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**Early Years
Consultant's
Handbook**

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Early Years Consultant's Handbook

First published in 2008
Ref: 00127-2008BKT-EN

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Contents

Introduction	7
Section 1 Why do we need Early Years Consultants?	8
1.1 The rationale	8
1.2 The importance of quality	9
1.3 Quality improvement	9
Section 2 The roles and responsibilities of the Early Years Consultant	11
2.1 Skills and required areas of expertise	11
Section 3 Raising quality of practice through support for all settings	16
3.1 Support and challenge within the local authority (LA)	16
3.2 Levels of support	18
3.3 Support across all settings – LA case studies	20
3.4 National Strategies Early Years Team support for local authorities (LAs) and Early Years Consultants	24
Section 4 Effective Early Years consultancy in action	26
4.1 Effective consultancy	26
Section 5 Action planning for improvement	27
5.1 Action planning	27
5.2 Feedback	27
Appendices:	
Appendix 1 Overview of relevant policies and initiatives	28
Appendix 2 The Communication, Engagement and Involvement taxonomy	32
Appendix 3 A model for effective consultancy in action	33
Appendix 4 Glossary of terms	37
Appendix 5 Glossary of acronyms	39
Appendix 6 Useful publications and websites	41

Introduction

The Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on LAs and their partners to improve outcomes for all young children and reduce inequalities between them. Fulfilling this duty requires a broad and inclusive strategy, part of which should focus on the provision of high quality early learning and care.

The overwhelming evidence from research shows that high quality early learning and care is essential to give children the solid start they need to achieve better outcomes in school and beyond. Children who experience high quality Early Years provision develop better social, emotional and cognitive abilities – qualities which are necessary for school and adulthood. Poor quality, on the other hand, adds no value in the long term. The Government therefore wants LAs to sharpen up their focus on raising and sustaining the quality of Early Years experiences for children and families at all levels.

This is being supported with significant additional funds in the Outcomes, Quality and Inclusion (OQI) strand of the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare grant (formerly the General Sure Start Grant) and the Graduate Leader Fund (GLF), designed both to develop a cadre of Graduate Early Years Professionals (EYPs) and to enable settings to recruit and employ them. The purpose of this investment is to promote the development of a world-class workforce, a high standard of content and environment; and effective and reflective practice and pedagogy. Together, these are the key drivers of quality in Early Years provision.

LAs have a statutory duty¹ to provide information, advice and training to their Early Years workforce, and Early Years Consultants should be at the forefront of delivering this. They are key players in ensuring that a local authority's quality improvement strategy is implemented in all settings in a way that impacts on the lives of children and their families, offering measured support in inverse proportion to success. This requires strong leadership and partnerships with settings across the maintained and private, voluntary and independent sectors, as well as with other children's services providers. This Handbook offers some tools and information which Early Years Consultants will find useful in carrying out this important role.

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¹Section 13 of the Childcare Act 2006. The Childcare Providers (Information, Advice and Training) Regulations 2007 which laid down this duty came into force on 1 October 2007.

Section 1

Why do we need Early Years Consultants?

1.1 The rationale

Over the last ten years, the Government has invested heavily in the early years to develop and improve the infrastructure and raise its status from a patchy and uncoordinated service into a key part of the modern welfare state. This has led to an increase in the number of early learning and childcare places available, the provision of an entitlement to free early learning for all three- and four-year-olds (latterly extending this on a pilot basis to two-year-olds in disadvantaged areas) and the creation of Sure Start Children's Centres in every community. The statutory Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework which came into force in September 2008 brings together key documentation focused on ensuring every child has a quality experience in their early learning and care setting while raising the profile of this phase to improve outcomes for children and families.

This first phase of development concluded with the Childcare Act 2006, which placed a duty on LAs and their partners to improve outcomes for children from birth to five and to reduce inequalities between them. The Early Years Outcomes Duty (EYOD) came into force on 1 April 2008. It provides legislative underpinning for the continued provision of early years services and activities such as children's centres.

The Outcomes Duty also raises expectations of the next phase of development, which is about demonstrating that Government investment is making a difference, that outcomes for young children are improving and, crucially, that the gap between the lowest achieving and the rest is closing. This ambition is further reinforced in the Children's Plan, which sets out the goal that by 2020 every child is ready for success in school with at least 90% developing well across all areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) by age 5.

In order to achieve this, LAs need to develop a broad strategy with their partners, which addresses improved access to and take-up of early childhood services (particularly early learning and care). They need to ensure that those services are of high quality, and provide support to parents to develop a strong home learning environment.

To help LAs build capacity in securing and maintaining high quality early years provision, the Government has provided additional funding through the Outcomes, Quality and Inclusion strand of the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant to enhance the role of those working with settings. The term being used for this role is the Early Years Consultant. The Early Years Consultant will be a key lever in the quality improvement agenda, and his/her role will be to provide effective and strong support to settings to improve the quality of experiences for all children and their families.

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1.2 The importance of quality

We know from research² that high quality effective early years provision has a significant impact on children's social, emotional and cognitive development and is a key factor in improving outcomes for children and families. Every child should be given the opportunity to experience high quality early years provision. The EYFS – established under the Childcare Act 2006 (see Appendix 1) – sets out a framework for learning, development and care from birth to five, and defines high quality Early Years provision as provision which:

- improves outcomes for every child through high aspiration and effective practice;
- provides personalised learning, development and support – tailored to the needs of individual children;
- involves parents in their children's learning and development;
- builds the foundations for future success.

High quality provision has a number of essential characteristics:

- the leadership, qualifications and quality of the workforce and their understanding of Early Years pedagogy, anti-discriminatory practice and equality;
- the importance of the home learning environment and the involvement of parents in supporting and extending children's learning and development (see the Communication, Engagement and Involvement taxonomy, Appendix 2);
- a safe and stimulating environment both indoors and outdoors which promotes physical, mental and emotional health and well-being and provides continuity of care.

1.3 Quality improvement

To support the successful implementation of the EYFS, the Government has drawn up a Quality Improvement Programme (QIP) which sets out a plan for focused activity to drive up standards. The Early Years Consultant will have a key role in implementing this programme, which falls into three themes:

1. Communicating quality – developing a shared understanding of what constitutes high quality provision, and helping parents to become confident in recognising and demanding it. This is key to driving up quality.
2. Stronger performance management at LA and setting level through:
 - LAs: setting clearer expectations of Early Years settings; using data to direct resources and support; better alignment – especially to address transition from EYFS to Key Stage 1; Early Years Consultant role providing leadership in supporting/challenging Early Years settings and aligned with school improvement arrangements.
 - Settings: conducting self evaluation, applying appropriate quality improvement tools to review and improve provision; monitoring children's progress through better observation and recording to tailor provision; learning from each other, e.g. 'buddying' and sharing information on children.
3. Workforce development – ensuring a cadre of highly skilled and qualified Early Years staff is in place; graduate-led, with a good knowledge and understanding of effective pedagogy and practice, including aspects of child development such as speaking, listening, social development and how to support parents, and with a culture of continuous professional development. The Government's aim is for a graduate Early Years Professional (EYP) to be in place in every full daycare setting by 2015 – two in disadvantaged communities.

Further detail of the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) QIP can be found at: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/features/foundation_stage/ey_qip

²Sylva, K., Melhuish, E. C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report*. DfES/Institute of Education, University of London.

How will this be achieved?

- **All Early Years settings** including schools, children's centres, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector and childminders should aspire to deliver provision of the highest quality by:
 - continually reviewing their practice through self evaluation, e.g. completing the Ofsted self evaluation form (SEF);
 - drawing on tools and resources available locally and nationally to support quality improvement;
 - ensuring continuing professional development (CPD) for their practitioners.
- **LAs** should ensure that there is a well-articulated vision for quality improvement in their Children and Young People's plan (CYPP) which draws on the expertise of **Early Years Consultants** who will:
 - be at the forefront of implementing systematic quality improvement processes;
 - provide challenge and targeted support for settings;
 - capture and share best practice across all settings and with childminders;
 - work with graduate leaders to further develop their knowledge, skills and understanding and in so doing contribute to their professional development;
 - support all practitioners in developing their practice;
 - build capacity at both LA and setting level;
 - champion the role of parents in their children's learning.
- **The National Strategies** have a key role in ensuring LAs and Children's Trusts embed Early Years quality improvement in their plans for Children's Services and in their effective action plans to achieve the EYOD targets. The National Strategies Early Years team will also play a key role in providing ongoing support, training and materials, for example Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (QISP) materials for Early Years Consultants in their role as catalysts for quality improvement at a local level.

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Section 2

The roles and responsibilities of the Early Years Consultant

Early Years Consultants are expected to have a strong focus on improving the quality of learning and development, and thus improving outcomes for children and families through support, advice and challenge. This will involve working with leaders, managers and practitioners in all types of Early Years provision – schools, children’s centres, PVI settings and childminders. The support provided should be differentiated. Not all providers will require the same level of support; and some – particularly those that have sophisticated quality improvement processes already in place – may require little or no support. Early Years Consultants should operate to the principle of support in inverse proportion to success – this means that support should be targeted at those settings and providers which need it most, where outcomes for children are poorest. (See Section 3.2)

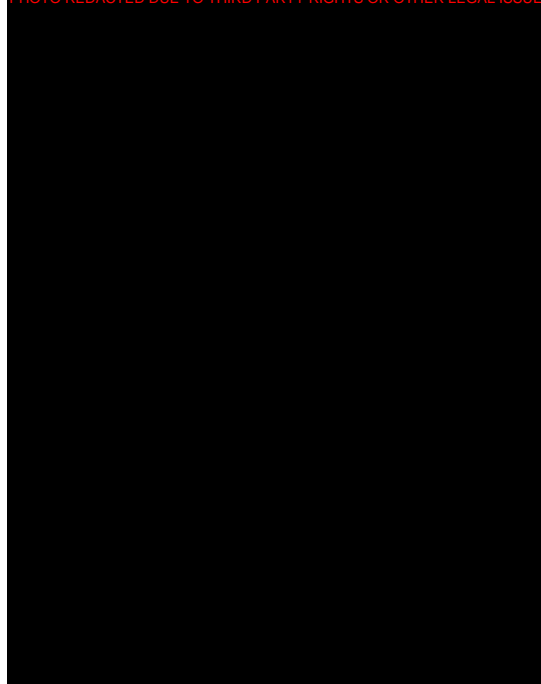
2.1 Skills and required areas of expertise

Five areas of expertise relating to Early Years consultancy are:

1. *Strengthening leadership for learning and development* – focusing on the key role of leaders in building capacity and ensuring quality learning, development and provision.
2. *Developing practitioner learning* – focusing on the needs and highlighting/developing strengths of practitioners who support and extend children’s learning and development.
3. *Facilitating partnerships for learning and development* – focusing on working in partnership with parents/carers, children, other settings and partner professionals to support children’s development and progress.
4. *Supporting progress, learning and development* – focusing on using observations to assess and understand children’s learning and development, both in the home and the setting, and translating observations of children at play into an assessment of each child’s progress to help support them further.
5. *Securing high quality environments for learning and development* – focusing on the enabling environment (including the physical and emotional environment), which promotes children’s well-being, nurtures children and fosters positive relationships between children parents and adults, and where children are valued for their uniqueness and individuality.

These areas of expertise are explained further in the following grid.

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Roles and responsibilities of the Early Years Consultant					
	Leadership	Pedagogy	Working with Parents and Partners	Assessment for Learning (AfL)	Physical space
	<p>1. Strengthening leadership for learning and development.</p> <p>Focusing on the key role of leaders in building capacity and ensuring quality learning, development and provision in the setting.</p>	<p>2. Developing practitioner learning.</p> <p>Focusing on the needs and highlighting/developing strengths of practitioners who support and extend children's learning and development.</p>	<p>3. Facilitating partnerships for learning and development.</p> <p>Focusing on working in partnership with parents/carers, children, other settings and partner professionals to support children's development and progress.</p>	<p>4. Supporting progress, learning and development.</p> <p>Focusing on using observations to assess and understand children's learning and development, both in the home and the setting, and translating observations of children at play into an assessment of each child's progress to help support them further.</p>	<p>5. Securing high quality environments for learning and development.</p> <p>Focusing on the enabling environment, including the physical and emotional environment, which promotes children's well-being, nurtures children, fosters positive relationships between children, parents and adults, and where children are valued for their uniqueness and individuality.</p>
The core functions of the Early Years Consultant	<p>To be the main broker for LA Early Years quality improvement systems and processes, and to be a clearly identifiable point of contact within the LA for all settings.</p> <p>Implementing a differentiated approach in order to target resources and support to where they are needed most and will make the biggest impact.</p>	<p>To provide support and challenge concerning the implementation of the EYFS across all Early Years provision.</p>	<p>To support settings to engage mothers and fathers and involve them in their child's learning and development, and help them develop partnerships with other settings and agencies to share information and understanding about the child's needs.</p>	<p>To provide support and challenge to all settings to improve outcomes for all children, by improving the quality of pedagogy and assessment for learning.</p>	<p>To provide support and challenge focused on the quality of the Early Years environment, in order to improve outcomes for all children and to embed a culture of continuous quality improvement.</p>

<p>The Early Years Consultant knows and understands about</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality improvement principles, systems and processes and securing impact from this work. Effective self evaluation models including the Ofsted SEF. Monitoring and evaluation processes. Leadership styles and approaches. The process of change management. Action planning processes. Local and national priorities, issues and initiatives in Early Years, including Every Child Matters (ECM), the EYOD, the Children's Plan, LA Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Funding streams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EYFS. Primary Frameworks and KS1 of the National Curriculum. The ECM agenda. Inclusive practice. Equal Opportunities. Strategies to engage and motivate adults. Emotional intelligence, i.e. capacity for recognising one's own feelings and emotions and those of others, and forming positive relationships. Reflective practice in which practice is reviewed, analysed and adapted in the light of thinking about feedback from observations and interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing positive relationships. Effective strategies to communicate, engage and involve all parents in their children's learning. Effective methods of working collaboratively with all partners and stakeholders, multi-agency and multi-professional teams to secure impact. Internal and external influences impacting on quality in all sectors. The impact of transitions on children's learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's learning, development and care – EYFS Framework and principles. Early Years pedagogy. Observation-based AFL. Planning for personalised learning, development and care. Targeted intervention strategies and programmes for Early Years that lead to impact on children and families. Effective analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics and features of high quality inclusive environments, both indoors and outdoors. The importance of play, exploration and active learning. Transitions and continuity for children and families. The role of the community in children's learning.
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<p>Core elements of the Early Years Consultant role</p> <p>The Early Years Consultant is expected to work in partnership with leadership teams* to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure all Early Years providers and practitioners have high expectations of and aspirations for children's learning. ● Monitor and evaluate practice and provision in settings as part of the Early Years quality improvement process. ● Support and challenge managers and leaders to audit and review their provision, practice and the CPD needs of their workforce. ● Develop and implement programmes to secure continuous quality improvement that leads to impact. ● Support and challenge leadership teams in all sectors to analyse and use data effectively (including EYFSP and Ofsted SEF) to improve outcomes and provision for all children. ● Provide guidance on specialist Early Years issues to leadership teams and practitioners in all sectors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the effective implementation of the EYFS Framework in all Early Years settings. ● Support, train, advise and challenge practitioners in their implementation of the EYFS Framework. ● Observe learning and teaching, giving appropriate feedback, as part of a planned support package, to secure quality improvement. ● Support practitioners in developing self-reflective practice that leads to impact. ● Facilitate the sharing of effective practice. ● Contribute to the delivery of universal, targeted and intensive support and CPD to Early Years practitioners from all sectors and partner agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide specialist input on creating effective partnership with staff from all sectors. ● Support practitioners to communicate, engage and involve parents in their children's learning. ● Signpost to, liaise and work in partnership with a range of other professionals and LA officers, including their National Strategies Early Years Regional Adviser (RA) as appropriate. ● Develop robust and smooth transition arrangements to support children's learning, including the role of the key person in a child's transitions both vertically and horizontally across a day, week, or period of time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support and train practitioners in identifying and providing personalised learning for all children. ● Support and train practitioners in identifying and providing tailored support to those children with particular needs or disabilities, using the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) and other materials. ● Support, train and challenge practitioners in the understanding and implementation of observation-based assessments. ● Support practitioners in monitoring and evaluating all children's progress. ● Support practitioners in analysing and using data effectively (including EYFSP) to improve outcomes and provision for all children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Model and demonstrate effective practice. ● Advise and train practitioners in offering effective learning, including learning through play and child-led activities, both indoors and outdoors. ● Provide specialist advice on the development of both the physical and emotional environment (indoors and outdoors) to support children's learning development and care. ● Recognise and analyse effective practice and support its dissemination. ● Support clusters and networks of practitioners to improve the quality of the environment.
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<p>Key skills</p>	<p>The Early Years Consultant needs effective:</p> <p>interpersonal skills in order to develop professional and collaborative relationships with leaders, managers, practitioners and colleagues across all sectors – including the ability to develop trust, empathise, set boundaries, inspire and motivate others;</p> <p>communication skills in order to communicate in an open way – including the ability to listen actively, respond, question, convey hard messages when necessary, support and challenge appropriately, negotiate and influence for a ‘win-win’ outcome, maintain appropriate records and provide constructive written feedback;</p> <p>problem solving and analytical skills in order to build capacity within settings, so that leaders and practitioners are able to identify and tackle issues for themselves, thus avoiding excessive dependency on consultants – including the ability to respond flexibly, identify strengths and areas for development, action plan, monitor and evaluate impact, and analyse a range of data;</p> <p>observation and interaction skills in order to provide developmental feedback – including the ability to reflect, listen, watch and record objectively, mentor, coach and facilitate change.</p>
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*Leadership teams refers to those at both setting and LA level.

Section 3

Raising quality of practice through support for all settings

Long-term continuous quality improvement remains the responsibility of settings and those who lead them. There is a wide range of sources (including membership organisations, for example Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), National Childminding Association (NCMA), 4Children, National Children's Bureau (NCB) that providers can turn to for advice and support, as well as a variety of materials and tools they can use to review and improve their provision.

LAs have a duty, under section 13 of the Childcare Act 2006, to provide information, advice and training to Early Years providers. In implementing this duty, LAs should respect the independence of providers – particularly those in the private, voluntary and independent sectors – and work within the context of what these providers may already be doing in terms of quality improvement.

The Early Years Consultants have a leading role in this – being a critical friend, giving constructive advice and, where appropriate, using incentives and levers such as the categorisation of settings to secure improvement.

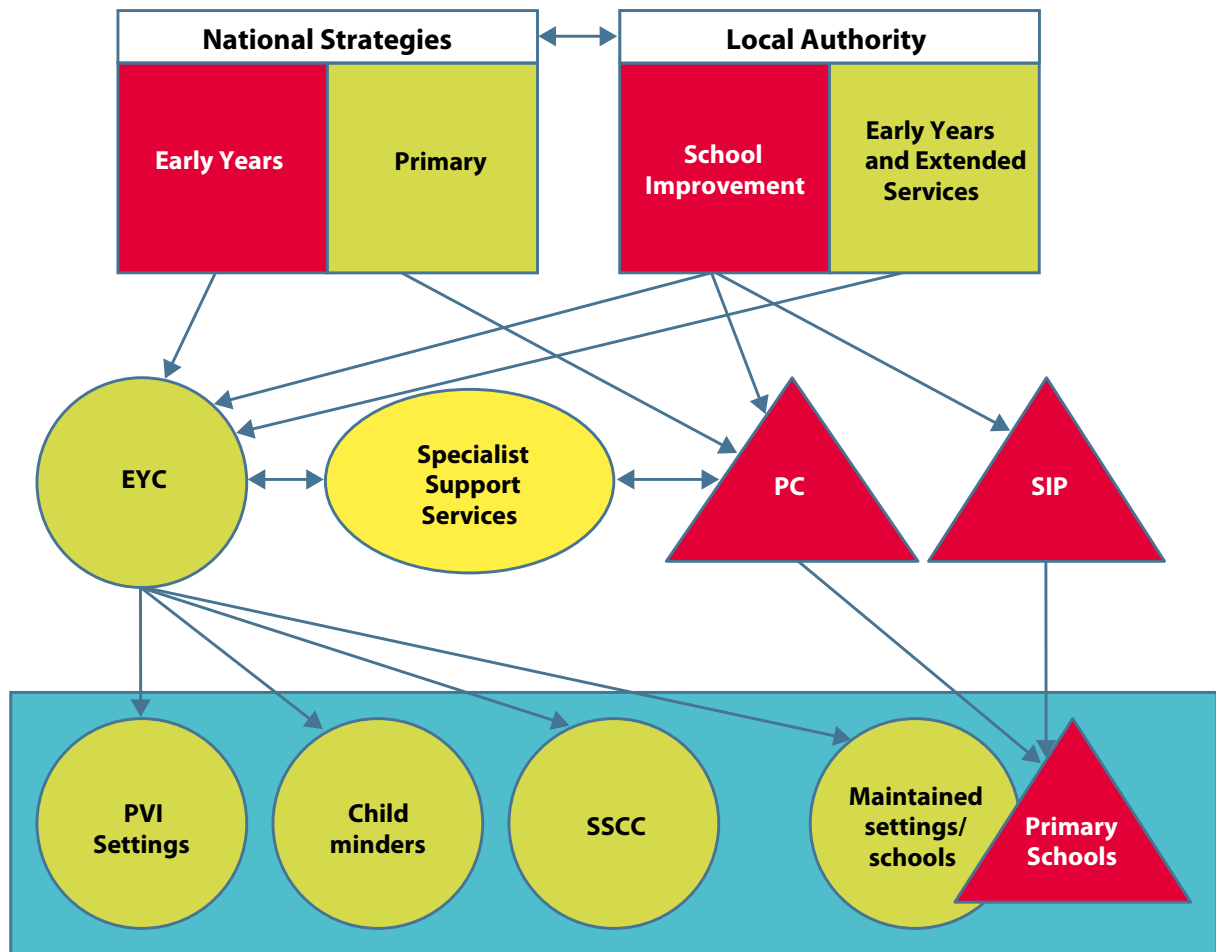
Evaluation and analysis of provision and practice should result in an agreed action plan or focused improvement plan which is owned by the setting. This plan should be based on an acknowledgement and understanding of quality improvement principles and processes and enable both internal and external skills and expertise to be effectively harnessed in joint partnership to secure improvements. The agreed action plan or focused improvement plan is a key mechanism in a setting's improvement cycle. It needs to be monitored and evaluated regularly against the success criteria, and should be responsive to a setting's identified needs.

3.1 Support and challenge within the LA

It is important that LAs have high expectations for all their settings and that the minimum standards should not be accepted as good enough for children and families. To embed high expectations each service delivering the Early Years agenda within an LA should share a common aspiration towards, and understanding of, quality improvement, with each supporting the others' strengths and areas of expertise.

The following diagram provides one view of LA support and challenge for quality improvement. It demonstrates the links and relationships between consultant roles in a LA that are necessary to ensure a consistent message and approach to all providers across the birth to five age range and beyond. For example, depending on structure and organisation, LAs may need to consider carefully the relationship between the role of the Early Years Consultant and those of the Primary Consultant and School Improvement Partners (SIPs) in how support and challenge are provided across all sectors. It is important that LA consultants understand how the EYFS and Key Stage 1 fit together and complement each other, and that they work together to share information and working practices which inform a 'single conversation' with a setting – the 'team around the setting' approach.

LA support and challenge



Key to abbreviations

EYC – Early Years Consultant
PC – Primary Consultant
SIP – School Improvement Partner
PVI – Private Voluntary and Independent
SSCC – Sure Start Children's Centre

3.2 Levels of support

Good practice suggests that LAs use a transparent categorisation process to determine the level of support across all settings. The Early Years Consultant plays a crucial role in this process. In collaboration with other Early Years colleagues, LA officers and Primary Consultants, their role is to build on existing positive professional relationships with settings and contribute to an ongoing dialogue of continuous quality improvement. An agreed level of support for settings would be provided as appropriate, making use of the 'team around the setting' approach.

The use of self evaluation and quality improvement materials should enable settings to reflect on their current strengths and identify next steps which will have a direct impact on children's learning experiences.

For further information on categorisation and support and challenge, please refer to the Early Years QISP materials, (Ref: 00669-2008BKT-EN).

Levels of support across settings can be identified as follows:

- universal;
- targeted;
- intensive;

It is the expectation that support from the LA is given in inverse proportion to success, with the most successful settings receiving annual monitoring and support; this will normally take the form of access to training, resources and network meetings. The least successful settings should receive the maximum levels of support tailored to their needs, and this should include regular Early Years Consultant visits to support the evaluation of the impact of the improvement plan.

The following table illustrates possible Early Years Consultant involvement and activities for each of these levels of support.

Universal: The universal offer will be accessible to all leaders and practitioners (where appropriate) and will be based on agreed LA models of support and challenge. It will encompass a range of opportunities that may be led, facilitated or mediated through the Early Years Consultant.

Activities: The following activities (in no order of priority) may be part of the universal offer:

- briefings for leaders and managers, including updates on local and national Early Years projects and programmes;
- training for practitioners;
- locality networks or clusters facilitated by the LA to discuss best practice – for example, Early Years Coordinator networks for leadership teams or EYP networks;
- moderation networks and clusters – ongoing throughout the year for leaders, practitioners, Year 1 colleagues, assessment and subject coordinators;
- access to quality assurance/improvement schemes, mentoring opportunities, and locality-based websites providing updates and materials;
- consultant or team support for evaluation of setting improvement/development plans as part of the annual quality improvement cycle.

Targeted: The targeted support would be brokered through the Early Years Consultant in conjunction with other team members and in consultation with LA strategic leaders, as part of the categorisation process. This support could also be triggered by a request from the setting for additional consultancy time due to particular circumstances – for example, addressing specific action points identified in an Ofsted report. The Early Years Consultant and the ‘team around the setting’ would work closely with the identified setting to ensure that there is a shared understanding and commitment to improved outcomes for the children and families within the setting and wider community.

Activities: The following activities, in addition to universal support, and in no order of priority, may be part of the targeted offer:

- regular visits by Early Years Consultants, with shorter intervals between visits and/or more time spent within the provision;
- joint audit of provision with negotiated focus to support/inform a focused improvement plan;
- tailor-made continuing professional development (CPD) linked to outcomes from self evaluation; this may be for an individual setting or a group of settings, for example those in a children’s centre area;
- involvement in a local or national improvement programme or strategy, e.g. Letters and Sounds, with support from the Communication Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) Consultant;
- individual support plan for leaders or practitioners, with agreed timescales and outcomes;
- access to a ‘buddying’ or mentoring scheme;
- access to an Advanced Skills Teacher, Lead Teacher or EYP, or Practitioner or Equality Named Coordinator (ENCO);
- joint visits to other settings or schools with Early Years Consultants on agreed target areas followed up through action planning;
- joint observations by leaders and Early Years Consultants with agreed actions;
- support in constructing improvement plans as a result of self evaluation.

Intensive: The intensive support will be brokered through the Early Years Consultant in consultation with LA strategic leaders and managers of settings, as part of the categorisation process outlined in Early Years QISP, (Ref: 00669-2008BKT-EN). This support could be triggered, for example, by an inadequate Ofsted inspection, parental complaints, a particularly challenging context, e.g. a newly registered provider, staff changes, or inadequate implementation of improvement plans. Providers who have been granted an exemption from meeting the EYFS learning and development requirements in order to further develop their childcare provision to meet those requirements must also be given additional support.³

Activities: In addition to the activities for universal and targeted support, further consideration may be given to:

- planned timescale in response to required outcomes, e.g. Ofsted re-inspection resulting in an agreed LA support plan with means of evaluating progress;
- support and challenge from a multi-agency team, e.g. SIPs, Early Years Consultants, EYPs, speech and language therapists, educational psychologists;
- planned review of a setting with follow-up focused improvement plans.

³The Childcare Providers (Information, Advice and Training) Regulations 2007

3.3 Support across all settings – LA case studies

LAs use different approaches to offer varied levels of support to settings, reflecting their circumstances, agreed support structures, priorities and the needs of the settings. The following case studies represent a few of the approaches that Early Years Consultants might use:

Case Study 1: An LA – providing targeted support to Early Years settings

This case study is an example of one LA's approach to providing targeted support to those Early Years settings who need it most, to ensure that all settings are focused on high quality Early Years provision and improving outcomes for all children. It sets out the process the LA uses to categorise settings and provide the support needed to improve practice.

Context

Early Years support to settings is determined on a termly basis so that it can respond to immediate changes in circumstances and quality of provision. A setting support meeting is held at the beginning of the term to discuss every PVI setting. The meeting involves the participation of everyone who visits settings, so that their knowledge can be part of the discussion. This includes:

- Early Years Consultants (who chair the meeting);
- CLLD Consultant;
- Inclusion Consultants;
- Early Years development and support workers;
- PLA development worker;
- Business Support Officer (if appropriate).

Each setting is discussed in the context of a set of criteria which help to determine the level of quality in the setting. These include:

- Ofsted judgments;
- issues identified through self evaluation by settings;
- changes in leadership, including manager and setting Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO);
- non-attendance at training;
- changes in intakes;
- concerns about provision noted by the Early Years advisory team on previous visits;
- changes in provision (premises, intake etc);
- post-Ofsted support required;
- workforce qualifications;
- support for vulnerable groups of children identified, including children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities.

The number of criteria attached to each setting will determine which category they are in and therefore how many visits they will receive that term. The purpose for each visit is drawn out of the discussion, so that there is a clear intended outcome expected from the contact.

A letter outlining the agreed package of support is then sent to each setting. It explains who will be visiting the setting and why. None of the areas identified will be a surprise to the setting, as issues will have already been jointly discussed during previous visits. However, this letter acts as a summary of the support offered by the Early Years teams and helps settings see how the different strands of the Early Years team are joined up with a single approach to improving quality.

The support package letter will also highlight areas of practice that should be celebrated; e.g. outstanding Ofsted outcomes, contributions made to LA training, particular aspects of good practice, etc.

Some of the visits will be joint ones, particularly between the Early Years/CLLD consultants and the development worker, as this paves the way for further support which will be guided by the consultants but might be undertaken by other members of the team.

Impact of targeted support in the LA

- No settings are on inadequate judgments compared to 7% in 2006.
- 23% require intensive support compared to 57% in 2006.
- 61% of settings are providing good quality provision, are self-sustaining and require a minimum amount of support compared to 28% in this category in 2006.
- Examples of good practice from this group are shared across the Early Years sector through training or cluster groups.

Targeted support to schools

Support for improving quality within the EYFS in schools is determined in a similar way through discussions with the Primary team, SIPs and Link Advisers. Support is often linked to a particular programme, e.g. the Improving Schools Programme (ISP) or CLLD, but will also be linked to the quality criteria listed above. Schools are informed of how many days the Early Years Consultant can work in each school, with a clearly identified focus for that support.

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Case Study 2: The role of the Early Years Consultant team

The Early Years Consultant team supports schools and settings across the LA. The county is divided into four locality areas, with a team of staff responsible for providing advice, support and guidance. The team comprises a Lead Early Years Consultant (with county-wide responsibility); an Early Years Consultant; a Childcare Coordinator; a Childminder Coordinator; an Early Years Inclusion Coordinator and a Business Support Officer (with county-wide responsibility).

This case study outlines the rationale for the proposed increased effectiveness of Locality Meetings aimed at enabling the LA to meet the EYOD more effectively.

Existing structure for supporting settings:

There are four Locality Meetings covering the four geographical areas of the county. Invited to these meetings are Early Years Consultants, Early Years Inclusion Coordinators, Childcare Coordinators, Childminder Coordinators, and Business Support Officers.

The purpose of the meeting is to discuss each of the schools and PVI settings in each locality in order to share information and concerns.

The meetings are held once each term and discussions summarised on a spreadsheet, available on the 'Everyone Drive'.

Proposed future structure:

The aim of the proposed changes is to:

- facilitate integrated team working in line with EYFS requirements;
- streamline structure to provide more time for discussing future action, rather than updating on current situation;
- prioritise and plan future workloads in proportion to need;
- identify good practice;
- provide information for the Settings Intervention and Support Programme (SSIP).

In order to achieve these aims the following organisational procedure has been designed.

A spreadsheet will be created to include every school and Early Years setting. Columns to complete will include: date of visit; time spent; purpose of the visit and comment; future recommendations.

There is an opportunity for 'ragging' the schools and settings using criteria from the Northumberland Quality Framework (NQF) and the Ofsted SEF which will provide information with regard to the settings' capacity to improve and the schools' EYFSP data. Deep Red (NQF - Focusing): concerns that need to be addressed urgently; Red (NQF - Focusing/Developing): concerns raised by members of the EY team; Amber (NQF - Developing/Establishing): some aspects of good practice, but ongoing need for development with specific issues; Green: many aspects of good practice, and setting addressing own areas for development.)

In preparation for the meeting, the form will be completed by any member of the locality team who has visited the school or setting since the last meeting, or has knowledge of them. There will be a deadline of one week prior to the meeting for this to be completed. There will be an expectation that team members will read the locality forms in preparation for the meetings.

The main focus of the meeting will be discussion of priorities for the future and will result in a change in the allocation of Consultant support to settings. At present all PVI settings receive one visit per term from an Early Years Consultant and an Early Years Inclusion Coordinator.

Outcome

By 'ragging' and prioritising settings, and following the Locality Meeting discussions, the Lead Early Years Consultants will determine the most appropriate support for the setting which will include:

- the focus of the support;
- the intended outcome of the support;
- the most appropriate team member/s to support;
- the level of support to be provided.

These discussions will also provide information for SISP meetings.

An additional focus of the meeting will be to identify good practice and how this can be shared more widely.

In order for this process to be effective, Locality Meetings will be held half-termly to direct the teams' work to enable us to more effectively meet the EYOD.

Targeted support in schools:

The LA is currently undertaking a pilot programme specifically aimed at reducing the gap between the lowest attaining 20% of pupils and the rest, and targeting support from the Early Years Consultants in identified schools.

Within current capacity we would be looking at working with six schools over a six session programme, as follows.

Four sessions will be specifically focused on data analysis, Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD) and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and two will be school generated – but arising from the Raising Attainment Plan (RAP) for the lowest 20%. (Supply cover will be provided.)

Planned session four will focus on CLLD and PSED. The two remaining sessions will consider the broader picture:

- Full Foundation Stage Profile data analysis will be carried out by the headteacher, Early Years Consultant, CLLD Consultant and Foundation Stage Coordinator.
- Full analysis of e-profile data – previous and current year – will be undertaken, with drilling down to provide identification of the Foundation Stage target group (lowest 20% attainers) and establishing targets to support their next learning steps.
- A RAP action plan will be produced that identifies what level of consultant support is needed (including intensive CLLD).
- Each school undertakes a self review using the NQF, with analysis of practices and identification of support needed.

School generated sessions

Aspects arising from the RAP plan might include:

- signposting to training – examples of good practice;
- consultant support through modelling, coaching etc.;
- support on further analysis and use of data – e.g. to complete Early Years section of SEF; using aspects of e-profile;
- support for observation, assessment and planning, moderation, and standardisation;
- guidance and advice on planning and development of CLLD and PSED.

Outcomes:

- School leaders and Early Years practitioners are competent in analysis of Foundation Stage Profile data and have a clear focus on performance and progress of lower attainers.
- Barriers to learning have been identified for target group children, with learning programmes designed to raise attainment (linked into the CLLD intensive support programme).
- Greater focus on Early Years in the school's self review process, and more accurate SEF analysis.
- Improvement in results for EYOD threshold and equalities target results within participating schools.
- Transition arrangements are reviewed. The implications of children achieving lower than level 6 in EYFSP scales is considered, and appropriate arrangements are made to meet their needs in Year 1.

3.4 National Strategies Early Years Team support for LAs and Early Years Consultants

The National Strategies Early Years team in each region has been expanded to work alongside LAs to provide advice, guidance and support. This includes the development of materials, working with Early Years Consultants in coaching, modelling and demonstrating practice, and the offer of training. The approach will mirror that of the Early Years Consultants with settings, in that the support offered will be differentiated on the basis of need.

All LAs will have access to materials, guidance and universal training opportunities (for example, government-funded programmes to support continuous professional development in the EYFS areas of learning) and will be invited to events and networks focusing on the sharing of effective practice. LAs will receive a minimum of three strategic visits a year to monitor progress against the Red, Amber, Green (RAG) criteria and be offered support to further develop practice and provision. Some LAs will receive more targeted or intensive support as identified and agreed between the LA and their Regional Adviser (RA) through discussion of the RAG criteria. Targeted or intensive support will focus on RAs working alongside Early Years Consultants and leaders and managers in settings; authority-wide support will also be provided, thus adding to and building capacity. This approach is being modelled with the LAs in the *Making a Big Difference Programme*. These LAs are selected each year following the publication of the EYFSP results to help in their response to the gap narrowing challenges and improve overall achievement. The basis for selecting the LAs currently reflects their size (their share of the total number of five-year-olds living in the 30% most disadvantaged areas) and their performance on the threshold measure.

Targeted and intensive support activities could include:

- action/focused improvement planning with LAs (refer to Section 5) and settings;
- joint visits, demonstrating, modelling and coaching to implement actions to improve children's outcomes and narrow the gap;
- networking in and between LAs as well as facilitating the sharing of effective practice, training and briefings;
- data analysis;
- LA reviews.

The National Strategies Early Years team in each region comprises a Senior Regional Adviser (SRA) and at least one RA.

The role of the SRA

The SRA works closely with the Senior Regional Director (SRD) to agree LA packages of support from the National Strategies and deployment of the regional Early Years team. SRAs have a key role in the development and implementation of the Early Years work of the National Strategies at a regional level, including:

- securing meeting National Sure Start Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets for improving children's communication, social and emotional development and narrowing the gap;
- implementing the National Strategies Early Years programmes to secure continuous quality improvement;
- analysing regional data;
- agreeing Early Years RAG ratings for the region;
- formulating regular reports on the progress of the region;

- partnership working with key stakeholders, for example, Together for Children (TfC), Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), and Government Office (GO) to ensure coherence of support.

The role of the RA

RAs are linked to specific LAs in a role that both supports and challenges the delivery of LAs' Early Years work. RAs work actively with Early Years strategic leads, Early Years Consultants, leaders, managers and practitioners through modelling, demonstrating and coaching to improve outcomes for children and their families and secure improvements in the quality of provision. Included in their work with LAs are:

- strategic visits linked to agreeing LA RAG ratings;
- quality assuring the LAs' evidence against the RAG criteria;
- input to events;
- visiting schools and settings;
- demonstrating effective practice;
- facilitating partnership working.

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Section 4

Effective Early Years consultancy in action

4.1 Effective consultancy

Central to successful Early Years consultancy will be forming trusting relationships, building capacity, empowering, asking the difficult questions and placing the practitioner in a position to consider whether all options have been explored. Effective consultancy feels like walking through an open door as it is a process for providing challenge as well as support.

When working on identified priorities, the most important factor in sustaining the impact from consultancy is the continued involvement and support of the leader, manager, owner, headteacher and other senior staff of an Early Years setting. With regard to childminders, the Early Years Consultant may be working with individuals as part of an accredited network, or in partnership with childminder development teams. The provider should be aware of the areas in need of improvement, and it is through their continued engagement that improvement will become embedded and sustained.

If the support and challenge is to have real impact, it is important to identify who else the Early Years Consultant needs to work with.

For example:

- Who knows enough about the issue or has important information that the Consultant will need? For example: outreach workers, health visitors, partner professionals.
- Who cares enough about the issue to ensure that something is done about it? For example: parents and carers.
- Who can do something about the area of concern at a practical level? For example: management boards.

Tasks that are key to effective Early Years consultancy are:

- action planning for improvement;
- providing effective support and challenge to individual settings;
- monitoring and evaluation of setting improvement and progress.

Key to successful consultancy is rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring is about checking progress, looking for trends and making sure that action plans are being implemented. Evaluation is concerned with gauging effectiveness and interpreting how well things are going. The final stage in this process is to review what needs to be done next and where to start.

Consultants need to draw constantly on their skills of evaluation. They must make judgements about a setting and its work, so that they can offer advice about what might be needed to improve children's outcomes. Throughout their work with settings, Consultants will need to reflect on the quality, effectiveness and impact of their work in general, so that they can plan for their own professional development and gain satisfaction from their achievements as Early Years Consultants.

Section 5

Action planning for improvement

5.1 Action planning

All LAs need to have in place plans for implementing the EYOD set out under section 1 of the Childcare Act 2006. These plans should be contributed to and owned by all partners, including LAs' strategic leads of early childhood services, health, social care, Job Centre Plus, the third sector, parents and elected members.

The EYOD Plan should clearly articulate how the LA and its partners will improve outcomes for all children and their families and reduce inequalities. It should not stand alone, but should be aligned to other relevant strategic plans including the CYPP, and the LA's Early Years Quality Improvement Strategy and School Improvement Strategy.

It will clearly state the lead responsibility for agreed actions and those responsible for putting them into practice.

Through this plan LAs need to ensure:

- the effective deployment of their Early Years Consultants;
- monitoring of Early Years Consultants' impact against the agreed success criteria;
- responsiveness to the analysis of data, including EYFSP results.

The National Strategies Early Years RA will support the development and implementation of the plan through their ongoing work with LAs. (See section 3.4.) The Early Years RA's strategic visit will be the main vehicle for the monitoring of the impact of the EYOD plan, and this will contribute to the RAG rating of the LA and the work plan of the Early Years Consultant.

5.2 Feedback

All Early Years RAs' work with LAs will be transparent. As a result of the work undertaken with a LA, the Early Years RA will write an evaluative Note of Visit reporting on:

- strengths;
- areas of development;
- actions.

Notes of Visits will be shared with LAs as detailed in the agreed National Strategies protocol for working with LAs.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Overview of relevant policies and initiatives

The Childcare Act 2006

The main provisions in the Act are designed to achieve two key objectives.

1. All children from birth to five will have high quality early learning and care and better access to early childhood services, ensuring a good start in life regardless of background.
2. All working parents will have access to a wide range of childcare where they can be confident that their children will thrive and be well cared for, enabling parents to have greater choice about balancing work and family life.

The Act provides the legislative context for the delivery of the EYFS and sets out the new duties concerning improving outcomes and reducing inequalities – the EYOD. The Early Years Consultant has a key role to play in ensuring that LAs meet the duties outlined in the Act, particularly the EYOD and the implementation of the EYFS.

LAs have a statutory duty to set targets for their EYFSP results, both to improve achievement for all children at the age of five and to narrow the gap between the lowest achieving 20% and the rest. LA actions to support meeting those targets are the key to success and the Early Years Consultant plays a major part both in identifying the necessary actions and achieving the goals.

LAs play a key role in ensuring that all providers and practitioners access appropriate information, training and professional development opportunities for the Early Years workforce, to enable them to understand the principles and requirements of the EYFS in order to provide high quality early learning development and care for children from birth to five. The Early Years Consultant has a vital role to play in providing these training and professional development opportunities.

The EYFS

The EYFS is the main framework of regulation and guidance for Early Years Consultants to use to improve quality across the sector. EYFS sets the standards as described in the introduction to the Statutory Framework for the learning, development and care that children should experience in settings.

Through the Key Themes, their Principles and the linked professional commitments, the EYFS establishes a shared language with providers and users of the services to recognise quality and improve practice. The EYFS is the main tool, together with the Ofsted inspection framework of self evaluation, for driving quality improvement. Alongside these, formal quality improvement tools should be used wherever possible in LAs as the basis for consistent and systematic quality improvement across all settings.

Leaders need to be clear about their systems and structures, and practitioners about their pedagogy, to ensure that each child receives quality experiences to support their individual needs and help them make the best of their abilities and talents as they grow up. Early Years Consultants can use the guidance material found in the EYFS Framework to support providers in addressing key elements of their provision.

EYOD

Within the provisions of the Childcare Act (2006) the EYOD on LAs (backed by statutory targets and guidance) aims to improve the five ECM outcomes for all children from birth to five and to reduce inequalities between them. LA targets do not measure progress of individual children, but compare one cohort with the next. LAs set statutory targets for their EYFSP results, both to improve achievement for all at the age of five and to narrow the gap between the lowest performing 20% and the rest. LA actions to support meeting those targets are the key, and the Early Years Consultant plays a major part both in identifying the required actions and achieving the goals.

Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets 10 and 11

PSA 10: Raise the educational achievement of all children and young people

Indicator 1 relates to EYFSP achievement with a national target as follows:

Increase the proportion of young children achieving a total points score of at least 78 across all 13 EYFSP scales – with at least six in each of the CLLD and PSED scales by an additional four percentage points from 2008 results, by 2011.

PSA 11: Narrow the gap in achievement between children from lower income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers

Indicator 1 relates to the achievement gap at the EYFSP with a national target as follows:

Improve the average (mean) score of the lowest 20% of the EYFSP results, so that the gap between that average score and the median score is reduced by an additional three percentage points from 2008 results, by 2011.

These PSA targets are national targets, but inform the setting of LA targets to meet the EYOD and also inform the work of the Early Years Consultant. Quality improvement is the key to achieving these targets, ensuring that outcomes are improved for all children and, in particular, the gap in achievement is narrowed.

The Children's Plan - www.dcsf.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf

The Children's Plan published in December 2007 contains a range of measures looking at all aspects of a child's life to ensure that all children enjoy a happy, healthy, safe childhood and achieve their full potential. The plan sets out how services work together to intervene early to prevent problems turning into crises. It provides more support for parents to do the best for their child and joins up services so that they are shaped around the needs of children and their families, reflecting the lives they lead rather than being designed around professional boundaries. The plan reiterates the Government's long term commitment to a strong Early Years infrastructure, and continuous quality improvement through Sure Start Children's Centres for every community. It reaffirms the new duties placed on LAs; extends free entitlement to a nursery place; and states the intention to put in place a graduate-led multi-disciplinary workforce.

The Children's Plan aims to make this country the best place in the world for children and young people to grow up. Five principles underpin the Children's Plan, as follows:

- The Government does not bring up children – parents do – so the Government needs to do more to back parents and families.
- All children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them.
- Children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life.
- Services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries.
- It is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.

CLLD programme

The CLLD programme is an important opportunity for the range of settings and practitioners in the EYFS to implement the recommendations of the Rose Review⁴. While the focus is on the three to five age group, there are obvious links to work supporting children from birth to the age of three and to Year 1 and beyond. The programme provides focused support for early reading and writing, and speaking and listening – the four interdependent skills identified in the Rose recommendations for early reading.

In the funded CLLD LAs, leaders of schools and key linked settings, practitioners and teachers work together with LA colleagues, including the CLLD consultant and the National Strategies, to develop an approach based on the process of identifying barriers to children's learning, devising, implementing and evaluating solutions and modifying practice.

Early Years Consultants play a part in supporting the delivery of the CLLD programme, working in partnership with the CLLD consultants to support schools and settings in improving quality and outcomes.

The IDP Programme

The IDP is part of the Government's strategy for SEN outlined in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (The Government's Strategy for SEN; Ref: DfES/0117/2004). The focus of the first year of this four-year programme (2008–2011) is supporting children with speech, language and communication needs.

The Early Years IDP was launched in February 2008, and comprises a booklet and interactive DVD based around the four themes of the EYFS which form the basis of continuous professional development sessions. These materials, together with the package of training and support which is already offered in the LA, will help practitioners to improve the provision for all children and will support them in developing more inclusive practice, especially for children with speech, language and communication needs. It is recommended that staff in settings work through the material as a whole team, but it can also be used by individuals and viewed in any order. This resource has been developed in partnership with ICAN.

LAs have been invited to order sufficient copies for all schools and Early Years settings. To order additional copies call 0845 60 222 60 and quote Ref: 00215-2008 BKT-EN.

The National Quality Improvement Network (NQIN) and the Quality Improvement Principles

The NQIN membership includes LA and PVI representatives with an interest in quality improvement who link with the DCSF and key national organisations to promote quality improvement programmes and quality assurance schemes across Early Years and childcare. The NQIN have national and regional groups which involve LAs and organisations locally in peer support and sharing of best practice. The NQIN has developed twelve Quality Improvement Principles to help guide LAs and others in assessing and improving their quality improvement processes.

The Quality Improvement Principles identify the full range of components and effective practice required to ensure quality improvement systems can successfully support settings and improve quality. The Principles can be used by LAs in partnership with local settings to establish and agree a transparent and consistent framework based on a shared understanding and vision of quality.

Full details of the NQIN and the Quality Improvement Principles can be found at the NCB website: www.ncb.org.uk.

⁴Rose, J. (2006) *Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading: final report*. DfES (Ref: 0201-2006DOC-EN)

Graduate Leader Fund (GLF)

The GLF supersedes the Transformation Fund (TF), although it has a greater focus than its predecessor on the aim of securing graduate Early Years Professionals in PVI full daycare nurseries. It supports the Government's aim that every full daycare setting should be led by a graduate by 2015, with two graduates in settings in the 30 per cent of most disadvantaged areas (also by 2015). Like the TF, it focuses on the PVI because although they make up 80 per cent of all early years providers, only 3 per cent of their staff are graduates, compared to 40 per cent of Early Years staff in the maintained sector. £305 million is being invested between 2008 and 2011, with £232 million (managed by LAs) for settings to recruit, train and retain graduate practice leads (and £73 million for the CWDC to deliver the EYPS across the country).

For more information on the GLF, see the guidelines at:

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/earlyyearsworkforce

EYPS

CWDC developed EYPS in conjunction with the childcare sector in response to evidence that higher staff qualifications are among the key indicators for high quality childcare related to the best developmental outcomes for children.

The status, first awarded at the end of 2006, is given to graduates (level 6) who have demonstrated 39 standards covering knowledge, practice and professional development in childcare and Early Years. These standards set by the sector are recognised as being of key importance for leaders in Early Years practice. Through a national network of training providers, four pathways have been made available to enable practitioners to train and be accredited with the status. More details on EYPS, the pathways and funding are available at: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/eyps.

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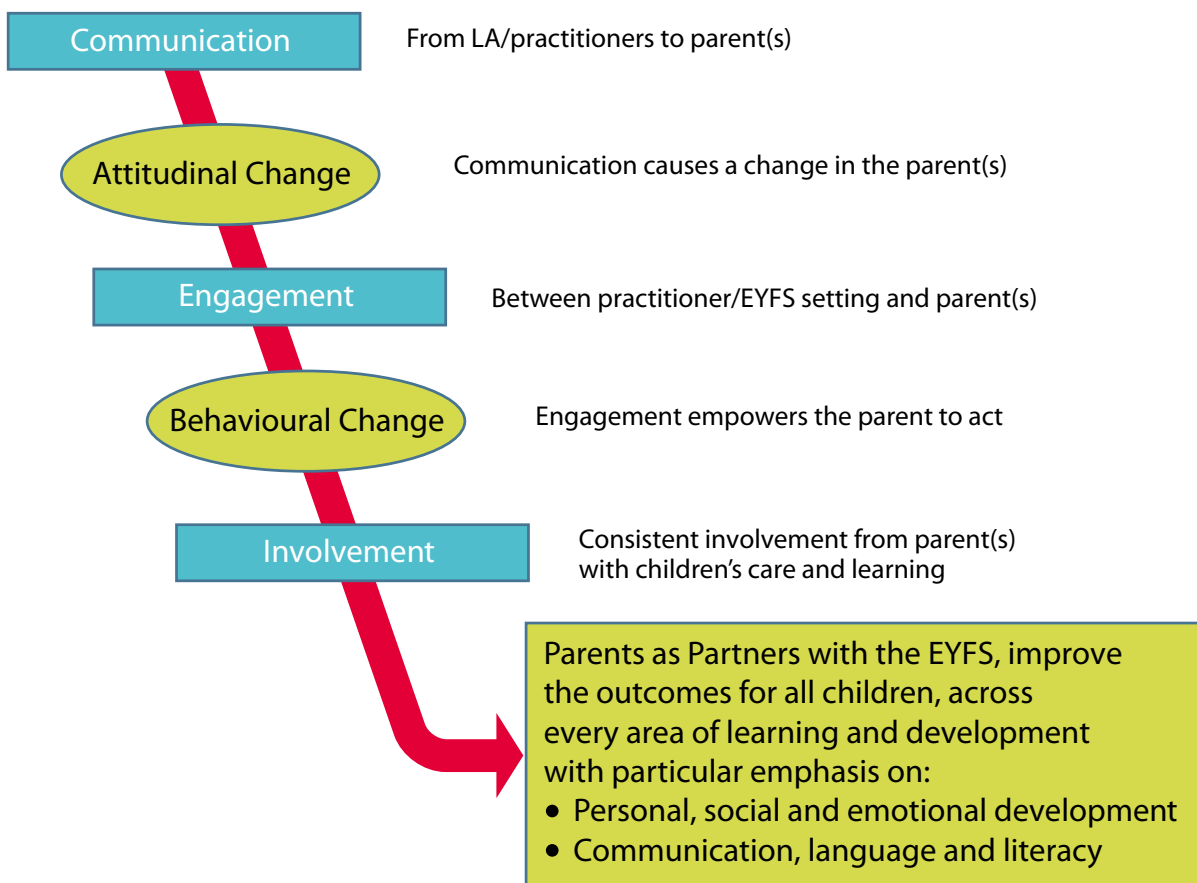
Appendix 2

The Communication, Engagement and Involvement taxonomy

Parents are the foremost and most enduring influence on children in their formative years, so high quality provision is characterised by effective partnership with mothers, fathers and children's primary care givers.

At the heart of the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) project is a three-layer taxonomy which describes the meaning of the terms **Communication**, **Engagement** and **Involvement** and their relationship in the context of enabling effective parental involvement in children's learning.

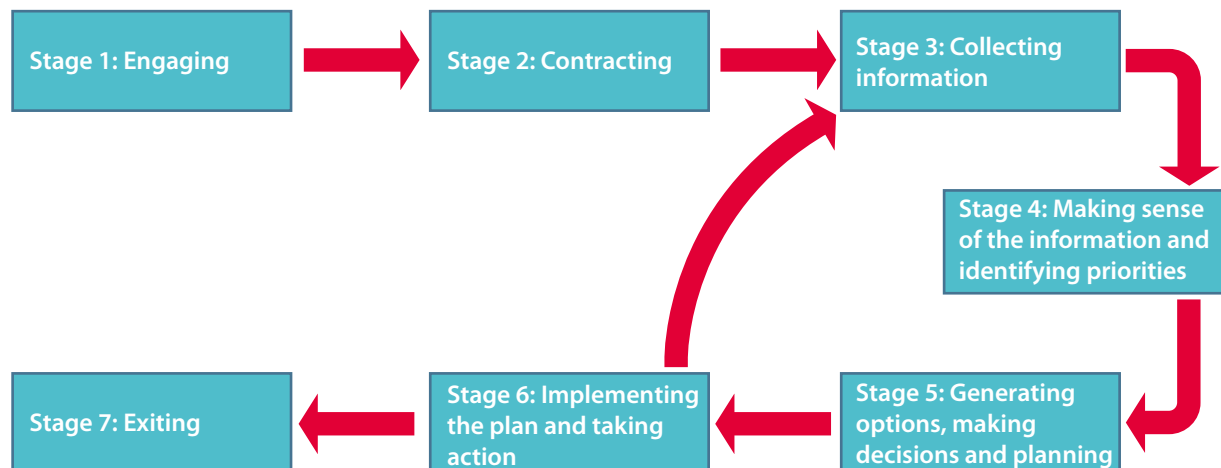
The concepts and linkages underpinning the three-layer taxonomy can be summarised by the following flow diagram:



Appendix 3

A model for effective consultancy in action

There are several different models of consultancy, however the seven-stage model outlined below has proved successful in securing quality across a wide range of situations and contexts.



Cockman, P., Evans, W. and Reynolds, P. (1998).⁵

Stage 1: Engaging

The first stage of the cycle is about making initial contact and establishing a working relationship with the provider and key staff in the setting. These may be the people with whom the Consultant will be working directly. They will also be those who can offer useful information and insights into the issues and those whose positions enable them to ensure that the work is carried out. As well as finding out about the setting and the staff and their situation, it is important to listen to their views about the setting.

Gathering general information and developing effective relationships: guidance for Consultants

- Ensure that you have any relevant information that is held about the setting, for example, previous Consultant notes of visits, Ofsted inspection reports, current action plans, overview of appropriate policies, staffing information, numbers and ages of children, etc.
- Ensure that you know of the involvement of any other professionals, past or present, in the setting. Is anyone else offering advice and guidance to this setting? If so, what will be their roles and how will they connect with your work?
- Ensure that staff in the setting understand your role. For example, you are not there in an inspectorial capacity, but rather to offer support and challenge within the cycle of self evaluation and improvement as a 'critical friend'.

⁵Cockman, P., Evans, W. and Reynolds, P. (1998) *Consulting for Real People: A Client-Centred Approach for Change Agents and Leaders*. McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.

Stage 2: Contracting

This stage of the cycle provides the opportunity to make as explicit as possible what you will be doing. This will not necessarily be a formal contract, but may be stated as broad requirements and will always be taken from identified priorities. Contracting is about ownership and developing an agreement on how both setting and Consultant intend to work.

You will need to establish your role, what you are prepared to do and what those involved will be expected to contribute. It is important that there is agreement and commitment from all parties. Any developments should be linked to the integrated single setting development plan.

Developing an agreement

When developing an agreement on a programme of work with a setting you may want to consider the following questions.

- What are the expectations – both your own and those of the staff?
- What level of commitment is there from the setting?
- What is the timescale for the work?
- What protocols need to be followed or established?
- Who needs to be involved and what are their roles?
- What about confidentiality?
- What factors are likely to promote or inhibit the work?

Stage 3: Collecting information

By now, together with the key setting staff, you may have identified a broad focus for the work. This part of the cycle is about collecting further information to identify the key priorities in more detail. While you will be able to influence the nature of the information to be collected, the setting needs to take responsibility for collecting the information. This will assist the setting in taking ownership of any emerging strengths or development areas. Collecting information takes time, which should be scheduled by the provider. The greater the setting's involvement in collecting the information, the greater its credibility and the confidence of the setting that the emerging priorities are the right ones.

Questions to consider:

- What information is relevant to the issues?
- What information already exists and is in use, and what needs to be collected?
- Who should be involved in collecting the information?
- How can you ensure the validity of the information?

Stage 4: Making sense of the information and identifying priorities

Effective consultancy is about helping staff to make sense of the data and other information and clarifying their understanding of the issues. They will then be in a better position to start making decisions that will improve the situation. At this stage, staff usually start to realise that the issue is more complex than they had thought, and that it may be interconnected with other issues.

Sometimes issues are outside your expertise or spheres of influence, and you will need to think about whether there are other professionals who need to be involved. Underlying issues associated with expectations, leadership and setting organisation may emerge at this point, and it is important that these are recognised and discussed before moving on to the next stage.

Questions to consider:

- Do you have enough information?
- Does the information need clarifying or presenting more clearly?
- What issues are emerging from the information?
- How will priorities be identified?
- Who will be the key people in taking forward the identified priorities?

Stage 5: Generating options, making decisions and planning

Once the priorities have been accurately identified, you are in a position to support the key setting staff in generating options or solutions to tackle them. The role of the Consultant is to simplify, clarify and restructure the information so that options emerge. Often this involves discussion of the emerging issues, the full range of causes, ways forward, options and possibilities, leading to the development of an action plan. The more the setting is involved in identifying ways of moving forward, the more likely it is to have ownership of the actions. Any programme of action will need to identify outcomes, actions, timescales, resources, responsibilities and evaluation strategies. You and the provider will need to agree how you will evaluate the impact of identified actions.

Stage 6: Implementing the plan and taking action

The success of the action plan depends on four factors.

- **Ownership:** Do all the people responsible for implementing the plan own it and are they committed to it?
- **Leadership:** Is the provider and leadership team committed to the change?
- **Capability:** Do staff have the necessary skills to carry out the plan?
- **Organisation:** How is the plan organised?

Effective consultancy attends to all four factors.

The more that the staff are involved in all of the stages in the consultancy cycle, the greater their sense of ownership and the more likely it is that the implementation will be successful. Your support will ensure that practitioners are encouraged to understand the nature of the changes that are necessary and how to make them.

Your involvement in the implementation of the plan will depend on a number of issues, these may include:

- the nature of the changes that are to be made;
- the needs of the setting, for example, high, medium or low priority as designated by the LA;
- involvement of other key professionals, for example, children's centre teachers, development workers, and so on.

It is important to get the balance of your involvement right. At one extreme, non-involvement could result in high levels of ownership, staff participation and reduced dependency while running the risk that nothing gets done. At the other extreme, being too directly involved – while saving time and ensuring the job gets done – can deny staff a valuable learning experience, engender low-level ownership and high staff dependency and not sustain any improvements.

Effective consultancy

Consider how, as a Consultant, you:

- provide support and feedback;
- support the provider in 'mini-reviews' and suggest modifications;
- help practitioners to work together while avoiding taking over or assuming control.

Throughout Stage 6 it is important to be flexible, recognising that any changes made may not be the end of the process, as you will need to evaluate the effectiveness of change. This may mean returning to Stage 3 of the consultant cycle, generating either confirmation of success or the need to develop further actions.

It is important that staff in settings know:

- what part they will play in implementing the plan;
- what part you will play in implementing the plan;
- who has ownership of the plan;
- if the plan has leadership support and how this is demonstrated;
- who will monitor, challenge, support and resource the plan and how this will be carried out;
- who will monitor and evaluate the changed practice after the Consultant has left.

Stage 7: Exiting (completing one cycle of improvement)

If the consultancy has been successful both in addressing the area of development and strengthening the setting's capacity to solve future issues, then the exiting process is relatively easy. It is more difficult if evaluation indicates that issues have been only partially addressed, or that improvements cannot be sustained. Ongoing monitoring of actions will ensure that any difficulties are identified at an early stage and can be addressed appropriately.

It is important that an exit strategy is established at an early stage of the process, so that setting staff understand that consultancy is a limited resource and that there should be significant and sustainable improvement as a result of it.

In order to ensure that the strategy is successful and changes are sustainable, consultants may consider:

- coaching and developing staff to adopt a role similar to that of the Consultant;
- gradually reducing their influence over a period of time;
- planning at the outset a formal celebration of the work undertaken;
- agreeing planned follow-up, for example, six or 12 months after the consultancy.

At this stage you will need to include a review and evaluation of the work that was identified through the action plan, paying specific attention to how well the success criteria have been met and any further areas for development.

Often as an Early Years Consultant you will be providing continued support to a setting on a differentiated basis.

Therefore this stage may represent a complete exit from the setting, or reduced support, or a change of emphasis in support; for example, a change to a targeted or universal offer, or to work through a further issue or action.

Appendix 4

Glossary of terms

Early Years Consultant – a person employed by the LA to provide support and challenge to ensure effective implementation of the EYFS Framework, high standards of provision and continuous quality improvement by Early Years providers.

Early Years Outcomes Duty (EYOD)– the duty placed on LAs by the Childcare Act (2006) to improve the five ECM outcomes of all young children and to reduce inequalities.

Early Years provider – a person or setting supplying Early Years provision, for example, a childminder, nursery, or school. This includes any person on the Early Years Register, and any school (maintained or independent) offering Early Years provision. A company, committee or group may constitute a registered person.

Equality Named Coordinators (ENCOS) – a key element of a localised Early Years Single Equality Strategy (EYSES). They are designated personnel in early years settings. ENCOs work collaboratively with children, parents/carers and staff to meet the equality requirements of children, families and the setting. Some areas have different terms for this role such as INCOs (Inclusion Coordinators) or ECOs (Equality Coordinators).

The responsibility for equality however does not lie with this individual but rather with the Early Years provider and with all associated with the provision. The role is one of conduit, assisting in ensuring that equality compliance and promotion is a 'golden thread' running through all Early Years settings.

The national charity Early Years Equality has produced guidance and advice practice manuals for this role and the sector to support ENCO delivery. The guidance is available at:
www.earlyyearequality.org

Early Years Single Equality Strategy (EYSES) – an EYSES supports LAs and their cross-sector partners in engaging the Early Years sector to work proactively to eliminate inequalities.

It is a combined, localised, strategically planned approach across all equalities groups, and supports the successful delivery of the EYFS through promoting and embedding the ethos of meeting the requirements of the unique child in all forms of diversity. It can add value to local CYPPs, Childcare Sufficiency Requirements, EYOD, Equality Duties, Best Value, and other major strategic goals for Local Government and their partners.

The national charity Early Years Equality has now made available to the sector essential guidance and advice on how to formulate and implement a localised EYSES. The guidance is available at:
www.earlyyearequality.org

National Strategies Early Years team– the fieldforce appointed by the DCSF to offer support and challenge to LAs with regard to the Early Years.

Parents – mothers, fathers, legal guardians and the primary carers of looked-after children. There may also be other significant adults in children's lives and other relatives who look after them.

Practitioner – any adult who works with children in a setting.

Quality improvement (QI) – the process of raising the quality of experiences enjoyed by children and young people and their families in a whole setting. It is therefore a journey towards ever higher quality, involving teamwork, commitment and some thorough self examination of practice.

Quality assurance – a specific type of quality improvement, which provides recognition that an individual setting has made real progress against a set of agreed standards and has achieved an accredited level or stage.

Setting – any out-of-home provider of Early Years provision for children from birth to five, including childminders, LA nurseries, nursery or Early Years centres, children's centres, playgroups, pre-schools, schools in the independent, private and voluntary sectors and maintained schools.

Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) – the responsibilities of the SENCO may include ensuring liaison with parents and other professionals in respect of children with special educational needs, and advising and supporting other practitioners in the setting.

Sure Start Children's Centres – centres to support children under the age of five and their families, providing easy access to health services, parenting and family support including drop in and advice sessions, outreach services, integrated early education and childcare, and links to training and employment opportunities.

Young child – the Childcare Act (2006) defines a child as being a 'young child' from birth until the end of the month of August following his or her fifth birthday.

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Appendix 5

Glossary of acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
CLLD	Communication, Language and Literacy Development
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
CYPP	Children and Young People's Plan
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
ECM	Every Child Matters
ENCO	Equality Named Coordinator
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-school Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYFSP	Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
EYOD	Early Years Outcomes Duty
EYP	Early Years Professional
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYSES	Early Years Single Equality Strategy
GLF	Graduate Leader Fund
GO	Government Office
IDP	Inclusion Development Programme
ISP	Improving Schools Programme
LA	Local authority
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCMA	National Childminding Association
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NQIN	National Quality Improvement Network
NS	National Strategies

OQI	Outcomes, Quality and Inclusion
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PPEL	Parents as Partners in Early Learning
PSA	Public Service Agreement
PSED	Personal, Social and Emotional Development
PVI	Private, Voluntary, Independent
QA	Quality Assurance
QI	Quality Improvement
QIP	Quality Improvement Programme
QISP	Quality Improvement Support Programme
RAG	Red, Amber, Green
SEF	Self evaluation form
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SIP	School Improvement Partner
SISP	Settings Intervention and Support Programme
SSCC	Sure Start Children's Centre
TfC	Together for Children

Appendix 6

Useful publications and websites

Useful publications

Early Years Foundation Stage:

The Early Years Foundation Stage: setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. DCSF, May 2008 (Ref: 00261-2008PCK-EN)

Confident, capable and creative: supporting boys' achievements. Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage. DCSF, 2007 (Ref: 00682-2007BKT-EN)

Guide to the Early Years Foundation Stage in Montessori settings. Montessori Schools Association, 2008 (Ref: 00225-2008BKT-EN)

Improving Quality and Raising Standards in the Early Years: a directory of resources for local authorities. DCSF, 2007 (Ref: 00631-2007BKT-EN)

(This document provides details of many other publications that can support LA colleagues in working with practitioners across the Early Years Sector.)

Local Authority Briefing Pack for the Early Years Foundation Stage. DCSF, 2007 (Ref: 00016-2007BKT-EN)

Parents as Partners in Early Learning case studies. DCSF, 2008 (Ref: 00196-2008PCK-EN)

Playing and learning together – a DVD of practical examples of how parents and carers can get involved in their children's early learning, building on work with parents, carers and practitioners. DCSF, 2007 (Ref: 00671-2007DVD-EN)

Also with subtitles and audio in the following languages:

- Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu (Ref: 00111-2008DVD-EN)
- Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech, Romanian, Turkish (Ref: 00109-2008DVD-EN)
- Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese (Ref: 00108-2008DVD-EN)

Supporting children learning English as an additional language. Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage. DCSF, 2007 (Ref: 00683-2007BKT-EN)

Effective practice:

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Sammons, P. and Melhuish, E. (2003) *The EPPE case studies Technical Paper 10.* University of London, Institute of Education/DfEE. ISBN: 085473 601.

Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Manni, L. (2007) *Effective Leadership in the Early Years Sector: The ELEYS study* Issues in Practice Series, Institute of Education, University of London.

Quality improvement:

Environment Rating Scale Extension ECERS–E. (2006) Trentham Books Ltd.

Laevres, F. ed. (2005) *Well-being and involvement in care: a process-oriented and self-evaluation instrument for care settings.* Kind and Gezin and the Research Centre for Experiential Education, Leuven University.

National Quality Improvement Network (2007) *Quality Improvement Principles: a framework for local authorities and national organisations to improve quality outcomes for children and young people.* The National Children's Bureau.

Sylva, K.; Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2006) *Assessing Quality in the Early Years – Early Childhood.* Trentham Books Ltd.

The Baby Effective Early Learning (BEEL) programme, devised by Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal with Maureen Saunders. (2006) Amber Publications and Training LLP.

The Effective Early Learning (EEL) Programme, devised by Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal (1997). Hodder Arnold.

Useful websites

Children's Workforce Development Council: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Communication, Language and Literacy Development www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/clld

Department for Children, Schools and Families: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

Early Years Equality: www.earlyyearesequality.org

National Children's Bureau: www.ncb.org

National College for School Leadership: www.ncsl.org.uk

Phonics website: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics

Standards Site: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

Together for Children: www.childrenscentres.org.uk

University of London, Institute of Education (EPPE research): www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe

Acknowledgements

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Pages 22 & 23, Case Study of *The role of the Early Years Consultant team*, Northumberland Local Authority. © Northumberland Local Authority. Used with kind permission.

Page 33, Extract from Cockman, P. et al. (1998) *Consulting for Real People: A Client-Centred Approach for Change Agents and Leaders*, McGraw Hill Publishing company. Used with kind permission.

Audience: LA Officers and Early Years Consultants

Date of issue: 09-2008

Ref: **00127-2008BKT-EN**

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further information at: www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

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Schools and Families

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