

**Achieving for
all eligible
two-year-olds**

**Learning from
what works**

achieving **2** year olds



hempalls

Raising take-up
levels so all eligible
two-year-olds
can access their
entitlement

Delivering quality
Developing capacity
Engaging families

Foreword	5
Introduction by James Hemsall OBE	6
About Mott MacDonald	7
About Hemsall's	7
The Achieving Two-Year-Olds programme	8
A programme that delivers even against many challenges	8
What works?	
Management commitment, leadership and project coordination	10
Access to finance and ability to make spending decisions	10
Ability to initiate actions swiftly and early	11
Partnership with providers	12
Quality of provision	13
Marketing and promotion to reach families, raise awareness and achieve take-up	14
The customer journey for parents	15
Market management	16
Partnership working – outreach and engagement	17
Fit for purpose IT and online systems	18
What's been happening?	
Root-and-branch review and refreshing the approach	20
Funding a year early to build momentum, awareness and take-up	22
Using the Childcare Act (2006) Sufficiency Duty to target resources, funding and quality improvement	24
Reaching parents early, and through providers and partners	26
Communicating with partners and providers, and performance management as a motivator	28
Bold, temporary measures to drive take-up	30
Maintaining a relentless approach to marketing and communications	32
Using demand to support the development of supply	32
Systematically using and sharing DWP lists to reach parents	34
Embedding online applications as the main access route	36
Using sufficiency data to drive activities and place planning	38
Working with other local authorities, networking and collaborating	40
Developing a recognisable brand	42

The single biggest growth in the early years sector between 2010 and 2015 was the rollout of the free entitlement for two-year-olds. Now is a great time to look at what has been achieved, and what is happening, and the difference and impact it has made. This important learning is invaluable in how it informs future development of such a significant entitlement and similar programmes such as the upcoming 30 hours for three- and four-year-olds whose families work.

Evidence strongly shows that good quality early years provision has benefits for children's educational development, particularly for least advantaged children. Since 2010, the Government has worked to improve children's outcomes by increasing the number of hours of funded early education for three- and four-year-olds and by extending that to around 40% of least advantaged two year olds.

There have been other reforms including additional funding for disadvantaged children through the early years pupil premium. The commitment of everyone in the sector to securing the best possible outcomes for our young children has been nothing short of impressive. Nothing demonstrates that more than the enthusiasm and commitment displayed in the implementation and delivery of the entitlement to early education for two-year-olds.

Many people, partners, providers, practitioners and local authorities have been working hard to support delivery of this entitlement through programmes designed to support and challenge. It is a remarkable achievement that already two-thirds of those children eligible for a place are benefitting, and that most are in good or outstanding settings. That is down to the work of many people in local areas across the country, and of course all of those providers offering places.

This guide provides a reflection on what elements have been found to be in place in areas where take-up is highest, and a series of case studies of what has been found to work in delivering the entitlement.

Introduction by James Hemsall OBE

A2YO National Support Director



James Hemsall OBE

I would like to congratulate and thank the local authorities, providers, childminders, children's centres and schools who have already embraced the two-year-old entitlement. The Achieving Two Year Olds (A2YO) team has been working with each local authority and thousands of providers and partners to provide information sharing, and the support and challenge to make it happen since 2012.

We have seen a tremendous amount of effort and success on everyone's behalf to achieve what we have all done so far – with around 160,000 children now accessing their entitlement at any one time (September 2015). And yet there's still much more to do. The A2YO programme, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and delivered in partnership by Hemsall's and Mott MacDonald, offers information exchange and fora, termly regional network meetings, training days, special in-depth events, guided visits, provider roadshows and one-to-one support where needed – all with the aim of making it easier and helping us to help each other.

A common question asked of A2YO is *"how are those areas who are funding the most children, achieving?"* The sub-text is *"what more could or should we be doing?"* There is not one simple answer – instead there are many factors and approaches to consider. All need to be locally applied, which in itself can present a huge challenge. Strategies to stimulate demand which work well in one area may not be as successful for another. Likewise, some place development strategies are not suited to all areas – they depend so much on the local market, the range and type of providers available locally, the constraints and opportunities presented by their premises, funding rates matched to the local economy, and competing agendas and demands for space. This forms the basis of this guide to what we have learned from what works.

What is key, in our view, is the message given to eligible families must be clear and understandable and constantly communicated by all. And the journey parents take from hearing about the entitlement and deciding to use it needs to be easily navigable and barrier-free. It's also vital we have enthusiastic, effective and solution-focused leadership and management throughout the local authority, and in all the providers delivering the entitlement. All of whom play their invaluable part in reaching least advantaged children and families, communicating the benefits and the opportunities presented by it, and supporting families to achieve their full potential with high quality early learning.

Mott MacDonald is a global management, engineering and development consultancy adding value for public and private clients on agenda-setting, next-generation projects worldwide. We use our ingenuity to save our customers money and time, reduce risks, increase efficiency, maximise sustainable outcomes and advance best practice.

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Hemsall's was established in 1999 as a collection of early years trainers, consultants and researchers. We're here to support organisations of all types (particularly providers, practitioners and local authorities) to achieve best practice in services for children and families.

We do this by: creating and delivering tailor-made training workshops and courses; delivering research that achieves relevant and useful results, and reaches and informs everyone in the process; and providing consultancy and/or development work that project manages in the short term or even for as long as 10 years.

We've worked with:

- all 152 local authorities in England
- central and regional government
- many small businesses, charities, and children's centres
- and some major high street brands, international and global businesses too

What we like though, is to stay small and deliver big, with a focus on quality and equality.

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The Achieving Two-Year-Olds programme

Since the announcement in 2010 that an entitlement to early learning for some two-year-olds would be introduced, the Department for Education (DfE), local authorities and providers in England have been working hard to deliver funded places for eligible families. Activities have been focused on the statutory duties to fund places which was introduced in two phases in the Septembers of 2013 and 2014. In implementing the programme and in its continued delivery and development, there has been a triple focus on:

- Quality provision that best meets the needs of two-year-olds and their families
- Developing place capacity in new and extended settings, and looking at new models of delivery
- Reaching and engaging eligible families, so they know about their entitlement and are able to easily access it when they need to.

A programme that delivers even against many challenges

Take-up rates, measured as the percentage of eligible children being funded at any given time, have shown wide variation across the country, as roll-out strategies take shape and develop at different times and at different paces, and in response to local needs. We've moved from funding 20,000 children in 2010, towards 160,000 being funded at any one time. A remarkable achievement.

No one, including government, local authorities, A2YO, and early years and childcare providers considered this ambitious roll-out to be without challenge. Local experiences are varied and range from area to area; this guide aims to show how such challenges have been overcome effectively, with ideas to share and replicate. It has, however, done exceptionally well:

...when I first heard about this requirement for a massive increase in places, I thought that it was a very challenging delivery task, so I would like to congratulate both the sector and the officials in my department on managing this increase in provision. There has clearly been a great success, as has been acknowledged by many people... Lord Nash, House of Lords, 8th January 2015

What works?

Based on A2YO's work across the country and feedback from providers and local authorities, we have compiled a set of common characteristics of areas where take-up is highest. Not all areas will show all of these characteristics, and some areas experiencing lower take-up of the entitlement may have adopted many of the suggestions.

Also in this guide, are examples of how some of these factors have been used to great effect. There are plenty of useful ideas that can be pursued in other areas so the entitlement continues to reach children for whom it would benefit the most.

All examples are also provided online in the A2YO Knowledge Hub group. This has been a vibrant online community where ideas and resources have been shared and debated since we started in 2012.

The Knowledge Hub can be found at: <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/group/achievingtwoyearolds>

In addition A2YO has published a range of other resources delivered through a considerable number of support plans, much of which is available on the Knowledge Hub:

- IT systems and processes toolkit
- Place development strategies
- Workforce development
- Working with schools
- Communicating with parents toolkit

1 Management commitment, leadership and project coordination

Senior management 'buy-in' and commitment to delivering the entitlement for two-year-olds acts as a foundation for all actions

Senior management 'buy-in' and commitment to delivering the entitlement for two-year-olds acts as a foundation for all actions, which in itself is not surprising. Early years teams make many efforts to ensure this is the case. We have frequently seen where implementation is supported by management, and delivery rates are higher it is in areas where there is:

- Strong early years and provider representation at Schools' Forum so appropriate local funding decisions are made
- A senior management team 'champion' who promotes and defends the two-year-old entitlement
- Regular monitoring and scrutiny of delivery keeping local delivery at the forefront, comparing delivery against regional and statistical neighbour's progress, and linking it with wider local authority strategies
- An overarching understanding of where the two-year-old entitlement fits within other strategic plans (for example, reducing worklessness/ supporting employment; early intervention; improved educational outcomes; safeguarding etc.

2 Access to finance and ability to make spending decisions

Where all or most of the allocated funding was secured by early years teams, they were more able to develop strategies to create places, support quality, and to stimulate demand at a very early stage

Between 2011 and 2015, DfE allocated more than £1.6b of revenue funding to local authorities to support the funding of places and the activities needed to build an appropriate trajectory. Originally in the Early Intervention Grant this funding was transferred to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) in 2013-14 ensuring that it could only be spent on education, although specific funding for two-year-olds remained un-ringfenced within the DSG. £100m of additional capital funding was also provided to support physical capacity in the form of building renovations, adaptations and new-builds; to be ready to deliver the statutory duty after Septembers 2013 and 2014.

Where all or most of the allocated funding was secured by early years teams, they were more able to develop strategies to create places, support quality, and to stimulate demand at a very early stage. This also offered the opportunity to raise the curve of development higher by funding the entitlement earlier (see number 3). Access to funds is one factor, however, the secondary ability to make decisions and have delegated responsibility was also key. It is widely recognised this was a particular challenge during a phase and culture of local authority spending reductions and efficiency savings. There have been some examples of how local authorities have maximised the impact of their funding by using it to create loan schemes, using repaid amounts to distribute funding to other providers.

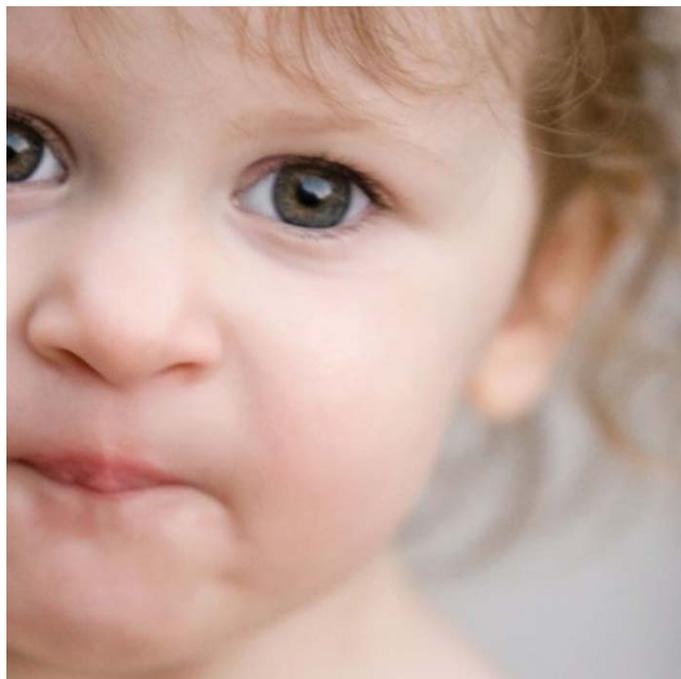
Many local areas that currently enjoy the highest take-up, are those that took the decision to fund against eligibility before each of the statutory duties came into force

Many local areas that currently enjoy the highest take-up, are those that took the decision to fund against eligibility before each of the statutory duties came into force in the Septembers of 2013 and 2014¹. Financial resources were available and flexibility in this way was within the acceptable boundaries and scale of such funding.

Benefits of this approach enabled a smoother transition towards expected take-up levels, and phasing-in in this way helped grow awareness of parents and providers of the good news stories and outcomes of accessing early learning. The more that parents are using their entitlement and then telling their friends and other eligible families, the better. The local marketing and communications strategies experienced what we call a 'tipping-point' where word-of-mouth becomes the most powerful method of sharing the message.

Keeping the strategy and action plan under constant review and monitoring its effectiveness, informs the need for change, and for alternative approaches. The ability to respond in a nimble fashion and implement such changes in response to learning is also key.

¹The 20% least advantaged children qualified in September 2013, 40% eligible became eligible in September 2014. Eligibility criteria can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs/free-childcare-and-education-for-2-to-4-year-olds>



4 Partnership with providers

Communication is the cornerstone of partnership working, and sharing information as early as possible enables providers to prepare to deliver

The best marketing and communications plans have included resources to help providers promote the programme, reach eligible families and support their applications, and to say and do things positively and consistently

It is early years providers (which of course, includes childminders) that deliver the entitlement. They can often deliver most effectively when working in partnership with each other, collaborating with partners (e.g. children's centres, health visitors), and through working in partnership with local authorities.

Communication is the cornerstone of partnership working, and sharing information as early as possible enables providers to prepare to deliver. Where it works, we've seen open, enabling and informative relationships between local authorities, wider partners, and providers from the earliest stages and on a continual basis throughout implementation. Providers are the essential partner in both growing capacity and stimulating parental demand for places. Characteristically, areas with higher take-up demonstrate open, enabling and informative relationships with providers. Providers themselves have been supported to recognise the potential of a rapidly developing market, and with support, have been able to maximise the opportunities it presents.

The best marketing and communications plans have included resources to help providers promote the programme, reach eligible families and support their applications, and to say and do things positively and consistently. Scripts, easy to understand leaflets and key messages have all been key to success here. As has access to online checking so providers can check eligibility whilst parents are with them in their setting.

Quality provision, as ever, is essential and continuous professional development programmes have supported quality (delivering quality provision for two-year-olds, vulnerable families, improving Ofsted inspection outcomes), business (new business models, sustainability and financial management), and change (new models of delivery, staff leadership and management). The importance of such training in business and leadership cannot be underestimated. It is equal significance to that of quality improvement, however it can sometimes feel less of a priority.



Quality of provision has rightly been at the forefront of place development strategies and placements

We have found, the dynamics of supply and demand are key to driving quality

Quality of provision has rightly been at the forefront of place development strategies and placements. Local authorities and providers have focussed on developing quality provision, working together to support quality improvement and to extend age ranges with appropriate training and guidance. Quality improvement strategies are integral to implementation of the entitlement. Any planned growth in the sector can provide an opportunity for quality improvement, where factors in developing both quality and places are interdependent, and not in competition.

We have found, the dynamics of supply and demand are key to driving quality. Families are not obliged to use early years learning; they choose to. Having the ability to choose high quality provision is vital to a market which depends on customer/parent choice. Local authorities, providers and partners have been supporting parents with information, brokerage and support in choosing and taking up childcare. Keeping providers informed about what parents are looking for and need, is key to enabling providers to respond and improve.

Local authorities have also concurrently managed the shift in their role and relationship within quality improvement, as Ofsted has become the sole arbiter of quality. Whilst local authorities retain a line of accountability with providers, in particular for funding and safeguarding, they are reliant on the Ofsted process to directly intervene.

A commissioning relationship has been adopted by many using a range of levers to ensure opportunities for quality improvement are maximised. Local strategies have been:

- Regularly informing all providers about growth, both actual and planned
- Regularly informing providers about local authority activity to promote take up and support parents to choose high quality provision
- Using growth to raise-the-bar by ensuring existing outstanding providers are promoted as the norm to new providers
- Ensuring start-up support embeds high quality from the beginning as part of good business planning
- Role modelling good practice through peer support programmes and good practice displays and example rooms
- Regularly sharing feedback from parents about what they are looking for in terms of quality and offering training to address those needs
- Using data and a systematic approach to target resources
- Working with Ofsted to ensure swift action to improve quality where needed
- Using the range of duties in a combined way to manage both sufficiency and quality at the same time

In addition, there has been a tremendous focus on ensuring all provision and provider models recognise the needs of two-year-olds. In doing so, there has been a real growth in understanding how to meet their needs and supporting two-year-olds to meet their potential in safe and appropriate environments.

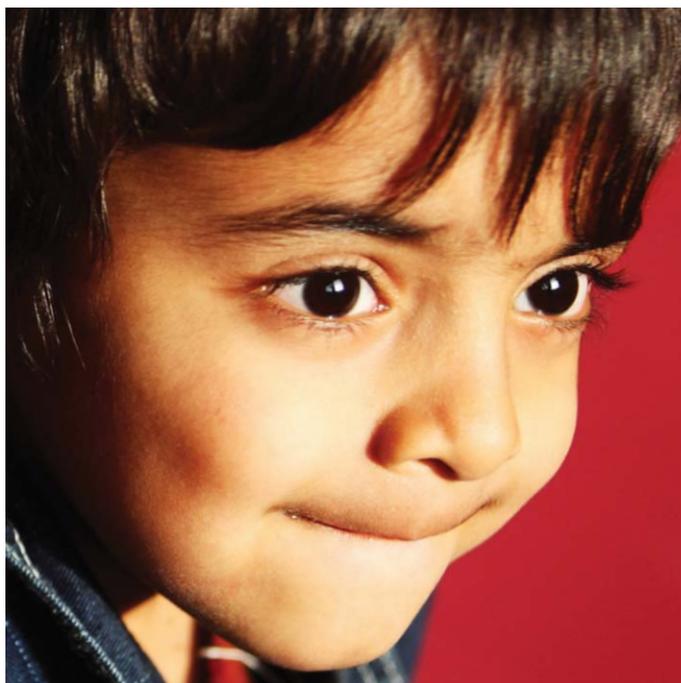
6 Marketing and promotion to reach families, raise awareness and achieve take-up

Because the programme is relatively new, and it is targeted at least advantaged children, marketing and promoting the entitlement is an essential element of any strategy

Because the programme is relatively new, and it is targeted at least advantaged children, marketing and promoting the entitlement is an essential element of any strategy. We have always recommended local areas have broad and prolonged marketing to raise awareness of the entitlement amongst the population as a whole. This ensures that friends, neighbours, relatives, employers, and grandparents all hear the general messages about the entitlement.

Marketing has not been limited to promoting the entitlement to families, but extended to ensure partners (schools, health visitors, children's centres, Jobcentre Plus, housing etc.) have a good understanding of the entitlement, its benefits for families and children, and how to support access. This should also be enhanced by targeted marketing to reach eligible individuals, and specific groups and communities. All of which complements many of the national marketing campaign activities funded by DfE from 2014.

It is striking how many of the case studies included in this document have used proactive marketing and promotional activities.



A simplified customer journey, linked to robust marketing, supports parents to access the entitlement in as few a number of steps as possible

When we talk about the customer journey for the entitlement, we are highlighting the actions parents take from first learning about the programme, to taking it up and using their place. It includes receiving information directly from the local authority or providers, or hearing about it word-of-mouth from friends, neighbours or relatives. From the initial steps towards checking if they are eligible, to finding a suitable provider, meeting with them and finally settling their child in to their place.

A simplified customer journey, linked to robust marketing, supports parents to access the entitlement in as few a number of steps as possible. Local authorities have worked to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy, including simplifying application or claim forms, introducing self-checking, empowering providers, and facilitating easy routes to providers offering funded two-year-old places.

What is key is that all written communication is clear and accessible. It should be positive and congratulatory rather than legalistic and lengthy. Providers have also been equipped with resources such as simply written materials or prompts to help them promote the programme. Banners displayed outside settings have demonstrated where places are located and offer easier solutions to parents who may have concerns or questions. Another advantage of banners outside, is if parents can see them they are more likely to be able to travel to that setting.

8 Market management

Childcare sufficiency assessments have been updated regularly and overlay DWP lists of eligible parents to track take-up and place supply in each sub-locality area

The result is a greater energy around place creation and the releasing of new capacity through flexible provider-led models

Section 6 of The Childcare Act (2006) requires local authorities in England to secure sufficient childcare, so far as is reasonably practical, for working parents, parents studying or training, for children aged up to 14 years old, and 18 years old for disabled children. The Act also placed on local authorities the requirement to produce a detailed childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA) every three years (section 11 of the Childcare Act 2006). This element was repealed in the Children and Families Act (2014). However, local authorities are still required to report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents. Such a report is a vital part of understanding the local childcare market, its supply and demand for childcare. Childcare sufficiency assessments have been updated regularly and overlay DWP lists of eligible parents to track take-up and place supply in each sub-locality area.

Together these duties require local authorities to shape and support the development of childcare in their area in order to make it flexible, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the community. This role is described as a 'market management' function, supporting the sector to meet the needs of parents, children and young people and stakeholders. This is of particular importance in also securing the duty to provide early learning for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

In embedding the entitlement for two-year-olds, the laws of supply and demand are useful to take advantage of and shouldn't be discounted. By widely promoting the entitlement to families and reaching them in a targeted way, we raise awareness of the programme. This in turn increases the level of interest, raises the numbers of eligibility checks and ultimately boosts the numbers of families approaching providers for places. It is this scenario, that exploits the dynamics of parental demand, where more and more parents ask providers for places, and providers in turn can experience a demonstrable new market asking for services. It makes it real for everyone. The result is a greater energy around place creation and the releasing of new capacity through flexible provider-led models.

Effective working relationships with children's centres and wider universal and targeted services, support awareness raising, referrals and the brokerage of participation

It's a good idea to reach front-line staff directly rather than relying on managers to do it for you

In addition to partnership working with early years providers, many other professionals, partners and organisations feature in the delivery chain for the programme. Effective working relationships with children's centres and wider universal and targeted services, support awareness raising, referrals and the brokerage of participation.

Where early years teams are working closely with children's centre colleagues to support reach and engagement, take-up can be increased. Wider partners may include Jobcentre Plus, housing, children's centre outreach, social care and schools, amongst others. Health visitors have a trusted relationship with families with young children and as such are a vital part of the reach and engagement jigsaw. It is essential that key partners fully understand the benefits of the entitlement, not just to the child but to the parent/carer and wider family, as well as having a good understanding of how the entitlement can be taken up. This should be regularly updated and repeated so the message is front of mind, partners don't assume the programme has ended, or myths and misunderstandings aren't fostered.

Regular briefings also help to ensure messages are refreshed, particularly in light of a developing market, and continuing staff churn. Partners need to know how well things are going so thank them, celebrate successes along the way, and motivate them if you need more. It's a good idea to reach front-line staff directly rather than relying on managers to do it for you. Things as simple as arriving for a 15 minute slot at regular team meetings with a packet of biscuits can have a dramatic effect.

We've recently noticed a trend in supporting partners to play their role in negotiating with parents about the benefits of early learning, which has supported the raising of take-up rates, and ensuring applications or approvals converted into actual use of places. Training courses and briefing sessions for this purpose have been delivered by A2YO and local authorities alike.

10 Fit for purpose IT and online systems

...early adopters of online systems have seen how their remaining resource has been released to concentrate on targeted work, brokerage and identifying and filling gaps in access and provision

Right from the start it was clear that everyone needed to review systems that were used in the early pilots and trials for very small numbers of children, to ones that were fit-for-purpose for many hundreds or thousands. Moving from a paper-based, panel-led system to one that is online and has automated eligibility checking is vital, and has devolved access to parents, providers and partners. It is a common feature of those areas where awareness and take-up is higher. However, it is not without its challenges or delays for many.

Some early adopters of online systems have seen how their remaining resource has been released to concentrate on targeted work, brokerage and identifying and filling gaps in access and provision. Local areas report real savings in resources and time where investment has been made, and the systems and processes support and enhance parents' customer journey.



What's been
happening?

A2YO has also produced a 25-minute DVD showcasing the experiences of Rotherham, and Barking and Dagenham, highlighted in this publication. To view the film, please visit www.hempsalls.com

Root-and-branch review and refreshing the approach

In the **London Borough of Enfield**, around 53% of all two-year-olds are eligible for the entitlement. The local authority was funding less than 50% of eligible children in the summer of 2014. This rose to around 64% by spring term 2015. Just like the case in many other local authorities, children's services in the borough were restructured in April 2014. As a result of the new structure, teams were co-located which is said to support much closer working, and the two-year-old entitlement became part of the Senior Management Team's regular agenda. So, with the support of A2YO, the local authority undertook a root-and-branch review of delivery. The outcome of which resulted in a good level of growth across the following year.

Enfield addressed their marketing and communications strategy to drive-up general awareness and targeted take-up. They increased their on-line presence, and invested in a very large and sustained campaign in targeted areas, whilst maintaining their established and general marketing and messages. Additionally, case studies of how families accessed and benefitted from provision were produced in community languages and translated materials. Local parents and childminders also featured in the A2YO childminding DVD which can be found at www.hempsalls.com

The local authority has also reviewed and refreshed their customer journey so it became much simpler. An on-line application form was launched in September 2014. A2YO view the ability for online information and claims processes to be an essential not a desirable aspect of the strategy. Online methods reach many families who are able to find out about their entitlement, complete an application and claim, and find a provider of choice locally – without any help or involvement of the local authority. Such online activity will continue to grow in size, especially if mobile device friendly. Enfield agrees and reports that around 25% of applications are currently on-line and this is growing all the time.



“Enfield has shown that online processes where parents can self-serve, allows the local authority to achieve increased take-up rates. Therefore, allowing time, attention and other resources to be diverted to other elements of their strategy.”

Barbara Wilson,
A2YO London and
East Region Lead

Online processes must run in parallel and complement an outreach and support service via partners (such as health visitors and children’s centres) that reaches the minority of parents for whom the internet is an unsurmountable barrier. And professionals and providers who are working with such families can of course use the online processes to support and speed-up the support they offer the families in their caseloads or existing customer base.

Around 90% of two-year-olds in Enfield access their entitlement in good or outstanding settings. And 92% of settings delivering the entitlement in the borough were rated good or outstanding at their last Ofsted inspection. In balancing the quality and capacity of places, the local authority has worked with providers to raise quality as well as to expand provision. Their Quality Matters in Practice (QMIP) project supports settings in the private and voluntary sector to develop the quality of the places they offer to two-year-olds through an integrated programme of coaching, support, parental engagement and listening to young children to improve the practice in settings².

Key points

- Undertaking a regular root-and-branch review and using external input is an essential part of any implementation plan
- Sustaining an information strategy with a good online presence gets the message across effectively
- Ensuring and informing SMT interest releases resources and unblocks internal barriers
- Sharing case study examples for all communities about the difference the entitlement makes shows how the programme is live
- Using outreach alongside universal access methods such as online claims ensures all families can choose how they engage
- Supporting quality and capacity in tandem helps the number of places and informs settings about expected business and quality practice

Find out more: Charlotte Barlow – charlotte.barlow@enfield.gov.uk

² <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/local-practice/promising-practice-examples/enfield-case-study-quality-matters-in-practice-%28qmip%29.aspx>

Norfolk County Council Funding a year early to build momentum, awareness and take-up

Norfolk County Council is a large local authority with both rural and urban populations, and a number of challenges, including a population of just less than 10,000 two-year-olds (one in five of whom live in poverty) and a high number of Looked After Children (1,076). In September 2014, with the introduction of the 40% funding criteria for two-year-olds, around 3,600 children became eligible. By the summer term 2015, around 76% of eligible children were funded.

Norfolk introduced the 2014 eligibility criteria in September 2013 – a whole year early, and has maintained a high profile marketing throughout. As a consequence, they were funding well-above the national average of eligible children as early as December 2014. Norfolk used a wide range of media, including social media, press, print, radio, posters, banners and video to raise awareness of the entitlement. Over 80% of those were in Ofsted-rated good or outstanding settings, and 84% of all their settings delivering the funded early learning entitlement were rated good or outstanding.

The local authority believes it has developed overall sufficient capacity using the capital and trajectory funding provided by DfE. However, there are some localised gaps, and as capital build programmes in schools have been released, capacity continues to increase within these schools. Interestingly, Norfolk commissioned a third-party organisation to administer their grants programme and loans with £1m of their capital. Loans were used so capital monies could have even greater effect and in a sense are ‘recycled’ as sums are re-paid, and can then be reused to make more of a difference. Place development has been governed by a detailed understanding of childcare sufficiency and demand, with a clear focus on building and maintaining quality across the sector.

“Norfolk’s decision to maximise its use of capital funds by offering options for repayable loans was, in my view, a remarkably bold and innovative idea.”

James Hempsall,
A2YO National
Support Director

A2YO promote the use of regular reviews and changes in strategy as required, and this is exactly what Norfolk County Council undertook early in the programme. They focused on capacity development, quality and engagement at the heart of their refreshed plans.

As a result, work with their children's centres was a key focus and supported their overarching marketing and communications campaign to achieve high levels of awareness and take-up. The LA has developed a simplified customer journey, using on-line claim forms as well as the possibility of parents accessing their entitlement through partners, including early years providers and local children's centres.

Key points

- Active overarching marketing and communications including online and text messaging is key
- Sharing quality and timely data for sufficiency informs developments
- Language is important – use a 'claim' form (rather than an application form) as it reinforces the sense of entitlement
- Using and recycling capital through a loans scheme – making more impact
- Working in partnership with children's centres to outreach and complement online processes

Find out more: Jill Warwick –
jill.warwick@norfolk.gov.uk



Cornwall County Council Using the Childcare Act (2006) Sufficiency Duty to target resources, funding and quality improvement

Cornwall County Council has around 2,400 eligible two-year-olds and has achieved a take-up rate close to 80%. In 2013, they invited all settings in the county to apply for capital funding to create new or improve their existing provision for two-year-olds. In the following year, the local authority changed its approach to be more targeted. They used sufficiency data to identify settings they wanted to invite to apply for such funding. This was with the aim of ensuring childcare place creation and development was in the areas of greatest need for new or improved capacity.

In 2015, there was an additional quality focus in the form of grant funds of £650 for business support and £500 for resources to enhance environment for two-year-olds.

In the targeted areas, grants were offered for:

- becoming a new childminder
- £200 per new funded child
- the employment of childminding assistants
- and resource so experienced Ofsted good and outstanding childminders could become mentors for all new, inadequate, or requires improvement childminders.

The Sufficiency Duty

The duty on local authorities to undertake an assessment of the sufficiency of childcare in their area every three years was repealed in the Children and Families Act 2014. However, local authorities will need to assess the sufficiency of childcare provision in their area and use this information to drive its market management role. The Department for Education's statutory guidance on the delivery of early education and childcare is clear that local authorities should report annually to elected council members on how they are meeting their duty to secure sufficient childcare and to make this report available and accessible to parents.

In Cornwall, around 90% of two-year-olds are taking up their entitlement in good or outstanding settings. 97% of settings delivering the entitlement are Ofsted-rated good or outstanding. Quality improvement support from the local authority remains in the form of their Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP), which offers:

- telephone and email information and advice
- access to training and conferences
- support, training and moderation for those completing the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
- pre- and post-Ofsted inspection support for good and outstanding early years settings and schools (where requested)
- support visits arranged by agreement with the local early years consultant and early years team for settings receiving nursery education funding
- and brokerage of peer-to-peer professional support, including the Nursery Development Programme and Teaching School Support programme.

Settings causing concern due to their lower than good Ofsted inspection outcomes, have access to high intervention support, including funding towards their local authority action plans and bespoke training programmes. Additional Enhancing Environment funding is also available for settings with two-year-olds.

Key points

- Using sufficiency data to drive the prioritising of spend and development programmes meets the current requirements of the Childcare Act (2006) Sufficiency Duty
- Encouraging peer-to-peer and mentoring support adds value to the local authority offer and builds skills in the sector
- Universal and targeted approaches differentiate quality improvement offers from the local authority
- Funding can be used to incentivise childminders to employ assistants and increase places available

Find out more: fis@cornwall.gov.uk

Trafford Council Reaching parents early, and through providers and partners

Trafford Council in Greater Manchester started funding against the 2014 eligibility criteria in September 2013 and reaped the benefits of it being embedded in local delivery, achieving a take-up level of 84% of eligible families by December 2014.

Implementing sooner has widened access and made the offer more acceptable to parents who did not want to appear to be in an 'exclusive' group that needed help. Being more universally understood removed a perceived stigma of such a means-tested programme. Word of mouth between parents is said to be very strong in Trafford, and through widening awareness generally, there have been many requests for places because a friend or neighbour has spread the word. However, it is reported that some national chain providers in the area remain uninterested in offering funded places for two-year-olds.

The local authority was swift to implement its capital programme. It started promptly with most expansion projects being completed during 2013-2014. The nimble creation of additional places within the market meant capacity grew alongside demand – ensuring there was a good choice of local provision for families.

The local authority identified some eligible children were already in provision, often on a part-time basis and many with childminders, as their parents were low income working families. So, providers and childminders asked their families if they were entitled to a place. As a result, several childminders came forward to register to provide funded two-year-old places. There are now over 100 childminders on Trafford's Directory from a starting point of 15. Growth was also boosted after the need to be a network accredited childminder was removed by Government and the local authority.

An application form is used to support much-needed efficiencies in the customer journey. This was changed in November 2014 as now the form is pre-populated (as much as it can be) and has a unique reference number. Parents can now go directly to a setting to secure their place. The local authority sends out lists of providers with vacancies with the application forms so parents can go out and find their own setting – much as they do for three and four years olds. The local authority allowed cross border funding early on as they knew a significant number of families living in Manchester choose to take their three- and four-year-old entitlement with providers in Trafford.

The Families Information Service (FIS) works closely with the early education team and promotes early education widely using social media. There are FIS outreach staff who promote early education. Early engagement with health visitors is important. The health visitors' check was brought forward so children could be 'picked up' as they turned two and therefore access a place as soon as they were eligible.

Two-year-old entitlement postcards are sent out with health visitor two year check appointments to all families to promote the entitlement. Health visitors are still very involved in the steering group and identifying if children are eligible under the national criteria. Health visitors are part of the multi-agency Family Support Services, so there are regular meetings both around early years and other topics where relationships can be maintained and grown.



“We all have a responsibility to ensure the parents’ customer journey is as streamlined, efficient, quick, understandable and positive as possible. Trafford have developed some interesting options here such as pre-populating forms and a unique reference number.”

Jo Pringle,
A2YO North Region Lead

The authority recognises they still have children not accessing their place so they are continuing to work with settings to offer taster sessions. Parents mailed directly using the list of eligible families provided by DfE and DWP get dates and times of where these are taking place. This is a targeted offer in sub-locality areas where there are over 15 children not accessing a place.

Key points

- Acting early and widening messages has mainstreamed this targeted programme and increased demand, reducing the risk of stigma and non-participation
- Taster sessions break-down initial barriers, grow parents' confidence, and connect families with possible providers in their area
- Providers already have access to families who are eligible and can support claims and use of places
- Pre-populated forms and unique reference numbers can streamline aspects
- Informing and involving health visitors increases integration and outreach

Find out more: Carole Sharp –
carole.sharp@trafford.gov.uk

Newcastle City Council has just under 50% of their two-year-olds eligible for the entitlement, and around 75% of them are funded. The local authority identifies their early years providers as their biggest resource and drivers of take-up. Regular updates and briefings from the early years team ensure they understand their role in identifying children and supporting access. Additional briefings have supported children's centre managers and staff to realise the importance of vulnerable, least advantaged, and low income families in their overall work and how the two-year-old entitlement fits with children's centre delivery and Ofsted inspections.

With this success, feedback highlighted it was becoming more and more difficult for providers to get through to the council and the Family Information Service on the telephone and email. In response, a dedicated telephone hotline and email address were created, and all early years support officers were enabled to check eligibility. This meant that professionals, parents and providers can check eligibility almost immediately to confirm eligibility and arrange the place. The authority is also developing a web-based online checking service which will eventually be run in-house by the IT team.

When received from DfE and DWP, the team writes to all eligible families on the list each term using white envelopes branded with two-year-olds and the Sure Start logo. This was after a very common finding that if sent in brown envelopes and city council logos, it often led to parents ignoring the letter. Each children's centre receives a list of eligible families each time the DWP list is published, and they cross-check it with their registered families before following up with door-knocking and other targeted work.

Most often, parents access their places with childcare providers themselves – as with three and four year olds. In addition, children's centres, health visitors, and social workers are invaluable in reaching those parents that need extra information or support to take action. The local authority keeps everyone up-to-date through regular meetings and communication with other partners such as: family support teams; schools service; and voluntary sector providers. This is important as the early years team identify there are a high number of two-year-old referrals from colleagues, especially via social care and health visiting.

There are still reported occasions where the provision a parent contacts first or prefers is full. And there are instances where they may wait a term or even more to use this chosen setting.

“Newcastle has recognised the importance of partnership with providers, children’s centres and wider partners. They have achieved this through an energetic programme of information exchange through all stages of the programme’s development.”

Jo Pringle,
A2YO North Region Lead

In response, the Early Years Training and Childcare Sufficiency team has been working with schools to open new provision on the early years register as well as signing-up school nurseries taking ‘rising threes’.

A great deal of additional capacity has been created by the PVI sector without significant need for capital investment, and children are also placed with childminders. Support has been offered to providers to expand, including rising threes moving up to school nursery classes, and support by children’s centres to help parents investigate other local options, including childminding.

The authority has recognised that children’s centres have a clear role to play in the delivery of this entitlement. The two-year-old entitlement is embedded within the children’s centre and Family Services delivery. Each children’s centre has a dedicated lead for this area of work. Take-up rates are RAG-rated for each area, so they can understand their performance against the city’s average and identify if more resources are needed for this work.

Centres are clear how two-year-old take-up is a factor in their Ofsted inspection outcomes, and activities are motivated accordingly. And the value of such partnership working is high when engaging families from all communities. The local authority works with providers who are part of target or underrepresented communities, and children’s centre staff use their local knowledge, and language skills to support engagement and understanding of parents with English as additional language and Black and minority ethnic (BME) families.

Key points

- Regular communication with providers and partners maximises first points of contact with parents and families and increases referrals and access
- Embedding the entitlement as part of children’s centre and family service delivery outcomes motivates actions
- Quick response and multiple routes for applications, claims and checking are vital
- Using DWP data and RAG rating take-up drives performance management which in turn informs sufficiency planning and understanding of local take up patterns and barriers

Find out more: Ed Whitby –
ed.whitby@newcastle.gov.uk

Bold, temporary measures to drive take-up

In the autumn term of 2014, the **London Borough of Bromley** grew their take-up rates by 38%. This was following a determined and dynamic approach to their strategy. The local authority had faced a number of challenges, including complex local criteria, and the highest number of settled Traveller families and the largest Somali community reportedly in the UK. They had identified a lack of IT systems and processes to support the continued roll-out and expansion of the entitlement and they considered their operational team to be small.

One of the main challenges they aimed to address was the levels of awareness of all local families about the entitlement. A bold and innovative decision was taken in 2014 to contact all families on the list of eligible families provided by DWP. The local authority introduced a 'Yes You Can' message which gave instant approval to all those on the list, without the need for supplementary checks. What was striking here, was how different the expression of the message was compared to standard local authority approval letters – many of which would benefit from reviews. To our knowledge, Bromley was the first in the country to adopt this approach, however, many have followed suit and used it as a temporary market stimulus scheme.

The local authority reports this approach has stimulated their market and has been well-received by providers. Importantly, using the DWP list to confer eligibility, without the need to apply, is not used as a stand-alone strategy but is linked to wider marketing including posters in the high street, and open days at provider settings and children and family centres. The entitlement also enjoyed centre-stage on the home-page of the council website. Indeed, Bromley analysed their application data for autumn 2014 term, and this showed that the DWP lists are still really effective in driving take-up. However, over half of all applications are now through the on-line systems they have established, and providers remain as key partners in raising awareness and supporting claims.

Key points

- Using temporary measures can stimulate take-up rates and support partners and providers to engage with the programme
- In time, the importance of IT systems grows and levels of use increase as they become established – allowing other resources to be targeted where needed
- Positive language, expressed simply 'Yes You Can!' is more easily understood

“We congratulate Bromley for taking bold steps and thinking out of the box. We do think this has been a proven method of raising awareness and building-up use of the entitlement. And in turn, one that helps parents using their places to tell others about it too. It is best used as a temporary capacity building measure until online and other checks and outreach methods are embedded.”

Barbara Wilson,
A2YO London and
East Region Lead

Find out more: Kate Smyth –
kate.smyth@bromley.gov.uk

“No one single advertising or marketing method will realise all the families you are trying to reach. Using a jigsaw approach of various linked methods, including outreach, all combine to develop families’ desire to access early learning at this important stage of their child’s development.”

Ann Van Dyke,
A2YO South Region Lead

South Gloucestershire is relatively small local authority with a mix of rural and urban areas. It borders Bristol with a high number of children crossing the border to access their place in South Gloucestershire. This constant movement results in the need to closely monitor sufficiency and work together to ensure all eligible families are aware of the entitlement wherever they live. The local authority decided to fund against the September 2014 criteria (40%) early and has maintained a high-profile marketing and communications campaign throughout. They have used a wide range of media, including social media, press, print, posters, banners, and till receipts. Marketing is described as “relentless”. In line with what has become nationally entrenched practice, families on the DWP lists are contacted more than once using a variety of methods, for example, two postcards, children’s centre outreach and using democratic services for door-knocking (generally between 6pm-8pm). An online system means families can check their eligibility 24-hours a day (important for parents working in daytimes and evenings, at weekends and during school holidays) and registration to children’s centres is automatically completed in the process. As a result, take-up has consistently been around the mid 70% level.

Around 90% of funded children were in good or outstanding settings, and 94% of settings delivering the entitlement were rated good or outstanding. A series of grant schemes and support for providers ensured place development matched the growth in demand. In turn, the strategy supported large numbers of families applying for a place being approved. Sector workforce development was also supported through DWP workforce academies.

Key points

- A multi-faceted universal and targeted marketing and communications campaign was essential
- Multiple contacts using the DWP list can double or triple response rates
- Engaging all related departments and partner agencies is vital in reaching families
- On-line systems support working families 24 hours a day, when providers, children’s centres and the local authority are closed

Find out more: Michelle Jones – michelle.jones@southglos.gov.uk

London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Using demand to support the development of supply

With around 2,000 eligible children (53% of the total two-year-old population), the **London Borough of Barking and Dagenham** has a high number of eligible families and recognised early on the need to stimulate demand. The agreed focus was on blanket advertising, with images linked to children's centre advertising in terms of colours, fonts, images etc.

A number of strategies were adopted right away, for example:

- displaying banners in strategic places across the borough
- leaflets and posters
- advertising on road sweeper vans (as it was identified they drive slower than buses)
- and Argos and 99p Stores till receipts.

Activities were used to create awareness and stimulate demand. Road sweepers were identified as one of the most recognisable and effective methods.

The local authority is continuing to use their blanket marketing approach. Targeting supports this and is achieved by sending postcards to families on the DWP list, and differentiating or 'tweaking' messages such as changing 'you may qualify' to 'are you missing out?' at different stages of the programme. The team also sends text messages where they can, health visitors have actively referred, and children's centre colleagues have supported with door-knocking.

Barking and Dagenham has had the second highest take-up rate of the two-year-old entitlement in London. And remains above the national average. Of those, around 70% of funded two-year-olds were in good or outstanding settings, and 84% of settings delivering the entitlement were rated good or outstanding.



When considering what has contributed to their high take-up rate, the local authority agrees that senior management being 100% committed to delivery and allocating funding maximises delivery and capacity. They also found that children's centre involvement through colleagues undertaking outreach, door-knocking and working one-to-one to support families to access their entitlement was invaluable. Importantly, this involves having the time and capacity to chase and maintain contact with eligible families – providing an end-to-end service for parents to support take-up of the entitlement.

Key points

- High profile and widespread message sharing had a great effect, linked to established brand identities of local children's centres
- Road-sweeping vans helped promote the entitlement
- Tweaking messages regularly allows for differentiating the marketing aspect
- Creating demand supports providers to change and develop supply

Find out more: Rikke Damsgaard – rikke.damsgaard@lbbd.gov.uk

“Often, across the country, we saw a reluctance to promote the entitlement publicly and beyond targeted mailshot based communications. Here, Barking and Dagenham show the value of creating demand that in turn shapes the supply provided in the market.”

Barbara Wilson,
A2YO London and
East Region Lead

A2YO has also produced a DVD showcasing the experiences of Barking and Dagenham highlighted in this publication. To view the film, please visit www.hempsalls.com

Rotherham Council developed a clear and well-understood process for using their DWP lists that involves their providers, and partners in children's centres. On receipt (week one), the data is checked so that all children currently accessing place are removed from the list. The remaining names are then sorted by children's centre reach area, and then each centre is emailed with specific details of what they are expected to do with the data. A flyer is also sent to everyone on the list at this stage. The next week (week two), a postcard is sent out to any parents who have not yet responded to the week one flyer. In week three, a further postcard is despatched to any parents who have not responded to the flyer or the first postcard. Finally, the day after deadline, an e-mail is sent to children's centres reminding them the data deadline has expired and requesting feedback on levels of progress and interest.

In addition, the local authority uses regular Facebook messages (both through their remaining Families Information Service (FIS) and the children's centres' Facebook pages). All providers have been given banners to display outside their settings. Posters and leaflets are in all public places and have been distributed to local employers, childcare providers, children's centres, libraries, area assemblies, local parent and toddler groups, soft play centres and other community venues.

Once a parent decides to take action and apply, they can do so in a variety of ways. They can telephone the local FIS, return an application form directly to the FIS, complete an application form with their childcare provider, or use the council's online form.

Follow-up is vitally important to the success of this local strategy. The FIS contacts families who have been eligibility checked and approved, and have not taken up a place – on a termly basis. Children's centres also follow up families not accessing a place on the list to support maximum engagement. Sharing data to support partner, provider and children's centre work and ultimately Ofsted inspections is included too. The FIS emails childcare providers, health visitors, libraries and partner organisations with details of eligible numbers in each area and numbers yet to be eligibility checked so all teams can support increased take up.

In terms of outreach, Rotherham uses technology to break some of the cultural barriers with their Traveller and Gypsy communities. A short film about provision was shot at a local early years provider. This is then shown on-site with the aid of a tablet. The film is also shared through email and smart phones to maximise the number of families able to access this information. Something easily shared with all families via social media sites and digital marketing strategies.

Rotherham has approximately 1,600 eligible two-year-olds, of which 81% were accessing a funded place in December 2014. 90% of funded two-year-olds were in good or outstanding settings. The 40% criteria was introduced a term early in April 2014.

A2YO has produced a DVD showcasing the experiences of Rotherham highlighted in this publication. To view the film, please visit www.hempsalls.com

“DWP lists are a remarkable resource that enable us all to see where eligible families live, match them to sufficient local supply, and reach, inform and engage parents to support them to access provision.”

James Hemsall,
A2YO Central Region Lead

Key points

- Clear processes which are understood by all partners and agencies for using DWP data help everyone to contribute and succeed
- Multiple contacts can be needed before the message reaches families and prompts them to take action
- Messages need to be consistent across all areas and partners, standardised messages ensure dependability
- Offering several routes for families to access the offer promotes choice and matches the method to the need

Find out more: Aileen Chambers –
aileen.chambers@rotherham.gov.uk



Cumbria County Council Embedding online applications as the main access route

Cumbria County Council is a large rural local authority with the two-year-old entitlement representing a core part of their early years strategy. The local authority decided to fund against the September 2013 criteria straight away, and have sustained their development rate ever since. They have sustained their funding of around 80% of eligible children for at least three-terms. The local authority was at pains to ensure all partners were aware of the criteria as it changed in 2013 and 2014. And funding was started early in May 2014 for the September 2014 criteria.

Families receive an application form as part of their mailing sent from the DWP list, and can apply using their form. The DWP list and the mailings sent directly to parents have had the biggest impact on take up. The mail out includes: an information letter, an application form, a leaflet about the benefits of accessing childcare and a list of childcare providers in their area. The local authority has tried postcards but found this was not as successful as their letters – in direct contrast to almost everywhere else.

The local authority introduced an on-line checking option very early – partly in recognition of the real challenges of reaching isolated communities. So parents can self-serve by applying directly on-line themselves. Around 67% of families using places in the autumn term 2014 applied on line – which we think is around the average we would expect to see everywhere in the very near future.

As in Trafford and other areas, health visitors in Cumbria have a real impact in raising parents' awareness and supporting families to access their places. In addition, from August 2014 the children's centres have been visiting families during the agreed timeframes for using this data. This brokerage has helped the local authority to encourage more families to apply and to understand why they might not be applying.

As is often identified, some parents can initially feel reluctant to use their places. They may feel their child is too young, or that 15 hours per week is too much. However, Cumbria highlights that once families start using places in an area, word-of-mouth tends to stimulate new interest, applications and actual use. To support this, providers offered settling-in sessions during the summer term of 2014.

The local authority has been monitoring when applications are being made so they can see what has made a difference. For example, there tends to be an increase in applications, unsurprisingly after mail-outs or children's centre visits and the beginning of terms as new children start. However, following an advert via social media to approximately 63,000 users, they found there was no significant increase in applications directly attributable to it.

The local authority has promoted the entitlement across the county through the Early Years Strategy Group, which includes health, children's centres, childcare providers and the early years team. Regular emails are sent to partners to ensure they have the most up-to-date information and to raise awareness.

Key points

- Strategic management sign up and inclusion in strategy documents essential for the stability and relevance of the programme
- Having a simple application process using a form and the option of an online system supports parental choice and self-service, with brokerage where needed
- Ensuring teams and departments working with eligible families are knowledgeable, well informed and kept up to date
- Engagement of children's centres in the promotion of the entitlement with follow up to increase take-up, and improving conversion rates from offer to actual use

Find out more: Joan Bradley –
joan.bradley@cumbria.gov.uk

"Here's a great example of how online checking was not a desirable luxury, but an essential element of reaching all eligible families."

Jo Pringle,
A2YO North Region Lead



Kingston Upon Hull identifies the autumn term always has the highest take-up both in terms of numbers of applications/placements and successful applications; this is because parents assume children start in September as they would at school. Over 2,000 children, representing 61% of all two-year-olds living locally are eligible for the entitlement. The local authority has achieved take-up rates of between 70 and 80%. 95% of funded two-year-olds were in good or outstanding settings, and 97% of settings delivering the entitlement were rated good or outstanding.

From the very start the local authority had a clear place development strategy which used GIS tools to map children (potential demand) against places available. This data has driven the place development strategy across schools, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years providers, and children's centres supported by capital and revenue funding. The local authority pays a higher rate of £5 per hour to incentivise providers. The local authority is confident they have sufficient places across Hull to meet demand.

Families can apply for their place via the local authority website page which contains an application form or by calling FIS. Once eligibility is confirmed FIS provide a list of providers who offer places. Brokerage is available via FIS and children's centres will also provide support to find a place.

The local authority advertised the 2014 offer during the summer term and supported parents to find places for a September 2014 start. There has been a variety of marketing strategies to target eligible families through offline/online marketing campaigns, radio adverts and local press coverage. Marketing materials and campaigns were developed to enable providers to market the offer to local parents and increase the numbers of local providers signing up to deliver two-year-old funding. The DWP list is used to target families with direct mailing. FIS now also contact by phone/e-mail all parents who have been checked at the start of the term to establish if they will be accessing their place and if not, why not.

Take up is monitored by children's centre area and children's centre staff are providing face-to-face contact to families not accessing a place. Children's centre practitioners also gather feedback from parents including reasons for non-attendance. There is good communication with all PVI providers who meet with the local authority on a regular basis.



Key points

- Place development is driven by supply and demand data
- A variety of marketing strategies combines to create a whole and rounded effect
- Using a simple application process with a speedy turn-around time keeps parents motivated and focused
- Staff time investment enables the local authority and children's centres to offer brokerage and follow up those families who have checked and have yet to take up a place

Find out more: Andrew Kemp – andrew.kemp2@hullcc.gov.uk

“Using technology in the form of GIS mapping and including feedback into the planning cycle has supported the identification of necessary changes in the local strategy, and crucially, the development of new childcare places.”

Jo Pringle,
A2YO North Region Lead

Stockport Council Working with other local authorities, networking and collaborating

Stockport Council has consistently achieved take-up rates of between 80 and 90% of eligible families. 91% of funded two-year-olds were in good or outstanding settings, and 93% of settings delivering the entitlement were rated good or outstanding (April 2015).

At the start of implementation, 89% of private day nurseries and 75% of childminders were good or better which gave the local authority a good starting point. The local authority created a lot of new quality provision in the right places. They have been creative in their new developments, using two ground floor flats, a scout hut, church halls, and rooms in children's centres. Childminders' participation in funded early education has grown from 10 to 120. A quick win was identifying families who were already using provision and paying for childcare.

The local authority secured all of the capital and trajectory money, ensured processes to access funding were made easy and as a result have spent and committed the majority. Geographical mapping of eligible and placed children has supported place development.

The local authority adopted the 2014 criteria early so families had been targeted for this with enough time to apply and make arrangements to take it up. The original referral process and panel were removed to create multiple routes for parents to check eligibility. A parent can check in person, by phone or face-to-face and get an instant response. The introduction of the DWP list as a way of directly informing families they were eligible simplified the process. Details of local provision are listed on the back of the letter. Families only have one step to go to their chosen provision. Very early on the local authority decided to encourage families to self-serve and focussed on providing parents with the information to empower them to find places themselves.

Partnership working with other professionals has been important. Building sound relationships with health visitors, social care, children's centres and early years providers is reported to have supported marketing and promotion and increased take up. All partners are kept informed and updated. There is a two-year-old network for providers to offer peer support.

The local authority was quick to pick up, try out and implement many of the ideas shared in Greater Manchester meetings facilitated by Hemsall's and wider A2YO regional events. There was a significant amount of marketing:

- contacting all eligible families direct from DWP list using letters and multiple postcards
- consistent marketing – images used across materials and signs
- adopted same graphics as Manchester
- leaflets, letters, postcards, stickers
- banners outside settings and children's centres
- buses, billboards, bus stops, local play day
- articles for press/life channel
- council email strap line on footers
- and Facebook and Twitter case studies.



“A great example of how early communications with parents, marketing the new criteria in multiple ways, and changing systems to suit have benefitted local families.”

James Hemsall,
A2YO National
Support Director

Key points

- Geographical mapping of take up and eligibility supported new place development and promotion in low take-up areas
- Creating a brand which is prominent in the local authority area and those of neighbouring authorities had wider recognition
- Building and maximising good relationships with early years providers helped, with support to manage their challenges and anxieties

Find out more: Glenda Brocklehurst –
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“It’s great to see how a short and affordable film can tell a story of a thousand words. Of two parents and how the entitlement has supported them to access early education and childcare for their children, and helped them get back into work and education.”

Barbara Wilson,
A2YO London and
East Region Lead

Milton Keynes Council doubled their take-up levels within a term in 2014, and they attribute this success to their communications campaign and engagement with children’s centre staff. At the end of 2014, Milton Keynes was funding over three quarters of eligible two-year-olds, and such levels are being maintained.

As early take-up levels were lower than the local authority wanted, marketing was thoroughly reviewed and assessed. The local authority felt images being used were not inclusive, presented an unrealistic image, and unsuitable for use on a wide range of promotional items. Things that were working well were also identified, and these included brand image, brightly colour-coordinated team wear (e.g. T-shirts) and ‘give-aways’ (e.g. balloons) with the ‘Time for Twos’ website address: <http://tinyurl.com/qb4muoc> This assessment and review identified what might be improved, and supported a complete re-branding and marketing strategy.

The team aimed to develop a simple, recognisable image to promote the entitlement – and ‘Tim’ was born! The Tim image was used across all marketing and promotional materials.

This includes back-packs, fridge-magnets, balloons and stickers, as well as a huge window display at the council offices. Tim also attends a wide range of meetings, events and opportunities to continue to promote the entitlement as widely as possible. A short film on the website shows how Time for Twos funding has supported two local parents, Faye and Beth, to access early education and childcare for their toddlers, which in turn helped them get back into work and education, and for their children to flourish.

Postcards that were being sent to parents on the DWP list were redesigned – introducing child-friendly images showing representative ethnicities. A ‘golden ticket’ approach was adopted by informing all parents on the DWP list they were eligible.

Key points

- Developing a brand identity for the programme established an easy to recognise message
- Golden tickets enabled a simple way to access the entitlement without delay
- Reflecting local communities in imagery demonstrates the entitlement is for all individuals and communities

Find out more: Geraldine Osbourne – geraldine.osbourne@milton-keynes.gov.uk



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