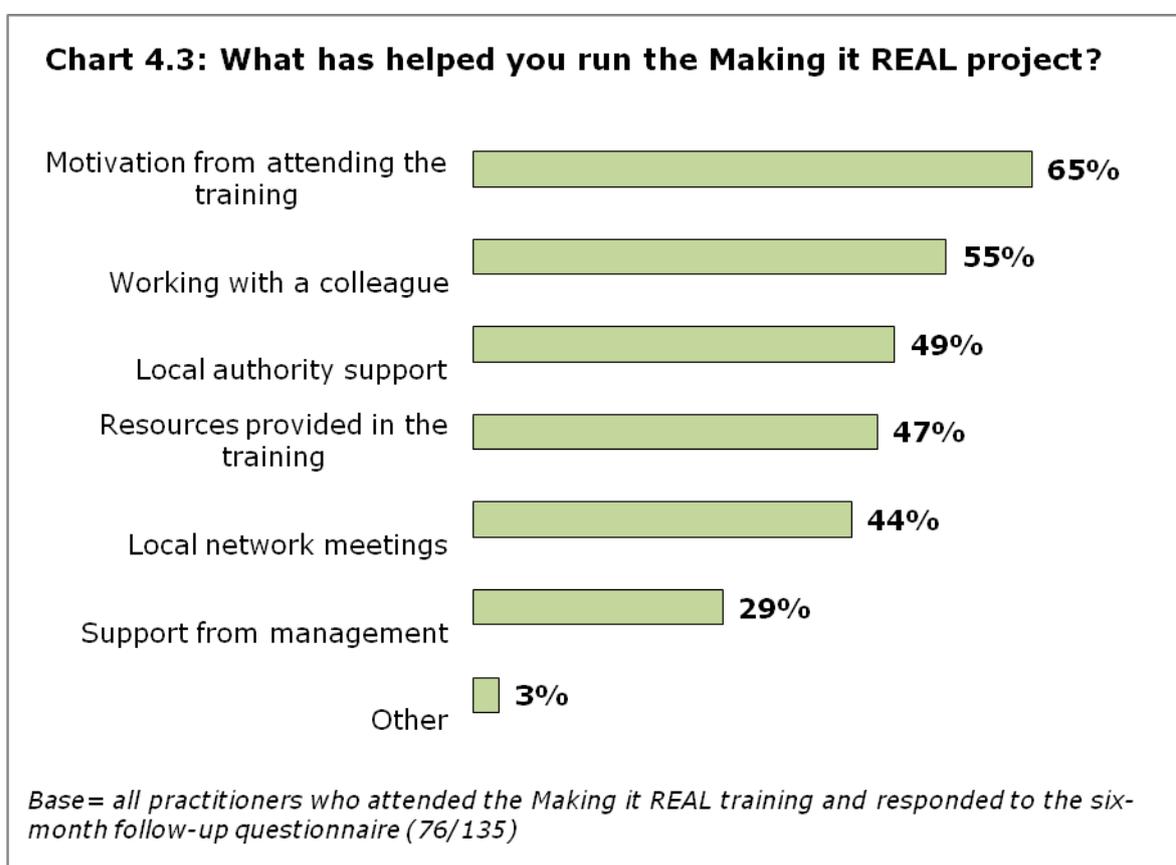
Interviewees discussed how the training, and the role play scenarios in particular, had helped reduce their anxieties and improved their confidence to carry out home visits, as mentioned earlier. A number commented that the strategies covered on how to engage parents, such as what to do if the television is on during a home visit, had proved useful when carrying out their own home visits. One practitioner also discussed how role-playing

home visit scenarios as a parent speaking English as an additional language with a colleague helped improved their practice, making them especially mindful of jargon.

### 4.1.3 The relative importance of different aspects of training and support in practice

As outlined elsewhere, in addition to the main two-day training, practitioners were provided with light touch on-going support during delivery of Making it REAL from Early Childhood Unit (ECU) and the local authority lead. Examples of local authority support included visits and telephone calls from local authority advisory teachers to discuss ideas for home visits and events, acting as a 'listening ear' when problems arose, and being in touch with settings at times when monitoring and evaluation paperwork was due. In particular, local authority leads were required to run 'network meetings' among the settings in their area to allow experiences to be shared and concerns discussed. ECU support involved attending network meetings, responding to queries from the local authority and coming to mutually supportive agreements about how to resolve problems and overcome challenges.

In the six-month follow-up survey, practitioners were asked to reflect on which aspects of training and wider support from a list presented had helped them run Making it REAL. As shown in chart 4.3 below, the feature most commonly identified was the motivation they derived from attending the training (65%), followed by the supportive nature of working with a colleague (55%). Local authority support, training resources and local network meetings were also each selected by two in four or more practitioners.



#### **4.1.4 Suggested areas for improvement and greater focus**

Most interviewees were happy with the training they received and reported no areas for improvement or gaps in the areas of focus. A number suggested that future training should place an even greater focus on strategies to work with parents during home visits, role-play scenarios and provide more opportunities for practitioners to share experiences and ideas.

Going forward, Year Two of the Making it REAL project and training will place a greater emphasis on working with two-year-olds. This was noted by a number of practitioners working within a setting delivering Making it REAL to a high number of two-year-olds as something they would like a greater focus on.

## **4.2 National Rollout one-day free training**

As mentioned in Section 3.2.2.1, 1,333 practitioners (and those who support practitioners) attended the National Rollout one-day free training throughout England in between July 2013 and March 2014. An outline of the aims, objectives and training delivery methods can be found in Section 3.1.

### **4.2.1 Experience of training**

The vast majority of those who attended (98%) reported that it met its stated aims and objectives, while a similarly high proportion (93%) rated the training either a four (28%) or five (65%) on a scale where one was 'poor' and five 'excellent'. When asked in the post-training survey to rate how confident they felt in their ability to put what they had learnt into practice, just over half of respondents (51%) indicated they were 'very confident', while 41% rated their confidence as four on the scale of 1 to 5.

When asked to comment on the experience of Making it REAL within the six-month follow-up survey, a number of respondents commented how the training had been helpful and reported to value the chance to meet others and share ideas:

*"The trainer on the day was excellent and having the opportunity to meet other Practitioners from other settings is always a great source of new ideas and ways of supporting Parents/children."*

(Manager at a private setting)

*"Positive enthusiastic training- I felt motivated and led me to be more proactive with families about taking an early interest in literacy"*

(Childminder)

*"I found the training very useful and interesting. I would like this type of training to be offered regularly. I wish other staff could receive the training as it encourages and inspires to be involved in setting up of project."*

(Early Years practitioner)

## 5 Learning from experiences of set-up and delivery in practice

### Summary

Reporting of case study local authorities', practitioners' and parents' experiences of Making REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy) identified a number of issues important to consider for the successful delivery of Making it REAL and which may be useful to bear in mind in Year Two of the project and for future delivery in general. Key points relate to the following areas:

- **Planning and management issues:** in particular, establishing the budget and suitable arrangements to provide staff cover for training, preparation and home visits was found to be the most significant management consideration for the delivery of Making it REAL on the ground.
- **Effective engagement of families:** successful recruitment depends on effective one-to-one engagement with families and a sensitive approach that responds to potential anxieties and highlights the particular benefits for the parent and their child. There is benefit in involving a practitioner that the family knows and trusts, whilst parents and children themselves can also be effective advocates to peers.
- **Overall design:** evidence points to the effectiveness of approaches that incorporate extensive tailoring to the needs and interests of individual children within a systematically designed and integrated programme of activities, for example, in which each home visit builds on the preceding visit(s) and group activities.
- **Delivering home visits:** two visits are sufficient for most families, but flexibility to offer more if needed is desirable. Successful delivery depends on careful preparation and the tailoring of materials and approach to the individual child and parent, and effective communication at all stages.
- **Delivering group trips and activities:** when deciding locations for visits, an optimum mix might be to include some which are readily accessible (so parents can easily return on their own), and some which 'stretch' parents to attend (thus helping to encourage parents to expand their horizons regarding what may be possible).
- **Two-year-olds and their families:** practitioners and parents found that the REAL approach worked well for two-year-olds when materials and activities are adapted for the age group. Most practitioners found adaptation straight forward to achieve based on their expertise in working with two-year-olds, but would welcome additional ideas via Making it REAL training in Year Two.

This section reflects on local authority leads', practitioners' and parents'<sup>40</sup> experiences of the set up and delivery of Making it REAL, including the key challenges encountered and the ways sites found to address them. It is based on qualitative feedback from the four local authority and eight case study settings, most of which were delivering Making it REAL for the first time. As well as identifying some tips for successful delivery, it also usefully identifies a number of issues for consideration for the future implementation of Making it REAL and for relevant training, guidance and support provided.

## 5.1 Planning and management issues: timescales, staffing and resourcing

- **Settings felt that the overall time available to set up and deliver the project had been quite tight for them** and this should be considered in future planning.
- **Practitioners delivering Making it REAL in Children's Centres identified potential benefits in involving both outreach/inclusion staff and early years practitioners in delivering REAL.** Outreach and inclusion staff often have established relationships with vulnerable families as well as the expertise to engage them in the home and in groups. Early years practitioners have expertise in early learning, and also have the continuity of contact with the child in the setting.
- **The costs and scheduling of staff cover was reported as one of the most significant challenges to be considered in the set up and management of Making it REAL.** Sites came up with a number of practical solutions to this but it needs to be borne in mind that, for many settings, the identification of a budget for staff cover is likely to be necessary in order to deliver the model of Making it REAL delivered by the Local Authority Development projects.
- Many sites found that the level of staff time required was greater than initially anticipated due to the amount of time needed to plan the home visits and prepare materials tailored to the individual child, as well as the unanticipated cancellation and rescheduling of appointments. While the time required for preparation may reduce as practitioners become more experienced, supplementary staff cover is inevitably required.

*"the challenge was it sounds quite simple, you'd do your two visits...But in practice it's much harder because parents are away, they forget about the appointment and staff are off sick and other issues come in and therefore they then get behind in what they're doing... they turn up and the parents aren't there, or sickness then comes up..."*

(Local authority lead)

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<sup>40</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

- One solution identified to minimise the need for cover was arranging home visits immediately before the child attended the setting, for example early morning or directly afterwards, by accompanying the child and parent home after attending the setting. Other individual settings spoke about using trainee teachers for cover and scheduling sessions for when such staff were available.
- The head teacher in one school highlighted the importance of ensuring consistency in supply teachers covering staff for Making it REAL activities to avoid constant staff changes impacting negatively on education delivery for children in the wider setting. She said they got around this in her school by booking a specific supply teacher consistently, and ensuring that home visits were booked to fit her availability.

## 5.2 Engaging parents

Practitioners interviewed from the eight case study settings identified a number of factors as important when recruiting and engaging families, and which may provide useful learning for future engagement of families in Making it REAL:

- **Approaching families individually and tailoring messages to respond to individual concerns or focus on particular benefits relevant to their child.** Some settings initially trialled inviting parents to an introductory group recruitment session at which the project was outlined, the REAL DVD shown and refreshments provided. However, turnout to group meetings was low, some parents found the DVD too long, and overall individual approaches proved more successful.
- **Highlighting the benefits of participating:**
  - **Stressing how the project would support parents to help their children develop to their full educational potential.** Benefits for children proved an effective ultimate motivator for parents with negative views of support services, such as social services.
  - **The 'free and additional' aspects** such as the free outings and individual box or bag of resources for the child.
  - **The enjoyment of both parents and children** in participating in the activities together, and arising from the one-to-one attention of the early years practitioner.
- **Mitigating against parental anxieties, for example, regarding what the activities might involve (e.g. if they lack confidence), why they were being selected and any perceived related stigma.** Being selected for the programme could trigger alarm among parents and be taken to mean that there was either something wrong with their child, or their parenting, or both. This was a common concern raised by many parents in discussion groups across several case study settings.

*"They were saying, are you saying I don't know how to bring up my child?"*

(Parent)

Apprehensions also centred on the issue of stigma, more so for two parents interviewed who had looked up REAL on the internet, and who had found information about the original study by the University of Sheffield which led them to believe the programme to be only for poorly educated, single parents, in deprived areas.

To mitigate against these concerns, a few sites reported that they found it beneficial to play down the targeting aspect when recruiting children and their families. It may be helpful for REAL training in Year Two to help sites consider how they can address potential anxieties about being selected, whilst maintaining an honest approach with parents regarding their child's development and why they are being invited onto the project.

- **Involving practitioners who know the parent well in recruitment.** In cases where early years practitioners do not know the parent well, involvement of other practitioners was found to be helpful. One parent described how her Family Nurse had been involved in explaining the Making it REAL project to her and was present for the first home visit, which helped to reassure her and build her confidence.
- **Benefits of parent volunteers and peer endorsement.** Parents as volunteers were described as being well placed to provide particularly credible endorsement for the intervention as well as reassurance and encouragement to other parents, based on their own experiences. More organically, some settings described how once the intervention had started, spontaneous peer endorsement spread via word of mouth and helped to stimulate interest. As well as parents communicating with parents, children themselves spread the word among their classmates which resulted in some children asking for their own home visits and which, in turn, encouraged parents to make inquiries.
- **Relationships with families can be built over time as the Making it REAL activities progress.** One setting used a big trip out as the first activity for the selected 16 families, which successfully warmed participants to the project. Settings also used the initial home visit to help explain the project more fully to parents, allay any residual fears and misconceptions, and build relationships.
- **Strong bi-lingual language capacity was highlighted as important where parents did not have sufficient English skills, and this was not always available.** Five of the case study settings visited were in very ethnically diverse areas. Two of these referred to having bilingual staff available but not sufficiently so to be able to cover the multiple language requirements of their local community. Effective delivery of Making it REAL depended on being able to explain and get understanding around methods, ideas, rationale, background theory, observations/assessments and their significance. This sometimes proved challenging for experienced early years workers with non-English speaking parents, as outlined elsewhere. As such, whilst settings found using tools such as

dual language tapes and books to be well received by parents, they felt that having staff members and parents who spoke each others' languages reasonably fluently to be critical for the effective delivery of Making it REAL.

- **Parents who worked, and those with large families, were found to be hard to engage and cater for due to the limited time they had available.** Practitioners mentioned that these groups were often unable to participate because of a lack of time. Equally, a small number of settings excluded full-time workers and children in full-time day care because of the difficulties of fitting in home visits, although in some settings this was addressed by offering visits at weekends and during half term. It may be helpful for future training and guidance to share best practice and highlight the diverse accessibility issues and to help practitioners explore ideas for how to support all families to participate within existing resources.

### 5.3 Overall design

- **Effective interventions were often based on approaches that were extensively tailored to the individual child's preferences and needs, but delivered within an integrated programme of activities, designed to provide a sense of continuity and progression, as well systematic coverage of different aspects of literacy.**
- Careful tailoring of the content and presentation of activities to individual children's interests and needs was reported to be key to success. Front line practitioners almost universally described focusing on priority areas of development need for each child, as well as selecting materials to reflect the child's interests, preferences and approach to learning.
- Individual practitioners also recounted devising interventions so that the child experienced continuity and progression between different activities: for example, using photos taken of environmental prints or other activities on trips as the basis for story telling or mark making activities in home. Some also described planning delivery so that different visits, trips and activities covered different areas of literacy, but with more tailoring in the home in order to respond to the child's interests and needs. In this way, each stage of delivery could build on the previous one to provide a comprehensive, incremental and engaging literacy support programme for each participating child.

### 5.4 Delivering home visits

- **The optimum number and timing of home visits: a common view was that two visits was a reasonable minimum number for effective delivery of Making it REAL but that, in some cases, a degree of flexibility was desirable in terms of having the scope to provide one or two extra visits,** if needs indicated this to be desirable.

The sufficiency of two visits for most families in achieving positive outcomes for children and parents is borne out by the positive findings on outcomes reported elsewhere.

- **Ensuring visits and activities were of a sufficient length and not too spaced out was identified as being important for achieving effective engagement and progression of learning.** For example, in one case study area, the time they chose to allocate to home visits was described as too short (30 minutes) and in another the home visits and other activities were reported as being too spread out.
- **Detailed preparation was regarded as essential for effective and relevant engagement with children in home visits,** especially taking time to tailor resource materials to individual children, and planning the approach to each visit for each child in detail in advance.
- **Alleviating parents' initial anxieties about home visits was necessary in many cases.** Many parents needed reassurance that the visits did not involve social services and were not intended to judge them but to support them with their child's learning. Some parents interviewed reported doing extensive cleaning, cooking and other preparation beforehand because of their anxieties about being judged.
- **Many highlighted the benefit of staff visiting homes in pairs.** This allowed staff to support each other, alternate who took the lead, share planning and discuss observations, and also was a safer approach for staff.
- **Explaining the concepts and principles of REAL to parents proved testing, especially during recruitment when it was 'in the abstract', but also during home visits themselves.** How to communicate REAL may be an area that would benefit from more focus within training. For example, one conceptual issue that was challenging to convey was the degree of learning that went on within what appeared to parents to be merely 'play'. Explaining the more nuanced aspects of REAL was also identified as difficult, for instance encouraging mark making without pushing formal writing, especially, but not only, with families who were not fluent in English.
- **There were a small proportion of parents who were challenging to engage in activities with their child during visits:** Individual practitioners described that the occasional parent regarded the sessions as home-based childcare (and did not expect to be involved in activities). In other cases hesitancy may have been due to lack of confidence or fear of being found wanting (as discussed above). This highlights the importance of clearly communicating in advance the purpose and ethos of Making it REAL and of alleviating potential anxieties. In these cases, encouraging parents to join in was found to require time and perseverance.
- **There are challenges to be addressed in supporting parents to enable child-led 'messy play'.** While the benefits of and variety of

methods to pursue messy play were understood and liked by many parents, occasional tensions emerged between the notion of following the child's lead, allowing them to, for example, explore mark making with a range of materials around the house, and the parent's desire to keep the house clean. Four parents, in two case study settings, discussed their concerns about not setting boundaries for their children, something they felt the practitioners had suggested, and how this could damage their home.

*"...even if they draw on the wall, it's ok. It's not ok"*

(Parent)

This highlights the importance of practitioners recognising such concerns and sharing ideas with parents on how to maintain boundaries, whilst allowing children to explore a range of materials and take the lead when pursuing messy play.

## 5.5 Delivering group trips and activities

- **Alleviating anxieties about group trips and activities was necessary for parents lacking in confidence.** Whilst most parents were easy to engage in the free activities and trips, some were found to lack the confidence to participate in groups or visit new places. For example, one practitioner described a parent who lacked the confidence to attend because she was embarrassed that her child had not eaten the food provided on an earlier trip.
- **Careful consideration should be given to the accessibility of venues chosen.** Based on feedback from parents, the optimum mix might be to include some venues which are quite accessible (so parents can easily return), and some which 'stretch' parents to attend (helping to encourage parents to expand their horizons).
- **Most benefit was gained from group trips when the practitioner remained with parents throughout the visit.** While in most settings practitioners remained at the venue throughout the visit, in one setting the staff were reported by parents to have only accompanied them on the journey to and from the venue. Parents said they would have found support and guidance from staff to be helpful.
- **Communicating clearly that trips are for parents as well as children is important.** In two case study settings, there were some reported instances of children being unable to go on outings because the adults had not understood that they had to attend as well.

## 5.6 Delivery with two-year-olds and their families

Seven of the eight case study settings catered for two-year-olds. Practitioners interviewed reported that there were no particular issues about applying REAL to this age group, apart from a need to further adapt some of the materials and

activities for the younger age. They said they had found this easy enough to do, based on their expertise in working with two-year-olds, but would welcome further input on how to aim the initiative more at the younger age group.<sup>41</sup>

In one area, some parents of two-year-olds entitled to the free offer were said to have felt surprised and a bit 'short-changed' at having to host home visits, having presumed that all their 15 hours of free entitlement would take place at the setting.<sup>42</sup> This highlights the importance of clear communication about the specifics of the Making it REAL project and its distinctiveness from the general free two-year-old entitlement provision.

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<sup>41</sup> This is to be included in the second year of Making it REAL

<sup>42</sup> The setting had adapted the REAL approach as such and Making it REAL had been integrated into the two-year-old free entitlement offer where families are offered a range of pathways, including home visits before entry into a setting.

## 6. Looking Forward

### 6.1 Next steps for Making it REAL 2014-2015

The Early Childhood Unit (ECU) has begun to deliver the second year of the Making it REAL National Rollout which aims to:

- **Continue rollout of one-day training nationally** to widen its reach.
- **Continue delivering Development projects in the same local authorities** in order to build capacity and further embed the intervention in settings that took part in Year One.
- **Increase the participation of families with two-year-olds accessing the free entitlement** using materials that have been specifically designed to support practitioners with this younger age group, and which have also been incorporated in the national one-day training rollout.
- **Continue to develop project innovations, including** exploring the use of the ORIM Framework for early mathematics, and supporting parent<sup>43</sup> volunteers in Making it REAL projects which will help to spread the word about Making it REAL via parents themselves.

### 6.2 Wider local plans to take forward Making it REAL

#### 6.2.1 Plans to continue with Making it REAL in individual settings

Looking to the future, most practitioners and setting managers in the case study areas described how they were keen to continue with the Making it REAL programme in Year Two and had already started to, or aimed to, incorporate Making it REAL in planning in some way. For example, some had started to consider which staff would attend the training and be involved in the second year of implementation. As interviews were conducted over the summer term, interviewees often spoke about the opportunity to integrate Making it REAL more fully in planning for the following academic year starting in September and looked forward to having more time to apply Making it REAL over a whole year.

As described earlier, many settings had also chosen to embed key principles of REAL within the setting as a whole, which would provide some longer-term sustainability of the approach, potentially beyond the second year if continued. Settings were less clear at this stage whether they would continue with the more resource-intensive aspects of the Making it REAL programme after funding

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<sup>43</sup> For brevity the term 'parent' is used here to signify both parents and carers and both mothers and fathers, though as mentioned in effect these were mainly mothers.

ended (e.g. home visits). This was something to be decided later down the line. Many settings expressed a desire to continue and expand home visits beyond a small group of families.

However, as indicated above, one of the main perceived challenges was how to ensure, and pay for, cover for staff, especially but not only for smaller and Private, Voluntary or Independent (PVI) settings. The head teacher in one school described how she planned to examine how distance travelled in pupil achievement scores compared between children who had been on Making it REAL and the other children in their cohort, in order to try and understand the degree of benefit that Making it REAL was providing, and to inform future decisions.

School-based settings also mentioned that they felt that the principles could be readily translated and used in reception classes and among older age groups, and also for two-year-olds (i.e. among settings not already delivering to this age group).

### **6.2.2 Plans to take forward Making it REAL at a local authority level**

There was evidence of at least two of the four case study local authorities already taking Making it REAL further in their local area. One council, already familiar with REAL, had incorporated home visiting in its Early Help strategy and aimed to roll it out across all early years settings for disadvantaged families; another was planning to apply REAL to every child on their two-year-old programme.

However, a lead in another local authority felt that her local authority was unlikely to be able to pursue it due to lack of resources, although she was personally keen to encourage settings to implement Making it REAL themselves. She also said that she would be communicating the potential benefits to the school improvement team (for example, in terms of supporting school readiness), as something worthwhile to consider in their planning.

### **6.2.3 Involving parents as volunteers**

Five of the case study settings visited had successfully recruited a parent volunteer for the second year and looked forward to getting their perspective and assistance. Two other sites also found the idea of volunteers appealing and said it was something they might consider. It was felt that these parents would help promote Making it REAL to new parents and help reassure them about what was involved. However, there were some concerns about maintaining confidentiality if the volunteers did certain types of work with individual families, such as home visits. This highlights the benefit of potentially discussing approaches to managing these issues in the course of the Year Two Making it REAL training.

## 7. Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix 1: Methodology supplementary information

This section provides additional detail on the evaluation methodology for the Local Authority Development projects and the National Rollout. It should be read alongside Section 1.3.1 Evaluation Methodology.

#### Data collection

For both the Development projects and National Rollout, the evaluation involved **self-completion census surveys of all practitioners (and those who support practitioners) who attended the training and were involved in delivery at three time points** (pre-training, post-training, and six months later after they had experienced delivery). Survey tools were initially piloted with 164 practitioners who attended the National Rollout training.

In detail:

- Two surveys (pre-training and the six-month follow-up) were delivered online. Practitioners were sent a link to the online survey via email by the Early Childhood Unit (ECU) and received between two and three email reminders to complete it. The post-training survey was paper based and administered by the training facilitator on the day.
- To a large extent, individual questions within the Development project and National Rollout surveys were the same. However, the National Rollout six-month follow-up survey was more detailed to allow for questions on outcomes for children, parents and the wider setting.

The evaluation of the Local Authority Development projects was designed to be more detailed, and in addition, the evaluation involved the following:

- **Pre-project and post-project observational measure forms completed by practitioners for each child/parent:** Setting leads were sent two paper observation forms for practitioners to complete and return to ECU.
- **A parent postal self-completion feedback census survey distributed to all participating parents:** Paper self-completion surveys were sent to settings to give to participating parents. A pre-paid self-addressed envelope was also given to parents to return their feedback directly to the Research Centre.

Qualitative research was carried out in four case study local authorities, and eight case study settings, including interviews with local authority leads, setting leads, practitioners and focus groups with parents.

All interviews and discussion groups were arranged by the Research Centre in close collaboration with the Local Authority lead and setting manager in each local area. Setting leads informed parents of the interviews and organised parents to be available for interview at a pre-agreed time in the setting. Parents participating in the research were provided with a £20 high street voucher as a token of appreciation for their participation.

## **Understanding the quantitative sample**

### **Populations covered by the surveys:**

- Local Authority Development projects:
  - Surveys among practitioners were distributed among all practitioners who attended the training days (135).
  - The population covered by the parents survey, and the practitioner observations of children and families forms is the 497 children and families who participated for the duration of the project. (In total, whilst 537 children and families were recruited to take part in Development project, 40 children and families did not continue with the project shortly after beginning and they have been excluded from the surveys).
- National Rollout:
  - Pre and post practitioner surveys covered practitioners who attended the training between July 2013 and March 2014 (1,333 practitioners). (Those attending the training between April 2013 and March 2014 were included in a pilot of the tools, and data are not included in the evaluation findings).
  - The six-month follow-up survey just covered the 697 practitioners who attended the training between July and December 2013, because practitioners attending later from January 2014 onwards would not have had time to complete a six-month follow-up survey.
  - Findings from each of the three surveys are based on the populations as specified here. However, findings that compare change between the pre-training and 6 month follow-up are based on the 697 practitioners who were eligible for the 6 month survey (i.e. figures for the pre-survey exclude cases who participated in the training after December 2013).

## Achieved sample sizes and response rates

Table 7.1.1 below outlines the sample sizes and response rates from the census surveys.

**Table 7.1.1 Census survey response rates**

		Issued N	Achieved N	Response rate %
Surveys of those who attended the <u>Development project</u> training	Pre-training survey	135	90	67
	Post-training survey	135	135	100
	Six-month follow-up survey	135	76	56
Surveys of those who attended the <u>National Rollout</u> training July 2013- March 2014	Pre-training survey	1333	1260	95
	Post-training survey	1333	1333	100
	Six-month follow-up survey	697	236	34
Practitioners' observation of children and families	Pre-project observation	537	511	95
	Post-project observation	497	465	94
	Matched sample	497	443	89
Parent survey	-	497	220	44

As shown in the table above, **strong response rates were achieved for data collection among practitioners**, meaning that in most cases, findings can be treated with confidence as being broadly representative of the population of practitioners surveyed (for example, all practitioners who attended training completed the post-training survey). However, it needs to be borne in mind that there was some attrition in the practitioner survey between the post-training survey and the six-month follow-up survey and, as such, the representativeness of this sample may be reduced. However, the profile of the sample at six months in terms of area, job role and setting type was similar to the overall profile, and findings were also fairly consistent between the two time points, increasing confidence in the sample.

**Over two-fifths of parents who participated in Making it REAL for the full duration of the project responded to the parent survey. However, as might be expected from a postal survey, there was a significant level of non-response within the parent feedback survey.** There is no way of knowing if the sample is representative in terms of views and experiences of the programme. With all self-completion postal surveys, it is possible that those

with the strongest views (positive and negative) may have responded, with a likely potential bias to the more engaged/positive respondents. As such, it is likely that parents with the least strong views/interest in the programme are least well represented.

### **Understanding the qualitative sample**

Reflecting the aims of the qualitative research, the sample was purposively selected rather than designed to be representative. It was designed to ensure coverage of different area and setting features important for understanding the nature and diversity of experiences of implementation and its outcomes.

It does not provide a representative picture of outcomes (which is addressed by the quantitative surveys), but rather aimed to understand the range of ways that Making it REAL was delivered, and the mechanisms of change through which any outcomes identified were achieved, as well as inform what works best in terms of delivery.

To achieve a regional spread, the local authority areas selected were in the North East, North West, the Midlands and London. In each area the local authority leads helped recruit the settings. The latter were selected to ensure: a mix of setting and sector type; inclusion of areas with high levels of deprivation; diversity across families; and settings catering for two-year-olds as well as those for older pre-school children.

To gain a wide range of views, the sample also included a mixture of settings who had found the implementation of the project more challenging, though there may remain some bias in the sample towards more positive settings and parents, as the settings/parents interviewed were generally those which had responded most readily to the invitation to participate in this evaluation. Table 7.1.2 presents an outline of the case study sample.

**Table 7.1.2 Qualitative case study sample**

Area	Setting	Setting type	Local Authority (LA) or PVI	Age of children (years)	Ethnicity of families	Area of high deprivation
North East	1	Nursery attached to school	LA nursery	3-4	High BME	Yes
	2	Play-group in children's centre	LA nursery	2-5	High BME	Yes
North West	3	Nursery attached to school	LA nursery	2-5	High BME	Yes
	4	Play-group	Voluntary setting	2-5	High BME	Yes
Midlands	5	Nursery	Voluntary setting	2-5	Asian	Yes
	6	Nursery	Private setting	2-5	Mainly white	No
London	7	Children's centre	LA nursery	2-5	Mainly white	Yes
	8	Nursery attached to school	LA nursery	2-5	Mainly white	Yes

### Analysis of data

Quantitative data was stored and analysed using PASW Statistics (formally SPSS) Version 18. Analysis was mostly descriptive. Statistical tests were carried out on matched pre-project and post-project observational measure forms completed by practitioners for each child/parent. The pre, post and six month follow up survey samples were not designed to track individuals over time. As such, statistical measures of change were not appropriate for comparing between waves from this survey, and data is presented descriptively. Changes in many measures between pre and post waves were large, giving confidence that changes were "real" rather than reflecting any differences in the profile of people responding at different waves. However, changes that are small should be treated with greater caution in their interpretation.

All qualitative interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded with the permission of participants. The data was analysed using Framework, a robust method that allows systematic thematic analysis. A matrix was drawn up for each key theme, with rows representing the key sub-themes and the columns representing different stakeholder audiences. Data from notes and recordings were summarised in the appropriate cell. The final matrices provided a full picture of each interviewee or groups' views, displayed the range of views described by participants and allowed the accounts of different groups to be compared, via a process of systematic analysis.

## **Ethics**

The NCB Research Centre follows the Social Research Association's (SRA) ethical guidelines, and the research was carried out in accordance with strict ethical principles.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> NCB Research Centre quality plan, including adherence to SRA Ethical Guidelines  
[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/433014/research\\_quality\\_plan-\\_jan\\_2012.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/433014/research_quality_plan-_jan_2012.pdf)

## 7.2 Appendix 2: Local Authority Development projects' tables

### 2.2.1.2 Delivery of Making it REAL activities

**Table 7.2.1: How often did parents attend workshops and events?**

Never attended %	Attended one event %	Attended two events %	Attended three events %	Attended more than three events %	Missing %	N
6	14	27	26	11	16	465

*Base = all parents who participated in Making it REAL for the full duration of the project and for whom a post-project observation form was returned (465/497)*

### 2.2.2 Outcomes for children and siblings

#### 2.2.2.7 Early identification of need, links and referrals made to other services and other outcomes for children

**Table 7.2.2: Has the Making it REAL project had any other impact on outcomes for children?**

	No impact %	Some impact %	Great impact %	Missing %	N
Identifying additional needs	15	46	22	17	76
Linking children and families to other services	11	42	29	18	76

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76)*

## 2.2.3 Outcomes for parents and carers

### 2.2.3.1 Perceived improvements in parents' confidence and engagement with early years staff about their children's learning

**Table 7.2.3: Has the Making it REAL project had any other impact on outcomes for parents/carers?**

	No impact %	Some impact %	Great impact %	Missing %	N
Improved relationships with parents and carers	0	21	61	18	76
Improved support to parents of two-year-olds accessing free early education places	25	32	22	21	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76)

**Table 7.2.4: As a result of the Making it REAL project has there been an increase or decrease in the frequency of parents/carers asking questions and starting conversations with practitioners about their children's learning?**

Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
0	29	54	17	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76)

**Table 7.2.5: How confident do you feel now when talking about your child's development?**

Not at all %	Quite confident %	Very confident %	Missing %	N
1	21	76	2	220

Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of Making it REAL and who responded to the parent survey (220/497)

**Table 7.2.6: Are parents/carers confident to ask questions and start conversations with practitioners about their child?**

	Do not appear at all confident %	Do not appear very confident %	Appear quite confident %	Appear confident %	Appear very confident %	Missing %	N
Pre-project observation	6	18	31	20	24	1	443
Post-project observation	0	5	15	27	50	3	443
Change (%)	6	13	16	7	26	2	-

Base = all parents who participated in the full duration of Making it REAL and from whom a pre-project and post-project observation form was returned (443/497)

### 2.2.3.2 Parents' increased understanding and confidence in their educational role and undertaking new or different activities with their children

**Table 7.2.7: If you think about all of the Making it REAL home visits, events and activities, what has been the most helpful to you and why?**

	%	N
Gaining new ideas, activities and access to resources to help my child learn	51	113
Finding out what my child is interested in and how to make learning enjoyable for them	16	36
Home visits	14	31
Seeing my child make progress	13	29
Events and outings/the library	12	26
Talking to and making relationships with practitioners, sharing information about my child's progress	5	12
Gaining reassurance, confidence and support from practitioners	3	6

Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of Making it REAL and who responded to the parent survey (220/497)

**Table 7.2.8: Do you do any new things at home now to help your child?**

Yes %	No %	Missing %	N
89	10	1	220

Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of Making it REAL and who responded to the parent survey (220/497)

**Table 7.2.9: How much have the Making it REAL home visits, events and activities helped you to support you child in the following areas:**

	Not at all %	A little %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Joining in with songs	4	18	78	0	220
Mark making	2	21	77	0	220
Using environmental print	1	26	72	1	220
Learning about books	1	28	71	1	220

*Base = all parents who participated for the full duration of Making it REAL and who responded to the parent survey (220/497)*

### 2.2.3.5 Involvement of fathers and grandparents

**Table 7.2.10: Has the Making it REAL project had any impact on the following area: more fathers and male carers involved in children's learning?**

No impact %	Some impact %	Great impact %	Missing %	N
17	41	25	17	76

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76).*

## 2.2.4 Outcomes in terms of practitioner confidence, knowledge, skills and practice

### 2.2.4.1 Overall changes in practitioners' knowledge confidence and skills in supporting children with early literacy

**Table 7.2.11: How much, if at all, has the training and pre-course reading improved your knowledge and confidence in the following aspects of practice?**

	Not at all %	Not much %	A little %	A fair amount %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Supporting children with early literacy	0	1	7	33	56	4	135
Knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it successfully with families	0	0	2	36	59	4	135
Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	0	0	5	42	49	4	135
Engaging with disadvantaged parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	0	1	8	48	39	4	135

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the post-training survey (135).*

**Table 7.2.12: How much knowledge do you feel you have about the following aspects of practice?**

		None %	Not much %	A little %	Fair amount %	Great deal %	Missing %	N
Knowledge of supporting children with early literacy	Pre-training	0	3	30	48	16	3	90
	Post-training	0	0	2	27	66	5	135
	Six-month follow-up	0	0	3	26	62	9	76
	Change (%)	0	3	27	22	46	6	-
Knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it successfully with families	Pre-training	31	34	22	4	3	6	90
	Post training	0	0	2	36	59	4	135
	Six-month follow-up	0	1	1	44	47	7	76
	Change (%)	31	33	21	39	45	1	-

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135), post-training (135-135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).*

**Table 7.2.13: How much confidence do you feel you have about the following aspects of practice?**

		None %	Not much %	A little %	Fair amount %	Great deal %	Missing %	N
Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	Pre- training	0	6	31	54	8	1	90
	Post- training	0	0	1	42	54	4	135
	Six- month follow- up	0	0	0	34	59	7	76
	Change (%)	0	6	31	20	51	6	-
Engaging with disadvantage d parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	Pre- training	1	9	39	42	8	1	90
	Post- training	0	0	4	44	48	4	135
	Six- month follow- up	0	0	3	42	46	9	76
	Change (%)	1	9	36	0	38	8	-

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135), post-training (135-135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).*

**Table 7.2.14: How confident do you feel about visiting families at home to support early literacy?**

	Not at all confident %	Not very confident %	Quite confident %	Confident %	Very confident %	Missing %	N
Pre-training	1	21	46	29	3	0	90
Post-training	0	2	10	58	24	6	135
Six-month follow-up	0	3	34	0	50	13	76
Change (%)	1	18	12	29	47	13	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135), post-training (135-135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

#### 2.2.4.4 Home visiting and practitioners' confidence and skills to support early literacy at home

**Table 7.2.15: As far as you are aware, does your setting (or setting you support) provide home visits to families that have been identified as needing early literacy support for their children?**

Yes %	No %	Missing %	N
17	82	1	90

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training survey (90/135).

#### 2.2.5 Outcomes in terms of practice and quality in settings as a whole

##### 2.2.5.1 Overview of changes in practice reported within settings as a result of Making it REAL

**Table 7.2.16: Has the Making it REAL project had any impact on the following area: changes to classroom/setting practice around literacy?**

No impact %	Some impact %	Great impact %	Missing %	N
7	54	22	17	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76).

**Table 7.2.17: How much does the following aspect of practice feature in the work of your setting (or settings you support): supporting children with early literacy?**

	Not at all %	Not much %	A little %	A fair amount %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Pre training	0	3	19	37	40	1	90
Six-month follow-up	0	1	4	21	67	7	76
Change (%)	0	2	15	16	27	6	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

### 2.2.5.3 Changes in reported levels of sharing literacy resources, and holding literacy workshops and events

**Table 7.2.18: Has there been a increase or decrease in the amount of literacy events/workshops your setting has provided since you attended the training?**

Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
3	15	72	11	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

**Table 7.2.19: As far as you are aware, how many literacy events/workshops, if any, has your setting run for parents in the last six months (excluding holidays)?**

	None %	1-9 %	10-19 %	20-29 %	30 or more %	Missing %	N
Pre training	21	53	1	2	2	20	90
Six-month follow-up	1	63	4	8	1	22	76
Change (%)	20	10	3	6	1	2	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

**Table 7.2.20: Has there been an increase or decrease in how often you lend books and literacy resources to families to take home since you attended the training?**

Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
0	46	45	9	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

**Table 7.2.21: In your setting, how often do you lend books and literacy resources to families?**

		Never %	Less than once a month %	At least once a month %	At least once a week %	Daily %	Missing %	N
Books	Pre-training	14	8	7	38	24	9	90
	Six-month follow-up	3	11	7	41	28	11	76
	Change (%)	11	3	0	3	4	2	-
Literacy resources	Pre-training	39	13	9	24	6	9	90
	Six-month follow-up	13	22	13	28	7	17	76
	Change (%)	26	9	4	4	1	8	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the pre-training (90/135) and six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

#### 2.2.5.4 Impact on quality ratings in settings

**Table 7.2.22: Do your setting use Early Childhood Environment Rating scales (ECERS) or another quality improvement framework?**

Yes - ECERS %	Yes - Other QI framework %	No %	Don't know %	Missing %	N
20	17	23	26	13	76

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

## 7.3 Appendix 3: National Rollout tables

### 3.2.2 Outcomes for children, parents, practitioners, and settings

#### 3.2.2.1 Reported outcomes for children

**Table 7.3.1 As a result of changes made to practice, has there been an increase or decrease in the frequency of the following:**

	Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
Children sharing books	0	40	56	4	184
Children noticing and responding to environmental print	0	41	55	4	184
Children singing rhymes and songs	0	42	53	4	184
Children engaged in mark making	0	41	55	4	184

*Base = all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July and December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey who answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the Making it REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236)*

#### 3.2.2.2 Reported outcomes for parents

**Table 7.3.2 As a result of changes made to practice, has there been an increase or decrease in the frequency the following:**

	Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
Parents attending sessions or activities	1	66	30	4	184
Parents asking questions and starting conversations with practitioners about their children's learning	0	44	53	4	184

*Base = all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July and December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey who answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the Making it REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236)*

### 3.2.2.3 Outcomes in terms of practitioner confidence, knowledge, skills and practice

**Table 7.3.4: How much, if at all, has the training and pre-course reading improved your knowledge and confidence in the following aspects of practice?**

	Not at all %	Not much %	A little %	A fair amount %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Supporting children with early literacy	1	2	10	38	36	14	1333
Knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it successfully with families	1	2	8	43	38	9	1333
Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	1	1	12	48	30	9	1333
Engaging with disadvantaged parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	1	2	16	48	23	10	1333

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July 2013 and March 2014 and responded to the post-training survey (1,333/1,333).*

**Table 7.3.5 How much knowledge do you feel you have about the following aspects of practice?**

		None %	Not much %	A little %	Fair amount %	Great deal %	Missing %	N
Knowledge of supporting children with early literacy	Pre-training	1	2	18	56	20	4	691
	Post-training	0	0	3	38	44	15	697
	Six-month follow-up	0	0	6	51	40	3	236
	Change (%)	1	2	12	5	20	1	-
Knowledge about REAL and the ORIM Framework and how to apply it successfully with families	Pre-training	35	30	19	8	2	6	691
	Post training	0	1	4	48	38	10	697
	Six-month follow-up	0	3	20	55	20	3	236
	Change (%)	0	27	1	47	18	3	-

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697), post-training survey (697/697) and the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).*

**Table 7.3.6: How much confidence do you feel you have about the following aspects of practice?**

		None %	Not much %	A little %	Fair amount %	Great deal %	Missing %	N
Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	Pre- training	0	2	14	59	23	3	691
	Post- training	0	1	3	47	41	9	697
	Six- month follow- up	0	1	3	50	43	3	236
	Change (%)	0	1	11	9	20	0	-
Engaging with disadvantage d parents to help them support their children's early learning and development	Pre- training	2	7	28	44	16	4	691
	Post- training	0	0	8	50	32	10	697
	Six- month follow- up	1	2	11	53	31	3	236
	Change (%)	1	5	17	9	15	1	-

*Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697), post-training survey (697/697) and the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).*

**Table 7.3.7: How confident do you feel about visiting families at home to support early literacy?**

	Not at all confident %	Not very confident %	Quite confident %	Confident %	Very confident %	Missing %	N
Pre-training	9	28	34	18	7	5	691
Post-training	1	4	24	40	19	13	697
Change (%)	8	24	10	22	12	8	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697) and the post-training survey (697/697).

### 3.2.2.4 Outcomes in terms of practice and quality in settings as a whole

**Table 7.3.8: As a result of attending the National Rollout training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting or settings you support?**

Yes %	No %	Missing data %	N
78	14	8	236

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.9: Has there been an increase or decrease in the following since attending the training?**

	Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
The amount of literacy events/workshops your setting (or settings you support) have provided	3	59	33	6	236
In how often you lend books and literacy resources to families to take home	1	53	37	8	236

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.10: As far as you are aware, how many literacy events/workshops, if any, has your setting (or settings you support) run for parents in the last six months (excluding holidays)?**

	None %	1-9 %	10-19 %	20-29 %	30 or more %	Missing %	N
Pre-training	60	30	2	1	1	5	691
Six-month follow-up	18	37	3	1	0	40	236
Change (%)	42	7	1	0	1	35	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697) and the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.11: How much do the following aspects of practice feature in the work of your setting (or settings you support): Engaging with parents to help them support their children's early learning and development effectively?**

	Not at all %	Not much %	A little %	A fair amount %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Pre-training	1	2	15	37	44	2	691
Six-month follow-up	1	1	11	33	53	2	236
Change (%)	0	1	4	4	9	0	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697) and the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.12: How much do the following aspects of practice feature in the work of your setting (or settings you support): Engaging with disadvantaged parents to help them support their children's early learning and development effectively?**

	Not at all %	Not much %	A little %	A fair amount %	A great deal %	Missing %	N
Pre-training	5	11	23	28	30	4	691
Six-month follow-up	4	8	15	33	38	2	236
Change (%)	1	3	8	5	8	2	-

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to; the pre-training survey (691/697) and the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.13: Has there been an increase or decrease in how many home visits you setting/s have provided since you attended the training?**

Decrease %	Same as before %	Increase %	Missing %	N
0	80	11	9	236

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.14: Do you use (or settings you support) use Early Childhood Environment Rating scales (ECERS) or another quality improvement framework?**

Yes - ECERS %	No %	Don't know %	Yes - Other QI framework %	Missing data %	N
12	34	17	12	25	236

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013 and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (236/697).

**Table 7.3.15: If changes to practice have been made, do you perceive any changes to your quality improvement ratings as a result of using the REAL approach in the following:**

	%	N
Work with parents		
Increase	61	34
Same as before	36	20
Decrease	0	0
Missing data	4	2
Total	100	56
Literacy	%	N
Increase	66	37
Same as before	30	17
Decrease	0	0
Missing data	4	2
Total	100	56

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training between July and December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey and who indicated they used ECERS or another QI framework in their setting (56/236).

**Table 7.3.16: If yes, please indicate if the changes have meant that ORIM and Making it REAL activities have been used (tick as many as apply):**

	%	N
In curriculum planning	55	102
To track children's literacy progress	36	66
To inform our quality improvement plan	34	62
To inform our plan for supporting two-year olds with funded places	32	58
In our Ofsted Self Evaluation process	26	48
In strategies to share knowledge around literacy with parents	11	21
To contribute to other early intervention services and parenting groups	4	8
To set up book and equipment loan schemes for families	4	8
To build an increased emphasis on literacy into home visit practice	4	7
Share ORIM with staff teams, other teams/ build into training	2	4
None of the above	8	14

Base = all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July and December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey who answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the Making it REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236)

### 3.2.3 Enablers and barriers to delivery in practice

**7.3.17: If improvements have been made to practice, what do you think has helped staff in your setting or settings you support (tick as many as apply)?**

	%	N
Staff motivation from attending the training	46	84
Planning meetings	45	83
Resources provided in the training	29	54
Local Authority support	20	37
Set up of a local project or network	9	17
Other	4	7

Base = all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July and December 2013, responded to the six-month follow-up survey who answered 'yes' to the question 'as a result of attending the Making it REAL training, have there been any changes to practice in your setting (or settings you support)?' (184/236)

## 7.4 Appendix 4: Tables for Section 4 Making it REAL training

### 4.1 Local Authority Development projects' two-day training

**Table 7.4.1 Did the day meet the stated aims and objectives?**

Yes %	No %	Missing %	N
100	0	0	135

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the post-training survey (135/135).

**Table 7.4.2: How useful do you think the training materials will be in supporting your work?**

Not at all useful 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Very useful 5 %	Missing %	N
0	0	0	13	87	0	135

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the post-training survey (135/135).

**Table 7.4.3: What has helped you run the Making it REAL project?**

	%	N
Motivation from attending the training	65	49
Working with a colleague	55	42
Local Authority support	49	37
Resources provided in the training	47	36
Local network meetings	44	34
Support from management	29	22
Other	3	2

Base = all practitioners who attended the Making it REAL training and responded to the six-month follow-up survey (76/135).

## 4.2 National Rollout one-day free training

**Table 7.4.4: Did the day meet the stated aims and objectives?**

Yes %	No %	Missing %	N
98	1	1	1333

Base= all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July 2013 and March 2014 and responded to the post-training survey (1,333).

**Table 7.4.5: What is your overall assessment of the training?**

Poor 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Excellent 5 %	Missing %	N
0	1	5	28	65	1	1333

Base= all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July 2013 and March 2014 and responded to the post-training survey (1,333).

**Table 7.4.5: How useful do you think the training materials will be in supporting your work?**

Not at all useful 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Very useful 5 %	Missing %	N
0	1	6	26	68	0	1333

Base= all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July 2013 and March 2014 and responded to the post-training survey (1,333).

**Table 7.4.6: How confident do you feel in your ability to put what you have learnt into practice?**

Not at all confident 1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	Very confident 5 %	Missing %	N
0	0	7	41	51	1	1333

Base= all practitioners who attended the National Rollout training between July 2013 and March 2014 and responded to the post-training survey (1,333).