

# Study Plan

## The Nuffield Early Years Language Intervention

### Scale-Up Evaluation

Evaluator: RAND Europe

Principal investigator: Emma Disley



<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>	The Nuffield Early Years Language Intervention (NELI) Scale-Up Evaluation
<b>DEVELOPER (INSTITUTION)</b>	The University of Oxford
<b>SCALING PARTNERS</b>	The Department for Education The Education Endowment Foundation The University of Oxford Oxford University Press Oxford Education and Assessment FutureLearn
<b>EVALUATOR (INSTITUTION)</b>	RAND Europe
<b>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S)</b>	Dr Emma Disley
<b>STUDY PLAN AUTHORS</b>	Dr Sashka Dimova Dr Andreas Culora Dr Emma Disley Lucy Gilder
<b>STUDY DESIGN</b>	Mixed-methods evaluation based on surveys, interviews, focus groups and case studies, supplemented by secondary data analysis.
<b>PUPIL AGE RANGE AND KEY STAGE</b>	Pupils in reception classes (ages 4-5)
<b>NUMBER OF SCHOOLS</b>	Approximately 6,600
<b>NUMBER OF PUPILS</b>	Approximately 50,000

### Study Plan version history

VERSION	DATE	REASON FOR REVISION
1.0 [ <i>original</i> ]	28/7/2021	
2.0	18/08/2021	<i>Redesign of data collection activities and timeline</i>
3.0	05/11/2021	<i>Redesign timelines</i>

## 1. This Study Plan

In comparison to standard evaluations comprising impact and implementation and process evaluations, this study plan follows a less traditional structure. The study plan consists of the following:

### 1. Background and study rationale

2. section which introduces the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) scale-up that we are evaluating;
3. **Intervention** section which introduces the NELI programme;
4. **Scaling** section which sets out the overall approach to evaluating scaling processes;
5. **Research objectives** which outlines the overall study aims and the comprehensive list of evaluation questions;
6. **Research methods and data collection** activities which sets out the overall research design and the analysis methods we will use to address the research questions;
7. **Ethics** section that sets out the ethical considerations related to this study;
8. **Data protection** which sets out the data protection measures put in place for the project;
9. **Study team** which sets out the personnel who will work on the different aspects of the project;
10. Error! Reference source not found. which sets out the risks to the project alongside mitigation strategies;
11. **Timeline for data collection activities** which sets out a high-level timeline of when we will complete different research activities.

## 2. Background and study rationale

Early language skills are important and a key element for predicting educational success (Snowling et al., 2011). Evidence suggests that a large proportion of children are starting school with poorly developed language skills, particularly in areas of deprivation (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). The added health and financial concerns that many families have experienced and continue to experience as a result of COVID-19, may further exacerbate this disadvantage gap (GOV.UK, 2020).

The existing evidence suggests that acquisition of the core language skills occurs in the early years when children are between 1 and 4 years old. Studies have shown that around 30% of children with low language abilities in pre-school continue to experience difficulties into their school years (Snowling et al., 2016, Law et al., 2017). Providing the right support in the early years for these children who have lower language abilities can be essential for reducing this 'language gap'.

NELI has demonstrated its potential to benefit young pupils in need of support with spoken language (Fricke et al., 2013; Sibieta et al., 2016). The most recent independent evaluation, undertaken by a team from RAND Europe, found that reception pupils who took part in NELI made, on average, +3 months more progress in language skills than a group of similar children who did not receive the intervention (Dimova et al, 2020). Given that the attainment gap at the end of Reception year between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers is around 4.3 months, the impact of NELI is significant (EEF, 2018). It offers real promise, and if targeted and scaled effectively, could make an important contribution to closing the disadvantage gap nationally.

This strong evidence base of the potential impact of NELI prompted the Department for Education (DfE) in England to commit £9 million to make NELI available to state-funded primary schools. This was announced as part of the Government's £1bn COVID-19 'catch-up' package announced in June 2020, although even without the special challenges posed by COVID, the strong evidence of the effectiveness of NELI makes it a strong candidate for scaling.

However, there were several features of the intervention as trialled that would need adjustment for operation at scale. For example, the intervention had relied on face-to-face training for teaching assistants and teachers. Therefore to support the scale up, [online training and support](#) was piloted by the University of Oxford, funded by ICG and EEF.<sup>1</sup> Another feature that was a limiting factor for scale up was the programme cost to schools of around £1,000 for one Reception class. To reach more schools it was important that the online training and resources were available at no cost for all schools.

In the 2020/2021 academic year the DfE in partnership with the EEF and other delivery partners rapidly recruited and offered NELI to approximately 6,600 state-funded primary schools. The scaling of NELI relies on a number of different partners: DfE is responsible for recruitment engagement of schools, while EEF is overseeing delivery of NELI to the recruited schools. Programme resources are produced and distributed by Oxford University Press (OUP), while the online training and support has been developed by Oxford University. The online training and additional support are made available through the FutureLearn platform, with additional support provided by NELI mentors.

Parallel to overseeing the delivery of NELI, the EEF funded RAND Europe as an independent evaluator to provide useful information to delivery partners. The objective of this evaluation is to assess and understand the scaling process in a COVID-19 affected environment and to provide recommendations for supporting future scale-up of educational interventions.

### 3. Intervention

**Why:** NELI is an intensive targeted support programme delivered by school staff (usually teaching assistants (TAs)) and designed to improve the spoken language ability of young children with relatively poor spoken language skills. The sessions focus on improving children's vocabulary, listening, narrative skills, and phonological awareness. NELI aims to improve children's oral language skills and early word/emergent reading skills with the ultimate goal of improving children's reading comprehension (as learning to read builds on oral language skills).

**Who (recipients):**

**Pupils:** The programme is targeted at children with poor spoken language skills. As at January 2021 approximately 6,650 schools accepted the offer to deliver NELI to pupils to their Reception cohort pupils. NELI is designed to be delivered to the 3-6 children with the lowest language skills in each classroom. Schools that accepted the offer to take part in NELI were advised to use LanguageScreen<sup>2</sup> to test and identify the children with lowest language skills

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<sup>1</sup> See more at <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/oxford-university-nuffield-early-language-intervention-development-of-an-on/>

<sup>2</sup> LanguageScreen is a school-administered app-based assessment of oral language skills. For more information, see <https://languagescreen.com/>

in their Reception cohort. However, the use of the test was not mandatory. Children could be selected based on teacher/TA professional judgement.

**School staff:** TAs and teachers in reception benefit by receiving online training that can enhance their oral language teaching practice.

**What (physical or informational materials were used in the intervention):** The intervention is delivered using resources available from Oxford University Press.<sup>3</sup> These include handbooks with detailed lesson plans, picture cards, resources that can be photocopied to use in sessions, and a puppet to support session delivery. Schools also benefited from access to the LanguageScreen assessment. They could administer LanguageScreen free of charge to all Reception pupils both before and after NELI delivery. Schools that accepted the offer received the needed materials for delivery between December 2020 and the end of January 2021.

**What (procedures, activities are being used):**

Training and support to teachers, TAs and schools.

- (1) Online training. Prior to NELI implementation, TAs, teachers and other school staff involved in the delivery take part in online training. School staff can access the NELI course after they receive an invitation by email. As mentioned, in previous trials, school staff were trained face-to-face. The online training was developed and piloted by Oxford University and is hosted on the FutureLearn<sup>4</sup> platform. The development and pilot of the online model was funded by EEF and ICG, with the aim to support scale-up of promising projects. The course is designed to be accessed at any time and completed in a self-paced manner. Materials are provided online which the TA or teacher reads and engages with. Materials include video clips, items to read, quizzes and the opportunity to post questions and receive a response from moderators who are experts in NELI, as well as other learners.

The online training involves a series of 3 linked courses, two which are completed before delivery and a final short course undertaken at the midpoint of programme delivery to pupils. It takes around 10 hours to complete all modules of the training.

Reception teachers, TAs and any other school staff involved in the delivery of NELI complete course 1 and then the TA (or other staff member who will deliver NELI sessions) completes the rest of the courses. Class teachers are asked to participate in course 1 of the training so that they can understand the importance of the intervention and support the TAs when required (for example, by letting the TAs work with the selected children during class time). The objectives of the three courses are described in the box below.

#### **NELI training course 1: Language Fundamentals**

The first course is designed to enhance teachers' and TAs' understanding of what oral language is, why it is so important for children to have good language skills and how to identify children in Reception classes for the programme. Staff find out about the programme itself, the critical role that

<sup>3</sup> Oxford University Press, NELI webpage. As of 12/04/2021:  
<https://global.oup.com/education/content/primary/series/nuffield-intervention/?region=international>

<sup>4</sup> FutureLearn is a digital education platform. For more information, see <https://www.futurelearn.com/>.

teaching assistants play in delivering NELI and familiarise themselves with some of the key teaching strategies used in the programme to support the development of good oral language skills. By the end of the training, staff will be in a good position to begin the NELI programme and to support Reception children, particularly those with weak oral language skills, in developing the language skills that will be critical to their success in school and beyond.

### **NELI training course 2: Delivering the intervention**

This second course is aimed at only the staff who will deliver the NELI programme to children, usually a teaching assistant. But this course is also open to Reception class teachers and NELI project leads. The course focusses on how to deliver the NELI programme effectively. In the course learners are taken through the structure of the NELI Programme followed by a deep dive into each of the two different types of session in NELI – the small group sessions and the individual sessions. Learners also examine the different elements that make up each type of session, which run consistently through the programme, and are familiarised with all the course materials and how to use them. By the end of this course, school staff should be confident in their ability to deliver NELI to the children.

### **NELI training course 3: Teaching Letter Sound and Phonics**

This is the last training course for NELI, which should be completed by TAs before beginning to deliver Part 2 of the NELI programme. The short course introduces TAs to a new element of NELI which will be incorporated into Group and Individual sessions in Part 2 of the programme, providing the tools needed to support NELI children in developing their letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness. Topics covered include: difference in programme structure between Part 1 and 2; terminology in letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness and; key teaching strategies for letter sound knowledge, blending and segmenting activities.

- (2) Remote support. Additional remote support is made available through the **Delivery Support Hub** hosted by FutureLearn. The NELI Delivery Support Hub is available to school staff that have completed the second NELI online training course.

The support on the Hub takes the form of discussion, query forums and videos. It includes 'See NELI in action' videos that show real life sessions delivered by an experienced NELI practitioners. The Hub is divided into different sections that provide extensive information about various aspect of delivery including the individual and group sessions, practical information on how to time the NELI sessions, on how to track progress, teaching techniques and good practices, and practical matters.

In addition to the support provided in the Hub, there are regular email communications with schools containing information conducive to the effective delivery of NELI.

- (3) Mentors. During implementation, if information is not available on the Hub schools can contact NELI mentors, who will be able to provide answers. NELI mentors are specialist speech and language professionals that offer guidance and support to schools as they deliver the programme. Schools can communicate with mentors via the NELI Delivery Support Hub. The team of NELI mentors maintain an ongoing

relationship with participating schools by providing online support in the form of emails, and an online forum.

### Delivery of NELI to children

NELI comprises group and individual sessions. The sessions encourage active participation between children and the TA. Lessons are designed around activities that support and reinforce narrative, vocabulary, listening, letter-sound knowledge, and phonological awareness skills.

(1) Group sessions: All NELI sessions follow a similar structure. The elements of the group sessions and the time allocated to each element is presented in Table 1. Part 1 (week 1 to 10) and Part 2 (week 11 and 20) sessions are similar but it can be seen from the table below that letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness activities are only included in the second part of NELI. At the beginning of the NELI group sessions TAs reinforce previously learned vocabulary and introduce new words in a context familiar to the children. Each session includes narrative tasks, which focus on skills such as storytelling by using the newly learned vocabulary.

**Table 1 group session breakdown**

Activity	Purpose	Part 1 (weeks 1-10) Time (mins)	Part 2 (weeks 11-20) Time (mins)
<b>Introduction</b>	Give greetings, discuss day of the week, revise Listening Rules, settle children into session, play listening games	3	2
<b>Letter-sound</b>	Introduce new letter	N/A	3
<b>Reinforcement</b>	Reinforce vocabulary taught in the previous session, for example using flashcards	5	4
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Introduce new vocabulary, use flashcards	5	5
<b>Narrative</b>	Work to improve narrative skills further, including sequencing and knowledge of story elements	10	9
<b>Plenary</b>	Sequence and revise session, award Best Listener	2	2

**Source:** *NELI Teaching Handout book Part 1 – detailed information and plans for implementing NELI, p.20* and *NELI Teaching Handout book Part 2, p.27*

(2) Individual sessions: Individual sessions are tailored to the specific need of each participating child, but the logic of NELI applies with no school or pupil variation. They offer an opportunity to focus on the child’s language need. Planning for the individual sessions is informed by the progress on the group sessions. Similar to the group sessions, each individual session follows a similar structure. The breakdown by activity and time is presented in **Table 2** below.

**Table 2 Individual session breakdown**

Activity	Purpose	Time (mins)
Introduction	Get the child settled into the session	2
Vocabulary revision	Revise vocabulary covered in previous sessions by focusing on words that the child found difficult	5
Narrative	Monitor child's progress in storytelling	5
Plenary	Revise session and give the child a reward sticker	3

**Source:** *NELI Teaching Handout book Part 1 – detailed information and plans for implementing NELI, p.25*

**How:** NELI sessions should be delivered within the school in a quiet area (such as class, library, staff room, or dining room). TAs have the freedom to decide on a suitable place for session delivery.

**When and how much:** NELI is designed to complement the language and literacy lessons for Reception pupils rather than to replace them. It is recommended to deliver NELI during the normal classroom hours but requires children selected into the programme to be taken out of classes. The programme is delivered over 20 weeks. As a result of the national lockdown in January 2021, planned delivery was postponed until the spring and summer terms of 2020/2021 academic year.

In February 2021, schools received an email recommending that, where possible, children should receive the full 20-week NELI programme. This meant that schools that agreed to deliver NELI according to this extended delivery plan will continue delivering NELI into the Autumn term of Year 1 in the 2021/2022 academic year, depending on when the programme begins in schools.

Each week, TAs hold group and individual sessions with those children selected to take part in NELI. TAs normally deliver three group sessions in a week lasting 30 minutes each. Children selected to participate in NELI also attend two 15-minute individual sessions each week. Group sessions and individual sessions generally do not take place on the same day.

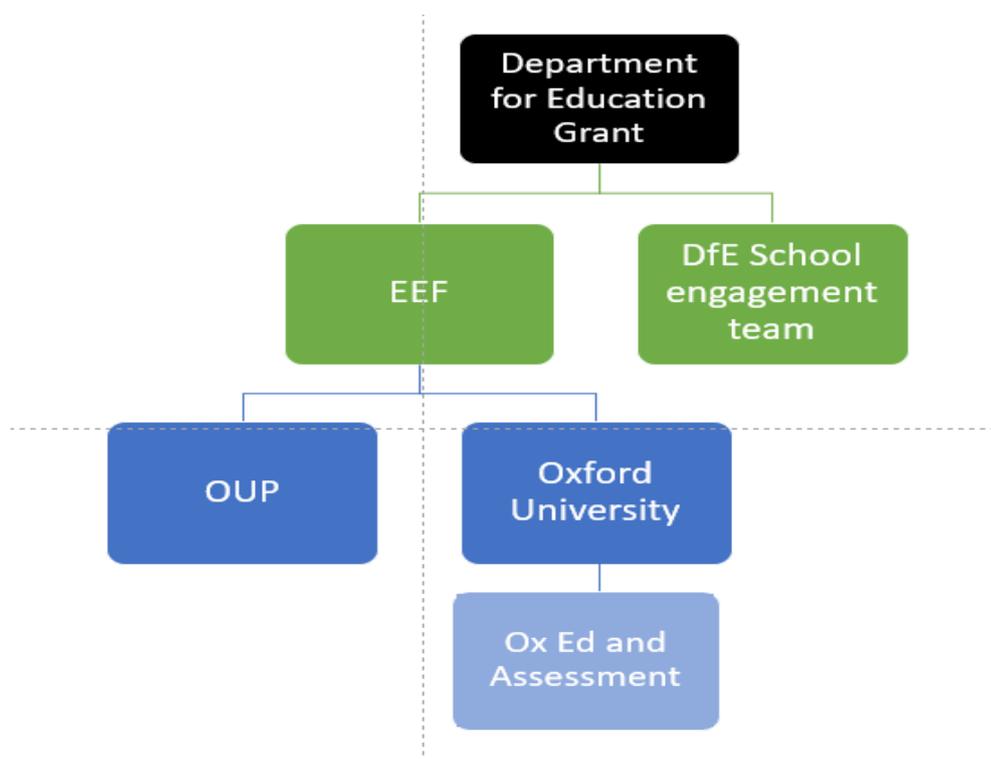
**Who (delivery providers, implementers):** The scale up of NELI has been funded by DfE grant to the EEF and it relies on number of delivery partners and funders as demonstrated in Figure 1.

- **The programme** was developed by a team of researchers at the University of Oxford (led by Charles Hulme and Maggie Snowling) together with team members from Sheffield (Silke Fricke) and York (Claudine Bowyer-Crane). The intervention development was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Nuffield Foundation webpage. As of 12/04/2021: <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/>

- **Recruitment to the scale up** in the academic year 2020/2021 was funded and delivered by **DfE**. The overall responsibility for recruiting schools rested with the DfE school engagement team. The DfE school engagement team is led by Victoria Parkes.
- **The programme resources** were produced and distributed to participating schools by **OUP**.
- **The online staff training** was developed by Oxford University and integrated on the FutureLearn platform. The piloting of the online training was funded separately. It was financially supported by ICG and EEF. The delivery team at Oxford is led by Professor Charles Hulme and Dr Gillian West.
- **The additional support** to delivery is made available through the **FutureLearn platform** and by NELI mentors coordinated by Oxford University.
- **The screening of children** with the aim to identify target pupils is provided via the LanguageScreen app by **OxEd and Assessment**
- **The delivery of NELI** is being overseen by the EEF. The team at EEF consist of the following people: Sarah Tillotson, Eleanor Stringer, Frances Laing.

Figure 1 NELI scale-up delivery partners



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#### 4. Scaling

The delivery of NELI in 2020 and 2021 is an act of scaling-up a proven intervention, previously delivered in a small number of schools, so that it can be delivered in thousands of schools across the country.

While the delivery of the NELI programme in the classroom is unchanged compared to the trials, there are a number of key activities that are linked to the aim of delivering bigger scale. For example:

- Developing online training, rather than face to face training
- Offering remote support in the form of the NELI Delivery Support Hub and NELI mentors (through online training)
- Forming a consortium to bring NELI to scale and to determine the scaling approach
- Investing resources in recruiting a large number of schools with a high percentage of FSM pupils – including making schools aware of the possibility of delivering NELI and the process of supporting schools in the recruitment process
- The logistics of producing and distributing the NELI packs to schools
- Recruiting mentors
- Managing the scaling programme and coordinating between the delivery partners
- Managing information about participating schools (for example, their progress through the stages of recruitment, whether packs had been received, whether the training had been accessed etc.)

## 5. Research objectives and questions

This evaluation aims to fulfil **five core** objectives:

1. Provide information to NELI partners, DfE and EEF relevant for supporting scaling of education interventions in the future (see topic areas 1, 2, 3, 4).
2. Assess and understand the delivery of NELI at scale and across school years (see topic areas 2 3, 4).
3. Assess the perceived impact of expanding NELI on pupils' language skills (based on teachers' and TAs' perceptions) (see topic areas 3).
4. Assess and better understand the NELI scale-up process in a COVID-19 affected environment (see topic areas 4 below).
5. Assess and understand prospects and challenges for sustainment of the NELI programme in schools over time (see topic area 5).

This evaluation originally included an assessment of the impact on pupil outcomes of expanding NELI. However, it was jointly agreed by the RAND evaluation team and the EEF that this aspect of the evaluation should not be pursued for now. This was for two reasons. Firstly, programme delivery was delayed; it was planned to begin in February 2021, however this was suspended due to the movement of schools to remote learning as a result of national lockdown which began in January 2021. Despite the reopening of settings in March 2021 the possibility of completing the full 20 weeks of the programme and collecting outcome data at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year was not considered feasible because the programme would not have been implemented under normal circumstances. Secondly, it became clear during the inception stages of the evaluation that collection of pupil level data that would have been essential to identify a suitable counterfactual proved difficult.

The delayed delivery of NELI, due to the lockdown, led to the addition of Objective 2 to the evaluation. It became clear to the delivery partners that many schools would not complete the full 20 week delivery of NELI to the selected reception school children during the academic

year ending in July 2021. Therefore a decision was made that, for these children, they would complete the NELI when they return as year 1 pupils in September 2021. This is a departure from the NELI model, which is designed for delivery to Reception children. The decision to complete delivery to these children, even though they will be in year 1, was based on evidence suggesting that the delivery of the full 20 weeks is important to observe positive impact on children's language skills.

Box 1 sets out the Research Questions for this study. These questions fall into the following five overarching topic areas:

Topic area 1: **School recruitment and engagement** focuses on the strategies used to ensure adequate numbers of schools are recruited and supported to deliver NELI, in order to target children for 20 consecutive weeks across two academic years. This topic explores variations in take up depending on level of FSM and barriers to recruitment in a COVID-19 affected environment.

Topic area 2: **Fidelity within recruited schools** examines how schools are implementing NELI and what are the barriers and enablers of effective adoption within schools. This topic is concerned with adherence to the key elements of NELI in the school, the scope and rate of participation and the degree to which staff engage with the NELI approach.

Topic area 3: **Perceived impact on pupils** aims to understand the impact of NELI on development outcomes of interest i.e. on children's language skills and on school staff knowledge and confidence. Impact will be assessed from the perspective of teachers and TAs through data collected via surveys and interviews.

Topic area 4: **Scale-up approach and processes in a COVID-19 affected environment** focuses on the overall strategy used to scale-up NELI. The aim is to record and describe: the *ways in which the NELI programme had to be adapted* to make it suitable for at-scale delivery (either because the design of the intervention was not feasible at scale, because of local features, or because of features in the wider environment); the 'what, who, how and when' of the *practical activities and processes* undertaken so that NELI is delivered in thousands of schools; the *coordination and management activities* that were planned and actually implemented to scale-up NELI; the ways in which the *delivery partners worked together*; the *barriers and facilitators* to rolling out at such a large scale, in a relatively short period of time. The aim is to *identify lessons* that might be relevant to inform future scale-up programmes. Importantly, in exploring this topic the aim is to distinguish specific challenges and processes resulting from the COVID-19 context from those that may have occurred in non-COVID environments.

The approach taken by the evaluation to topic area 4 is to see the NELI scale up as a case study. By treating NELI as partly an 'illustrative' case study of scaling-up (i.e. a case study that is descriptive and intended to capture the real experiences of those involved) and partly as a 'critical instance' case study<sup>6</sup> (examining a single example of unique interest) the intention is to generate an account of the 'story' of the NELI scale up – from the early decisions to roll-out the intervention throughout the process. This story should capture the decisions made, the actors involved, setbacks and successes. The rationale for this approach is that we think that this story-based account will be the most useful way to capture and communicate the lessons from NELI to those looking to scale other interventions in the future.

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<sup>6</sup> Better Evaluation Website: [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/case\\_study](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/case_study)

This approach is different from that outlined in earlier versions of this study plan; in previous versions our approach to topic area 4 was orientated to building a ‘scaling theory’ – using NELI to test and build on and nuance existing scaling theories, frameworks and models covered in the wider literature.<sup>7</sup> However, this approach was abandoned for a more pragmatic approach, which we consider more likely to generate useful and usable outputs.

Topic area 5: **The sustainability of NELI** focuses on understanding the prospects and challenges for sustainment of the programme in schools. The evaluation questions under this topic area aim to understand the factors that are critical for sustained delivery in schools, and how sustainable expansion of all aspects of the scale up can be attained. We will examine whether schools are continuing to deliver NELI in the new academic year to the same pupils, and whether they intend to continue with delivery. We will also explore, using interviews and focus groups, the stakeholder perceptions of barriers and facilitators to continued delivery.

Box 1 Topic area with specific research questions

### **1. School recruitment and engagement**

- 1.1. Why are schools attracted to NELI?
- 1.2. Did NELI reach the intended schools with a high proportion of FSM students? If not, why?
- 1.3. With the cost of training and programme resources removed, what barriers remain to school engagement?
- 1.4. What more could be done to improve the take-up of NELI?
- 1.5. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the recruitment of schools to the NELI scale up?

### **2. Fidelity within recruited schools**

- 2.1. Were appropriate adaptations to NELI introduced on an as-needed basis?
- 2.2. What was the schools’ experience from sign-up to delivery?
- 2.3. Were the delivery partners able to successfully monitor and address any delivery issues?
- 2.4. Were all the aspects of the intervention delivered as intended as the scaling proceeded? If not, why and what remedial action can or could be taken?
- 2.5. Did staff and schools feel confident and well supported to deliver the intervention?
- 2.6. Did it reach the intended pupils? If no, why not?
- 2.7. What was the experience of schools who completed the delivery of NELI once pupils had begun year 1? What approach was taken, and what issues arose from splitting delivery in this way?
- 2.8. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the implementation of NELI within schools?

### **3. Perceived programme impacts**

- 3.1. What is the perceived impact of NELI on pupils’ language skills based on teachers’ and TAs’ perceptions?
- 3.2. What is the perceived impact of NELI on pupils’ confidence in their use of language based on teachers’ and TA’s perceptions?
- 3.3. What is the perceived impact of NELI with regard to TAs/teacher literacy skills and knowledge based on teachers’ and TAs’ views?

### **4. Scale-up approach and processes in a COVID-19 affected environment**

- 4.1. What actions are/were taken to increase the scalability of NELI? Including
  - 4.1.1. Modifications to the intervention, training and support.

<sup>7</sup> For example: Here to There Consulting, n.d.; Fixsen et al., 2013; Gibbons et al., 2018; World Health Organization, 2009; Barker et al., 2015; Scaling What Works, 2011.

- 4.1.2. Modifications intended to address concerns highlighted in previous evaluations.
- 4.2. What is the approach to scaling NELI? For example
- 4.2.1. How is the scaling process organised?
- 4.2.2. How is the organisational and strategic management of the NELI expansion set up?
- 4.2.3. What strategies and/or methods are used to ensure that the scaling process is effective and coordinated?
- 4.3. Is the partnership between the different delivery organisations seamless?
- 4.4. Was the pace and coverage of expansion as intended? If not, what were the barriers to expansion and how can these be addressed? How was this affected by COVID-19?
- 4.5. Were existing monitoring systems adequate in supporting the NELI scale-up process?
- 4.6. Were any changes needed to the scale up approach due to changes in the environment and the local context to inform modifications to the scale-up approach?
- 4.7. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the NELI Scale up?
- 4.8. What are the delivery partners' conceptions of NELI scale-up success?
- 5. Sustainability of NELI**
- 5.1. Do schools continue to deliver NELI in the academic year starting September 2021?
- 5.2. Do schools intend to deliver NELI to the new cohort of Reception pupils in the academic year starting September 2021 (and beyond)?
- 5.3. To what extent do schools feel equipped to continue delivering NELI to new reception cohorts?
- 5.4. What are barriers and facilitators to the delivery of NELI to future cohorts of reception children?
- 5.5. What resources and support are needed for schools to continue deliver NELI to future cohorts of reception children?

## 6. Research methods and data collection activities

To achieve the core objectives of the study, and ultimately provide evaluation insights that can inform future scale ups in education, we have developed a comprehensive process evaluation.

The evaluation is based on a theory of change for the NELI scale-up. A theory of change had been developed by the EEF, and this has been further elaborated by the research team in the early stages of the evaluation. It can be found in Appendix H: NELI Theory of Change.

Taking a systematic approach, we have mapped data collection methods against the research questions. Table 3 presents an overview of the research methods, data collection activities and sources, the timing of data collection and how this relates to the areas of focus. The evaluation Matrix at the end of the document (see Appendix A: Evaluation Matrix) provides further details, mapping the data collection activities by research question.

The research methods and data collection activities were selected in order to:

- Ensure data are collected from all stakeholders, thus ensuring the evaluation captures multiple perspectives.

- Balance breadth and depth: collect information from all schools delivering NELI (via online surveys), complemented with in-depth data collection from a smaller number of case study schools
- Collect data at several timepoints with the aim of capturing the scaling journey throughout the evaluation period to allow exploration of issues arising.

To answer the research questions we will triangulate across different data sources. We aim to draw together the evidence from the surveys, case study interviews, focus groups and interviews with scaling partners together. We will organise an internal workshop to develop and synthesise our findings across the different research questions. The aim of this session will be to: triangulate the evidence gathered into a coherent set of findings; to explore possible convergence and divergence of trends and themes, and anticipate their plausible outcomes; and draft recommendations for the programme.

Table 3: Research methods overview

Research methods	Data collection period	Specific data collection methods	Participants/ data sources (type, number)	Data analysis methods	Area of focus addressed
Progress updates with DfE	On ad hoc basis between December 2020 and June 2021	Semi structured interviews	DfE school engagement team	Thematic analysis, deductive coding	1,2,3
Progress updates with delivery partners	Bi-monthly between December 2020 and November 2021	Semi structured interviews	Oxford University team, EEF's NELI Scale-Up team	Thematic analysis, deductive coding	1,2,3,4,5
School staff survey	Three rounds: 1. Post-training (Mar-Apr 2021) 2. Mid-delivery at the end of Reception (June-Jul 2021) 3. End-delivery in Year 1 (Octr - Nov2021)	Online questionnaires	School staff (TAs/teachers, Headteachers, NELI leads), all schools	Descriptive statistics, frequency counts	2,3,4,5
Interviews in case	Two rounds: 1. Delivery Reception	Semi structured	School staff, 20 schools	Thematic analysis,	2,3,4,5

study schools	(June-July 2021) 2. Delivery Year 1 (Oct-Nov 2021)	telephone interviews		deductive coding	
Interviews with NELI mentors	Three rounds: 1. Early delivery Reception (Jan-Feb 2021) 2. Mid-delivery Reception (Jun-Aug 2021) 3. Delivery Year 1 (Oct-Nov 2021)	Semi structured telephone interviews	NELI mentors, 5 each round	Thematic analysis, deductive	2,3,4,5
Interviews with schools who did not take part in NELI	One round (April-May 2021)	Semi structured interviews	Headteachers or members of the SLT, 10 schools	Thematic analysis, deductive coding	1
Focus groups with delivery partners	Undertaken between September 2021 and November 2021	Semi structured topic guides	Delivery partners including OU, the EEF's NELI scale-up team, DfE engagement team	Thematic analysis, deductive coding	2,3
Secondary data analysis : Recruitment and reach data	Collected between December 2020 and March 2021	Systematic record on recruitment and reach collected by DfE school engagement team	All schools	Descriptive statistics	2
Secondary data	Collected between	Data collected	School staff (TAs/teachers,	Descriptive analysis	4

analysis : Engagement data	January 2021 and November 2021	through the FutureLearn platform	Headteachers, NELI leads) all schools	Data mining	
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## Collection and analysis of primary data

*Surveys with TAs, reception teachers, heads and NELI leads in all schools who were willing to be contacted about the evaluation (Three rounds).*

Surveys are the best method for collecting data from all schools that agreed to take part in the evaluation of the NELI scale-up.

Survey questionnaires are developed by the project team at RAND Europe in consultation with the delivery partners. Each question in the survey can be mapped onto a specific research question. Survey questions will be tailored to each type of respondent (i.e. **TAs/ teachers, head teachers**). Surveys will be kept as short as possible (we expect that they will take no more than 15 minutes to complete).

Survey data will be collected at three different time points:

- Around the time of Part 1 NELI online training in March/April 2021
- Around the mid-delivery point, at the end of the school year in June/July 2021
- Post-delivery in October/November 2021 by which time any schools delivering outstanding sessions of NELI to year 1 pupils should have completed delivery.

The main objective of **the first survey** was to examine the schools' motivations for joining the programme and their understanding of NELI, so that potential barriers to recruitment can be better understood. The survey gained insights on the school staff experiences of undertaking the online training. It also probed school staff about their use of the resources and support in order to gauge the level of take-up as well as how useful these resources and support have been. Finally, the survey was used to assess whether schools have undertaken any delivery activities (i.e. if schools have administered the LanguageScreen assessment, selected children to take part in NELI, begun delivering NELI sessions) prior to the commencement of the main roll-out window, i.e. between January and March 2021.

**The second survey** was administered between June and July and focused on the overall experience of delivering NELI in the 2020/21 academic year. The survey included questions about programme delivery, on-going support and the perceived effect of the programme on children's language skills.

**The third and last survey** will help us understand the transitioning of delivery across school years. It will include questions on training and delivery in the 2021/22 academic year, including perceptions of programme effect. The survey will also ask schools if they continued or will continue to implement NELI with new reception pupils. This will help us learn about the critical conditions needed to achieve sustainable implementation.

Descriptive findings from the survey will be aggregated and summarised. To investigate the representativeness of the sample we will compare school characteristics of the full sample (i.e. all schools that agreed to take part in the evaluation) with those that responded to the

surveys. Any open-text responses will be analysed using a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006).

### *Interviews with NELI mentors (Three rounds with 5 NELI mentors)*

NELI mentors will be invited to participate in semi-structured interviews in order for the evaluation team to obtain a more detailed understanding of their experiences in the scaling process. There is a team of 10 mentors, combining experienced staff from the previous trial and new staff recruited for the scale up. With help from the delivery team we will identify mentors who have a range of different experience (i.e. mentors that were involved in the training in the previous NELI trial, and new NELI mentors). Five NELI mentors will each be interviewed **three times**: during the online training period, mid-delivery and towards the end of the programme. This will allow us to determine the extent of their involvement throughout the delivery period.

Interviews with NELI mentors will allow us to determine what scaling looks like 'on the ground'. Questions will focus on the overall experience of providing support to schools via the FutureLearn platform, as well as any barriers or enablers to school staff engagement with NELI training or programme delivery. For more information see the topic guide in Appendix G: Topic Guide for NELI Mentors.

### *Case study schools: Interviews with NELI leads, head teachers, teachers and TAs (Two rounds in up to 25 schools)*

There are many factors affecting the delivery of NELI within a school that will be difficult to capture through a survey.

Therefore, we are selecting up to 25 schools which we will follow throughout the scale-up process via a series of interviews. Interviewing school staff in case study schools will allow us to explore, in detail, how the same schools proceed along the NELI 'journey', from recruitment to delivery

A purposive stratified sampling will be used to select case study schools. We stratified schools by the following characteristics in our case study framework:

- Proportion of FSM children in the school;
- Geographical region;
- Whether the school have delivered NELI to date between January and April 2021;
- Whether the school has administered the LanguageScreen app test between January and March 2021.

This will allow us to study in more depth schools from different regions, with varying shares of FSM pupils and varying levels of engagement with NELI. For more information see Appendix B: Case studies sampling framework.

NELI leads, head teachers, teachers and TAs within each case study school will be invited to take part in telephone, semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted with each interviewee separately. Interviews will not exceed 30 minutes and will be conducted at **two time points** (i.e. at the end of the 2020/2021 year in June/July, and in the last weeks of NELI delivery in the 2021/2022 academic year).

The interviews will cover the following topics: school engagement with NELI including training, support and delivery, perceived impact of NELI on children's language skills, the impact of COVID-19 on delivery, and other aspects of the practicalities of delivery including how fidelity to the programme was facilitated and/or hindered by various factors. Importantly, the study team will develop a **tailored topic guide** for each respondent, drawing directly on the respondent's responses to the survey. In this way, we will ensure that the case studies complement and add value to the data collected via the surveys.

Information gathered in these interviews will be analysed using a general inductive approach. It will enable us to identify relevant themes and/or categories most relevant to the research objectives (Thomas, 2006). A description of the most important themes will be presented in the final report. This will also allow us to further our understanding of how the logic model worked in practice and the conditions needed to make NELI succeed.

Our analysis will include both within case and between case analysis:

- Within case analysis will be carried out first. This will allow us to understand the specific journey of each case study school, and locate that in the context of that particular school's location, environment and context.
- Between case analysis will then be undertaken to identify commonalities and differences.

**Update:** In the original evaluation design, we were planning to select 20 schools and to arrange three rounds of interviews. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing guidance, it was not feasible to undertake two rounds in the 2019/2020 academic year. Instead, we combined the first and second round of case study interviews to take place across June and July 2021. Interviews with 18 schools were undertaken in the first round. The evaluation team will increase the sample to 25 schools for the second round. The topic guide for the new schools (i.e. schools that were not interviewed in the first round) will include some of the questions from round 1.

### **Focus group with delivery partners**

In line with our approach of treating NELI as a case study of scaling up, we propose to conduct a series of focus groups with representatives from the delivery partners.

Our intention will be to conduct these focus groups separately, each with representatives from: the University of Oxford; the DfE; OUP; and the EEF.

The focus group(s) will take place towards the end of the evaluation period – around October 2021. The aim of conducting focus groups separately with delivery partners will be to create a space in which all participants can reflect openly on the scaling journey, what went well and what could have been improved. The focus groups will also aim to explore the different and aligning views and definitions of success among delivery partners, as well as any compromises made during the scale-up process.

This discursive approach should surface different understandings and assumptions and allow issues to be explored in a way that is more likely to lead to useful lessons.

After the initial round of focus groups, the team will identify cross cutting themes that have emerged from each, which we will then feedback to the different delivery partner groups to check we have understood their points.

The focus group will last no longer than 2 hours.

A detailed facilitation plan and agenda will be developed to guide the focus groups, but an indicative agenda is outlined below. To structure the discussions, in each focus group the

evaluation team will make a 5 minute presentation around two key topics in order to provide a starting point to prompt discussion.

Strong management of the focus groups will be provided by an experienced facilitator – which will ensure all participants have a chance to contribute, that the tone is set for a constructive, respectful and open discussion, and that the discussion remains on relevant issues.

After the focus groups, participants will be able to send additional contributions to the research team – on any points not made because of lack of time, or because a participant did not feel comfortable bringing up a particular issue.

**PART 1: (30 mins)**

- Welcome by the facilitator: aims, ground rules
- Brief presentation by the RAND research team on discussion topic 1 - emerging findings from the evaluation to date
- Discussion round - topic 1

**PART 2: (30 mins)**

- Brief presentation by the RAND research team on topic 2 - emerging findings from the evaluation to date
- Discussion round topic 2

**Break (15 mins)**

**PART 3: (30 mins)**

- Round table reflections: top 3 things to do differently; top 3 successes; 3 plans for the future

***Ad hoc progress updates with DfE following recruitment***

To understand the recruitment strategies undertaken to reach, recruit and engage schools we will interview the DfE recruitment team. Included in the interview protocol were questions aimed at understanding the overall scaling approach and its management, barriers and enablers to recruitment and lessons learned for future scale-up activities in relation to recruitment. In analysing these interviews a general inductive approach will be used to identify relevant themes and/or categories in relation to school recruitment and engagement.

***Regular progress updates with delivery partners (Oxford University, EEF)***

These progress updates will aim to gather their scale-up experiences. These regular meetings will take the form of semi-structured interviews. A range of topics will be discussed to understand and assess the role and experiences of the different delivery partners. We aim to cover a range of topics in these regular meetings, which will include but not necessarily be limited to the following: overall approach to the NELI scale-up; school recruitment; development and refinement of the online training, and; impact of COVID-19 on the scale-up. These meetings can be informed by other scale-up activities that may be ongoing at any given time.

***Interviews with school staff from schools that were approached to take part but declined NELI***

To complement analysis from the school reach data and understand in more detail the reasons why some schools declined participation in NELI we invited schools to take part in a short 10

minute interview. The interviews focused on the factors influencing the school choice not to participate, and whether anything could have been done to facilitate schools' participation. We used stratified sampling to draw views from a meaningful sample i.e. schools with high/low share of pupils eligible for FSM and schools across different regions in England. We interviewed 5 schools between April and May 2021. We offered a £20 high street voucher as an incentive for each interviewee. As with other stakeholders, a general inductive approach will be used for analysis.

## Collection and analysis of secondary data

The secondary data analysis will draw on the following sources:

### *Data about school recruitment and reach from DfE*

To investigate further programme take up and emerging reasons for declining NELI we will analyse school recruitment data collected by DfE. The data will allow us to validate the criteria and process for offering NELI to schools and will allow us to explore variations in recruitment (i.e. by wave of recruitment, or variation determined by school characteristics or regions). The recruitment data provide insights on any differences in programme take-up, as they may derive from the different recruitment experiences. The data will also allow us to explore the reasons why schools declined the offer to take part in NELI. School recruitment information will be linked with publicly available information for schools with the aim to explore variations in recruitment based on school characteristics (e.g. share of FSM, previous attainment).

### *School participation in the training and on-going engagement with NELI collected through FutureLearn*

The engagement with the online training and the on-going online support can be monitored through FutureLearn. FutureLearn data contains the following metrics: learner comments per course step; quiz/test question responses for each course step, video statistics for each course step, and a final report including key participation measures (e.g. total number of visits, completions and comments posed across learners).

The data collected through FutureLearn will be used for the following reasons:

- 1. To better understand the engagement with the online training using key participation metrics and video statistics.**

Key participation metrics such as total number of visits and number of step completions at the online training will allow us to measure the scale of learners' usage of, and engagement with the NELI training programme. Using metrics on learner activity we will estimate a registration rate and a completion rate per training course. We will *analyse descriptively* rates of registration and completion by training course, as well as the registration rate with regards to the NELI Support Delivery Hub.

Analysis of the video statistics will provide useful insights on engagement with video content covering particular training themes or topics related to delivering NELI. We will *descriptively analyse* through tables or graphs variations in the number of times videos have been viewed within and across the three training courses.

- 2. To better understand what aspects of the online training were more difficult for learners to grasp by analysing the volume of correct and incorrect responses to quiz and test questions.**

Analysis on responses to quiz and test questions will be used to assess which aspects of the online NELI training programme were more challenging for learners, and thus where the

training content may need to be modified or additional content be added to sufficiently support learners as they progress through the training programme.

We will undertake *descriptive analysis* to explore variations in correct responses by individual quiz/test question, quiz/test and training course.

### **3. To better understand learners' views on the course by analysing comments and questions received from learners.**

Participants in the online training could also post comments and questions throughout the course. The posted comments and questions provide insights on participants' views on the course as well as an insight in the most common type of discussions raised by learners. We will perform *text mining* and *sentiment analysis* of the comments to analyse learners' views and perceptions of the online training and ongoing support via the Support Hub.

For more detailed information on the FutureLearn metrics and the proposed analysis approach see **Appendix C: FutureLearn NELI training metrics analysis approach.**

## **7. Ethics**

The ethics processes are in accordance with the ethics policies adopted by RAND Europe. The evaluation design was approved by RAND U.S. Human Subjects Protection Committee (HSPC).

## **8. Data protection**

Data protection is the foremost concern in undertaking our work. Respecting the rights of the individuals engaged in the NELI scale-up is of paramount importance.

We have, in choosing a research design, been mindful that we should impose the minimum burden necessary on schools and school staff including minimising the use of personal data, while aiming to incorporate a variety of diverse perspectives.

RAND Europe will take measures to ensure the evaluation is GDPR compliant. RAND Europe operates in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and EU law including GDPR.

As currently applicable under GDPR, RAND Europe will obtain personal data from schools as data controller. The lawful basis for RAND Europe processing the data under the GDPR is 'legitimate interest'. That is, it has a legitimate interest in processing the data in order to work with the schools that wish to participate in the evaluation of the NELI scale up. The data is collected and processed solely to facilitate voluntary contribution to the project. The data is not excessive and will be used for the purposes of contacting school staff to arrange participation in the surveys and interviews, as required to meet the project goals. The data is necessary for the purpose of the project. We also judge that there is very limited scope for harm as appropriate data handling safeguards have been put in place. As such in considering whether they could rely on legitimate interests as the lawful basis for processing the data, the data controllers have balanced their interests with the interests of the data subjects. The data subjects' data will not be used in any way that could be detrimental to their rights and/or freedoms. On this basis the data controllers have assessed a legal basis of legitimate interests to be applicable.

Individuals targeted by the study have the right to oppose, have access to, rectify, or remove personal or sensitive personal data held by RAND Europe. Participants will be informed about their rights, legal basis, and the manner in which their data will be obtained and processed (providing sufficient detail about the nature, approach, and aim of the research activities in easily accessible way and format, so as to be compliant with the legislation).

RAND Europe will collect consent forms for school staff who will volunteer to participate in an interview or focus group. Furthermore, the cover page for each questionnaire survey collected as part of the study will contain an informed consent sheet and privacy notice statements for respondents. It will inform respondents that participation in the survey is entirely voluntary. Also, the surveys will not collect personal identifying information such as the respondent's name, date of birth, or contact details. A copy of the preamble for the Headteachers and Teachers/TAs surveys is provided in Appendix D: Survey Preamble and the privacy notice in Appendix E: Survey Privacy Notice. All interview participants will be informed about their rights, and the nature and aim of the interview, The interview privacy notice can be found in Appendix F: Interview Privacy Notice,

Any data sharing required will be governed by the data sharing agreement. The data sharing agreements will (i) define roles for controlling and processing data, (ii) explain data flows and limit sharing data to only essential data, (iii) outline arrangements for the storage, retention or destruction of data.

Data will be shared securely using specialised encrypted software (e.g. Syncplicity or Sharepoint for Research).

In order to ensure GDPR compliance, all data will be only saved on GDPR-compliant, secure servers inside the EEA or U.K. RAND Europe is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), registration number Z6947026 and is certified for adhering to ISO 9001:2015 quality management practices. All data shared with RAND Europe will be held and processed in accordance with RAND Europe's data protection policy, data breach procedure and information security policies (all available on request) and using controls outlined in RAND Europe's ISO27001 certification. Controls include data being stored in the EU in password-protected folders which are accessible only to the specific members of the research team. The folders are stored on RAND Europe's servers and special measures will be put in place to ensure that the data is exempt from backups to the US servers, as is standard procedure for other information. Backup files for the data (to mitigate against data loss in the case of a system failure) are kept off-site in a locked safe. RAND Europe implements a 'clean desk policy', in which all non-public documents are kept in locked drawers while the individual researcher is away from their desk, and all non-public printed material is securely shredded after use.

Data that permits the identification of data subjects will be kept for no longer than necessary to process the information collected (and no longer than one year after the end of the contract). The collected personal data will not be used or shared outside each assignment nor transferred to third parties.

## 9. Study team

### EVALUATION TEAM: RAND EUROPE

**RAND Europe** is responsible for design of the NELI scale-up evaluation (with input from the EEF team), analysis, reporting, and quality assurance of the evaluation. The evaluation team

in RAND Europe comprised: Dr Emma Disley (project leader), Dr Andreas Culora (project management), Dr Sashka Dimova, and Lucy Gilder. The evaluation team will benefit from advice and quality assurance from Prof Tom Ling, Dr Sue Guthrie, Elena Rosa Brown.

## 10. Risks

Risks	Assessment	Mitigation
Further delays to delivery due to COVID-19 (or alike) pandemic	Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: High	A new outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic could further delay the delivery of NELI and consequently the evaluation activities. Teams will maintain regular contact to coordinate and decide on any strategies to mitigate potential risks to the evaluation plans.
Not able to capture further changes in in roll out plans	Likelihood: Moderate; Impact: Moderate	Remain flexible and update the design in line with evolving evaluation needs Remain in regular contact with delivery partners
Limited time for data collection	Likelihood: Medium Impact: High	Work closely with EEF and delivery partners Prioritisation of tasks
Not able to engage a representative sample of schools in data collection activities	Likelihood: Medium Impact: High	There is a risk that certain schools (e.g. schools with high share of FSM) may face an extra burden in terms of time and resources to engage due to COVID-19. This can be mitigated by regular liaison with schools and by providing sufficient data collection window
Not able to get agreement on clear, feasible evaluation questions	Likelihood: Low Impact: High	Work closely with EEF to understand what's important Draw on our experience of preparing questions, knowledge of NELI and of scale-up
Low survey response rates from school staff	Likelihood: Moderate Impact: Moderate	Reminders, warm-up emails giving notice, open for 3-4 weeks, accessible by laptop, tablet and phone, clear questions, short (15 mins) survey Real-time monitoring of response rates to allow for reminders to be targeted

Not able to engage regularly and with delivery partners	Likelihood: Low Impact: Moderate	Short, efficient monthly or bi-monthly interviews Agree communications plan at inception
Not able to generalise findings and distinguish implications of COVID-context from general lessons for scale-up	Likelihood: Moderate Impact: Moderate	Survey questions to probe this Investigate in interviews and deep dives Remain in dialogue with the delivery teams regarding their views on COVID-19 impact
Delivery partners do not feel comfortable talking about their implementation experiences in a focus group setting	Likelihood: Low Impact: Moderate	Experienced facilitation Careful planning and structuring of the agenda for the focus group Participants able to send further contributions after the focus group

## 11. Timeline for data collection activities

Date	Activity
Dec 20 – Nov 21	Regular communication with Delivery Organisations (EEF, Oxford, other delivery partners)
Dec 20 - March 21	Regular communication with Delivery Organisations (DfE)
Dec 20 – Nov 21	Ongoing updates to ToC
Jan 21- Feb 21	Interviews with NELI mentors (round 1)
March 21- April 21	Analysis of school recruitment data
April 21- May 21	Post-training survey: teachers, heads, TAs (round 1)
April 21- May 21	Interviews with schools that did not participate
May 21 -July 21	Post-training & mid-delivery interviews in 18 schools (round 1)
June 21- July 21	Mid-delivery survey at the end of the school year: teachers, heads, TAs (round 2)
Aug 21	Interviews with NELI mentors (round 2)
Oct 21	Focus groups with scaling partners
Nov 21	End-delivery interviews in 25 schools (round 2)
Aug 21 and Nov 21	Analysis of school participation and engagement data (from Future Learn)
Jan 22- Feb 22	End-delivery survey: teachers, heads, TAs (round 3)

# Study Plan

## The Nuffield Early Years Language Intervention

### Scale-Up Evaluation

Evaluator: RAND Europe

Principal investigator: Emma Disley



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### **13. Acknowledgments**

RAND Europe would like to thank the members of EEF's NELI Scale-Up evaluation team for their useful comments and suggestions to inform and shape this document.

**Study Plan**  
**The Nuffield Early Years Language Intervention**

Evaluator: RAND Europe  
 Principal investigator: Emma Disley



**Scale-Up Evaluation**

**Appendix A: Evaluation Matrix**

	Regular interview with delivery	Ad hoc interview with DfE and EEF	Maintaining programme and scaling ToC	E surveys of TAs, reception teachers, head teachers, 3 rounds	Telephone interviews with TAs/ Teachers/head teachers, 2 rounds	Focus groups with delivery partners	Interviews with NELI mentors	Analysis of secondary data	Interviews with EEF priority schools that declined participation
<b>1. School recruitment and engagement</b>									
1.1. Why are schools attracted to NELI?	x	x		x					
1.2. Did NELI reach the intended schools with a high proportion of FSM students? If not, why?		x	x					x	x
1.3. With the cost of training and programme resources removed, what barriers remain to school engagement?	x	x		x	x		x		x
1.4. What more could be done to improve the take-up of NELI?	x	x		x	x	x			x

1.5. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the recruitment of schools to the NELI scale up?	x	x	x			x	x	x
<b>2. Fidelity within recruited school</b>								
2.1. Were appropriate adaptations to NELI introduced on an as-needed basis?						x	x	x
2.2. What was the schools' experience from sign-up to delivery?						x	x	x x
2.3. Were the delivery partners able to successfully monitor and address any delivery issues?	x	x				x	x	x x
2.4. Were all the aspects of the intervention delivered as intended as the scaling proceeded? If not, why and what remedial action can or could be taken?	x	x				x	x	x x
2.5. Did staff and schools feel confident and well supported to deliver the intervention?						x	x	x
2.6. Did it reach the intended pupils? If no, why not?						x	x	x
2.7. What was the experience of schools who completed the delivery of NELI once pupils had begun year 1? What approach was taken, and what issues arose from splitting delivery in this way?						x	x	
2.8. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the implementation of NELI within schools?						x	x	x
<b>3. Perceived impact on pupils</b>								
3.1. What is the perceived impact of NELI on pupils' languages skills based on teachers' and TAs' perceptions?						x	x	x
<b>4. Scale-up approach and processes in a COVID-19 affected environment</b>								
4.1. What actions are/were taken to increase the scalability of NELI? Including	x	x	x				x	x
4.1.1.Modifications to the intervention, training and support								
4.1.2.Modifications intended to address concerns highlighted in previous evaluations								
4.2. What is the approach to scaling NELI? For example:	x	x	x				x	x
4.2.1.How is the scaling process organised?								
4.2.2.How is the organisational and strategic management of the NELI expansion set up?								
4.2.3.What strategies and/or methods are used to ensure that the scaling process is effective and coordinated?								
4.3. Is the partnership between the different delivery organisations seamless?	x	x	x				x	x
4.4. Was the pace and coverage of expansion as intended? If not, what were the barriers to expansion and how can these be addressed? How was this affected by COVID-19?	x	x					x	x
4.5. Were existing monitoring systems adequate in supporting the NELI scale-up process?	x	x	x				x	x

4.6. Were any changes needed to the scale up approach due to changes in the environment and the local context to inform modifications to the scale-up approach?	x	x	x			x	x
4.7. How has the COVID-19 outbreak affected the NELI Scale up?	x	x	x			x	x
4.8. What are the delivery partners' conceptions of NELI scale-up success?	x	x				x	
<b>5. Sustainability of NELI</b>							
5.1. Do schools continue to deliver NELI in the academic year starting September 2021?	x	x			x	x	
5.2. Do schools intend to deliver NELI to the new cohort of Reception pupils in the academic year starting September 2021 (and beyond)?	x	x			x	x	
5.3. To what extent do schools feel equipped to continue delivering NELI to new reception cohorts?						x	x
5.4. What are barriers and facilitators to the delivery of NELI to future cohorts of reception children?	x	x			x	x	x
5.5. What resources and support are needed to support schools to deliver NELI to future cohorts of reception children?	x	x			x	x	x

## Appendix B: Case studies sampling framework

Factor	Description	Data source	Coded
<b>FSM %</b>	Proportion of FSM pupils in the school	<b>List of schools registered to participate in NELI</b>	To be recoded into categories, e.g. quartiles, binary indicator identifying schools above/below the threshold. This will be based on the sample data, then schools will be classified as 'low 25% FSM' 'low 50% FSM' 'high 50% FSM' or 'high 75% FSM'
<b>Region</b>	Geographic location of the school by region	<b>List of schools registered to participate in NELI</b>	We will indicate if a school is from one of the following regions: 1) East Midlands; 2) East of England; 3) London; 4) North East; 5) North West; 6) South East; 7) South West; 8) West Midlands; 9) Yorkshire and the Humber
<b>NELI delivery</b>	Data indicating whether or not schools started delivering NELI	<b>Teacher/TA survey (Q32/Q33)</b> Q32) Did you deliver any elements of the NELI programme during the period from 5 January up to 8 March 2021? Please tick all options that apply. AND Q33) Have you delivered any elements of the NELI programme since schools reopened to all Reception pupils on 8 March 2021? Please tick all options that apply.	A binary indicator will be used, where e.g. 1=NELI has been delivered; 0=NELI has not been delivered. The indicator will take a value of 1 if a school has delivered NELI before schools reopened on 8 March 2021 OR since schools reopened on 8 March 2021, not necessarily both. To minimise error, and ensure we select a representative sample we will exclude schools if a teacher and a TA provide different responses to the question.
<b>Use of LanguageScreen</b>	Data indicating whether or not schools have used LanguageScreen	<b>Teacher/TA survey (Q32/Q33)</b> Q32) Did you deliver any elements of the NELI programme during the period from 5 January up to 8 March 2021? Please tick all options that apply. AND Q33) Have you delivered any elements of the NELI programme since schools reopened to all Reception pupils on 8 March 2021? Please tick all options that apply.	A binary indicator will be used, where e.g. 1=School has used LanguageScreen; 0=School has not used LanguageScreen. The indicator will take a value of 1 if a school has used LanguageScreen before schools reopened on 8 March 2021 OR since schools reopened on 8 March 2021, not necessarily both. To minimise error, and ensure we select a representative sample we will exclude schools if a teacher and a TA provide different responses to the question.

# Study Plan

## The Nuffield Early Years Language Intervention

### Scale-Up Evaluation

Evaluator: RAND Europe

Principal investigator: Emma Disley



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## Appendix C: FutureLearn NELI training metrics analysis approach

NELI scale up study plan – analysis of FutureLearn training metrics

### PARTICIPATION DATA

FutureLearn data also contains key participation metrics which we can use in this evaluation, specifically:

- Total number of step visits across learners
- Total number of step completions across learners
- Total number of comments posted across learners
- Learner activity, including:
  - o Number of school staff sent course 1 enrolment email (Teachers and TAs)
  - o Number of school staff sent course 2 and delivery hub enrolment email (TAs only)
  - o Number of school staff sent course 3 enrolment email (TAs in March 2020)
  - o Number of additional school staff sent enrolments (post MoU nomination)
  - o Number of school staff registered for course 1
  - o Number of school staff registered for course 2
  - o Number of school staff registered for the delivery hub
  - o Number of school staff registered for course 3 (TAs from March/April 2020)
  - o Number of school staff completed Course 1
  - o Number of school staff completed Course 2
  - o Number of school staff completed Course 3

The first three metrics provide a high level understanding of the raw magnitude or scale of the use of, and engagement with, the online NELI training programme. We will report on these high level statistics to this end.

Using the metrics on learner activity, we then propose to analyse descriptively using tables and graphs participation in NELI training courses 1, 2 and 3 separately, as

well as use of the NELI Support Delivery Hub. To do this, we will construct two key measures:

1. **Registration rate:** Defined as the proportion of all school staff who received the enrolment email who subsequently registered for the relevant course or the Delivery Hub.
2. **Completion rate:** Defined as the proportion of all school staff who registered for the relevant training course who then completed that course.

### VIDEO STATISTICS

FutureLearn data on engagement with video content made available in the online NELI training programme is also available for analysis in this evaluation. Specifically, for each video available in the three NELI training courses, information on the course step on which the video is located, the title of the video, and the total number of times it has been viewed is provided. Analysis of this data will provide useful insights on engagement with video content covering particular training themes or topics related to delivering NELI.

We will descriptively analyse through tables or graphs variations in the number of times videos have been viewed within and across the three training courses. Using information on the course step on which the video is located and the title of the video, we will highlight particular training themes or topics where video content was particularly popular (or not) as a resource for learning about how to deliver NELI. We will also explore whether there were any differences in engagement with video content by training course, to understand whether there were particular points in the training programme where video content was especially helpful in preparing for NELI delivery.

### QUIZ/TEST QUESTION RESPONSES

Data collected via FutureLearn on responses to quiz and test questions are available for analysis. Information on the course step on which the quiz or test question is located, the question number, the learner's response, whether that response is correct or incorrect, and a timestamp are available. Analysis of this information will provide useful insights on which aspects of the online NELI training programme were more difficult for learners to grasp, and thus where the training content may need to be modified or additional content be added to sufficiently support learners as they progress through the training programme.

As the first step of our analysis, we will calculate the proportion of correct responses for every question across all quizzes and tests in the three NELI training courses. By doing this we can first assess whether there were any specific training or topic themes that were more problematic for learners to grasp.

Then, we propose to calculate an overall percentage of correct responses by quiz or test by averaging the percentage of correct responses for all individual questions within the same quiz or test. This will allow us to compare the relative difficulty of quizzes and tests by high-level training theme or topic, to understand if there were any specific course steps or themes that were particularly difficult for learners to understand.

Finally, we also propose to aggregate the data further by averaging the proportion of correct responses across all tests and quizzes within each training course, to explore

at a high level whether there were any differences in the difficulty of the content across the three NELI training courses. We will calculate course-level proportions of correct responses separately for quizzes and tests, given that quizzes did not contribute to learners' course score.

The metrics produced from this analysis would therefore be:

1. Percentage of correct responses by individual quiz or test question;
2. Averaged percentage of correct responses by quiz or test;
3. Averaged percentage of correct responses across all tests by training course;
4. Averaged percentage of correct responses across all quizzes by training course.

We will undertake descriptive analyses to explore the themes above, using tables and graphs to highlight and explore any variations in the percentage of correct responses by question, quiz/test and training course.

### LEARNER COMMENTS

Learner and Mentor comments, including information on the course step on which the learner or mentor left their comment and the discussion question(s) to which the comment is responding, are available for analysis. Analysis of the comments will provide i) useful insights into learner's views on the course and ii) information on the most common topics discussed among learners.

Given the large amount of comments we will undertake text mining in R to identify the most popular topics that arose in the comments and how learners viewed or perceived the training.

To do this, we will undertake the following analysis:

1. Word frequency of learners' comments

First, we will explore the most common words used by learners and mentors with the aim to understand the most common themes discussed by the same. We will estimate word counts for the total dataset by course (excluding stop words), and by question(s) asked in order to identify overrepresented words. This will show the most used single words, bigrams (pairs of words) and trigrams (groups of three words). We will estimate most common words using the *qdap* package by calling *freq\_terms* functions. The most frequent single words or pairs or triple of words will be presented in frequency plots.

2. Sentiment analysis

Second, a sentiment analysis approach would be undertaken to understand what are the main sentiments using the words counts, through the use of different dictionaries. Sentiment analysis will classify the comments by learners and mentors as positive, negative and neutral. Sentiment analysis will be undertaken for all comments collected first per course and then by question. The sentiment analysis by NELI course 1, 2 and 3 will allow us to track sentiments as learners progress through the training.

In order to undertake the sentiment analysis, we will first compute sentiment scores with *analyzeSentiment* and we will convert the scores to tertiary sentiment classes (negative, neutral or positive) with the *convertToDirection* command. The scores can

take positive or negative values and classify if the words have positive and negative polarity based on existing language library<sup>8</sup>. We will estimate sentiment scores by course type and by question. We will display sentiment scores by NELI course graphically using the *plotSentiment* command.

Prior to the text mining analysis an important step is data cleaning as we want to remove words that do not have any meaning for our analysis. Data cleaning would include lowercasing the text, removing punctuation and numbers, removing excess whitespace, replacing abbreviations, replacing symbols, word stemming, adding stop words in the existing list based on other stop words , and removing certain words.

## Appendix D: Survey Preamble

### Headteachers

Your school is one of approximately 6,650 in England taking part in the Department of Education (DfE) reception early language programme to deliver the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) in the academic year 2020 to 2021. The overarching objective of the programme is to provide evidence-based, targeted early language support to reception children to address the impact of time out of formal early education, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. DfE, working with the EEF and their delivery partners, provides training, programme resources and ongoing support for delivery to participating schools.

RAND Europe has been commissioned by the EEF to conduct an independent evaluation of the programme. The EEF is an independent charity that funds research into 'what works' for improving educational practice.

We understand that during this period, the main priority of your school is the wellbeing of pupils, staff and wider school community. We also understand that at this time, you will have many competing personal and professional priorities to manage.

At the same time, it remains important to understand how NELI (and other similar educational programmes) can be made effectively available to schools. For the evaluation of the NELI programme, this includes understanding the experiences of Headteachers and other members of schools' Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in terms of recruitment, information received for programme set-up and delivery, and engagement with the programme. We are therefore inviting you to fill out this survey on these topics. This survey will take **approximately 15 minutes** to complete.

Mindful of the current circumstances, we wish to facilitate your participation in the survey in any way we can. The survey will remain open for a period of four weeks, and we will only remind you once about its completion, and only if we haven't heard from you by the middle of April.

Survey responses will be confidential. We will only keep track of participating schools to record the number of responses from each institution. The results of this survey will be used alongside other data collected in this evaluation to understand how NELI has been implemented.

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<sup>8</sup> For more information see Feinerer, I. & Hornik, K. (2018). tm: Text Mining Package (R package version 0.7-6). Retrieved from <https://cran.rproject.org/web/package=tm>.

If you have any questions about this survey, or would like to enquire about ethical procedures please contact the RAND Europe team leading the evaluation study on [NELLevaluation@randeurope.org](mailto:NELLevaluation@randeurope.org).

For information about how we will use and store your information please click 'next' below to read the privacy notice.

## Teachers and TAs

Your school is one of approximately 6,650 in England taking part in the Department of Education (DfE) reception early language programme to deliver the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) in the academic year 2020 to 2021. The overarching objective of the programme is to provide evidence-based, targeted early language support to reception children to address the impact of time out of formal early education, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. DfE, working with the EEF and their delivery partners, provides training, programme resources and ongoing support for delivery to participating schools.

RAND Europe has been commissioned by the EEF to conduct an independent evaluation of the programme. The EEF is an independent charity that funds research into 'what works' for improving educational practice.

We understand that during this period, the main priority of your school is the wellbeing of pupils, staff and wider school community. We also understand that at this time, you will have many competing personal and professional priorities to manage.

At the same time, it remains important to understand how NELI (and other similar educational programmes) can be made effectively available to schools. For the evaluation of the NELI programme, this includes understanding the experiences of teachers and TAs with the online NELI training, ongoing support and delivering language and literacy teaching within the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. We are therefore inviting you to fill out this survey on these topics. This survey will take **approximately 15 minutes** to complete.

Mindful of the current circumstances, we wish to facilitate your participation in the survey in any way we can. The survey will remain open for a period of four weeks, and we will only remind you once about its completion, and only if we haven't heard from you by the middle of April.

Survey responses will be confidential. We will only keep track of participating schools to record the number of responses from each institution. The results of this survey will be used alongside other data collected in this evaluation to understand how NELI has been implemented.

If you have any questions about this survey, or would like to enquire about ethical procedures please contact the RAND Europe team leading the evaluation study on [NELLevaluation@randeurope.org](mailto:NELLevaluation@randeurope.org).

For information about how we will use and store your information please click 'the arrow' to read the privacy notice

## Appendix E: Survey Privacy Notice

RAND Europe is collecting data on the implementation of the NELI scale-up on the basis of legitimate interest as we have been awarded a grant by the Education Endowment Foundation to evaluate this scale-up and you have agreed to take part in this survey. Your contact details have been passed to us by the EEF in line with their privacy notice.

Accent has been contracted by RAND Europe to administer all surveys that form part of this evaluation, including this one. Your survey responses will be collected by Accent on behalf of RAND Europe, and the data that you provide in this survey will be subsequently passed to RAND Europe for analysis as part of the evaluation of the NELI scale-up. Your name and contact details will not be passed to RAND Europe along with your responses, but because the survey will ask you to provide the name of your school and your role in the school we will treat your responses as personal data.

RAND Europe will maintain this data in confidence and use it only for the purpose of evaluating the NELI scale-up. The data will be stored securely on RAND Europe's data servers for the duration of the evaluation of the NELI scale-up. To allow us time to analyse the data collected and report the results of the evaluation, this period will extend beyond your school's participation in the programme. We will keep your data for one year after the end of the evaluation, which is due to end in December 2021. This means that we will keep your data until December 2022.

Completion of this survey is entirely voluntary, meaning that you do not have to participate if you do not want to and can stop answering the survey questions at any time. Your responses will be used to identify common themes and trends and individual schools will not be identified in this context. Any open text response will be aggregated by theme before being reported. Your responses will not be made available to your employer.

Please do not provide any sensitive data in this survey, such as your political persuasion. If sensitive data is provided in the survey, RAND Europe will delete it before analysis.

As a data subject you have the right to restrict or object to processing. You also have the right to make a subject access request to see all the information held about you and to ask us to rectify any information that is inaccurate. To exercise any of these rights, or have any questions about how your data will be used, please contact the RAND Europe data protection officer ([redpo@randeurope.org](mailto:redpo@randeurope.org)) quoting "21036 NELI Evaluation" in the subject line. You may also contact the UK Information Commissioner's Office if you have any concerns about our use of your data at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns/>.

## **Appendix F: Interview Privacy Notice**

### **About the project, who we are and what data we collect**

The accompanying information sheets outline information about the project. This privacy notice outlines how your data will be used as part of the project.

RAND Europe Community Interest Company is a not-for-profit research organisation registered in the UK conducting independent research to inform policy.

In this project we will collect your name, email and telephone number.

### **Why are we collecting it?**

We are collecting your data in order to arrange your participation in a telephone interview. These interviews make up part of the research activity being undertaken to evaluate the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) scale-up.

### **What is the legal basis for processing your data?**

We are using your data on the basis of our legitimate interests. Your data is collected and processed solely to facilitate your voluntary contribution to the project. The data is not excessive and will be used for the purposes of contacting you to arrange your participation in the interview, as required to meet the project goals. These project goals have been explained to you and will lead to a wider public benefit through our work. The data is necessary for the purpose of the project, as without we would be unable to undertake the interview or recognise your contribution. We also judge that there is very limited scope for harm to you as appropriate data handling safeguards have been put in place. As such the approach to processing balances our legitimate interests against your interests, rights and freedoms.

### **What do we use the data for?**

We will use your data to contact you. We will use a random unique ID to attribute any contribution of yours that is used in our report, not your name.

### **How do we share the data, and how do we keep your data secure?**

We will keep all data safe on our secure servers. We will not share your data with any third parties.

### **How long do we keep your data?**

Your data will be deleted within 12 months of the end of the project (end of project estimated December 2021).

### **What choices do you have in our use of your data?**

You may contact us to request the deletion of your personal data.

### What are your rights?

RAND Europe operates in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and EU law including GDPR. You are provided with certain rights that you may have the right to exercise through us. In summary those rights are:

- To access, correct or erase your data. Your right to erase your name in relation to any attribution shall expire after it has been submitted for publication.
- To object to the processing of your data. Your right to object to processing of your name in relation to any attribution shall expire after it has been submitted for publication.
- To request that our processing of your data is restricted. Your right to restrict processing of your name in relation to any attribution shall expire after it has been submitted for publication.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights please contact the RAND Europe Data Protection Officer by email at [REDPO@randeurope.org](mailto:REDPO@randeurope.org) or in writing to Data Protection Officer, RAND Europe, Westbrook Centre, Milton Road, Cambridge, CB4 1YG, UK.

### How do you contact us?

You can contact us by email at [nelievaluation@randeurope.org](mailto:nelievaluation@randeurope.org).

## Appendix G: Topic Guide for NELI Mentors

### Purpose of the interview

This interview is being conducted to inform the NELI Scale-Up evaluation being carried out by RAND Europe. We would like to hear about your experience as a mentor in delivering training and ongoing support to teaching assistants, teachers, and NELI school leads as part of the NELI Scale-Up and your thoughts about which parts of the mentoring programme are working well, and any suggestions for improvements.

Further information about the evaluation and how we will use your information will be shared in an information sheet and privacy notice ahead of the interview.

### Role and background

1. Could you please describe your professional background? Have you worked in education before?
2. Were you involved at all (as a mentor or in another capacity) the previous NELI trial? What was your role then?
3. Who is your current employer in your role as a mentor?

### Training for mentors

4. Did you attend any training to become a mentor?
  - *Who offered this training?*
  - *What did the training cover?*
  - *Are there any additional topics or issues you think should be added to the mentoring training?*
  - *What was the most useful thing about this training in preparing you to become a mentor? What was the least useful?*
5. Apart from this training [if any], have you received other kinds of support in your role as a mentor from any of the delivery partners – Oxford University, Elklan, or other partners?
  - *Support at start and during the training?*

### About the role

6. What is the purpose of your role as a mentor?
7. Please describe your typical day as a mentor as part of the NELI training course.
8. What is your workload as a mentor? (*how many hours a day, the volume of questions; number of schools you are assigned to etc*).
  - *How do you manage your workload as a mentor?*
9. What are the most common issues that you have been asked to support school staff with so far in your role as a mentor?
  - *How do you address these issues?*

### School experiences with the training

*These questions are about the training for school staff who will deliver NELI*

10. What sort of feedback have you received from school staff about the training?

11. From your experience on the NELI Scale-up so far, how would you describe the engagement of school staff with NELI training?
  - *Have school staff completed various aspects of the training on time?*
  - *Do school staff interact with online content?*
  - *Do school staff seem interested in the topics being covered in the training?*
12. Have you observed any differences in engagement depending on the role of school staff (i.e. Teachers, TAs, NELI leads)?
  - *Has this engagement changed over the course of the training?*
13. Which factors have enabled/prevented schools staff engagement with the training?
14. How (if at all) could the training be improved to more effectively prepare school staff to deliver the NELI intervention?
15. To what extent, if any, were Oxford or other delivery partners (i.e. DfE, Elklan) involved during the training (light/heavy touch; one-off tasks or consistent involvement)?

*The following questions are about the mentors involved in the training in the previous NELI trial*

16. Based on your experience in delivering training in the previous NELI trial, have you observed differences in the engagement of school staff with the training in the NELI Scale-up, compared to the level of engagement of school staff in the previous NELI trial? (more/less engaged?)
17. If yes, why do you think school staff engagement in the NELI scale-up is different? Is there anything else you want to tell us about how the NELI scale-up training process is structured, organised and managed compared to the training in the previous NELI trial?

### **Changes to training delivered to schools**

18. We understand that training for school staff for the scale up started in November 2020. Have any changes been made to the training since that time?
  - *If yes, what were these changes?*
  - *What prompted these changes to take place?*
19. If you worked in the previous NELI trial, do you recall any concerns in respect of the training offered to school staff delivering NELI? If so, to what extent do you think these concerns have been addressed in the training being offered as part of the NELI Scale up?
20. In what ways (if at all) do you think that the training provided to school staff to deliver the NELI intervention could be improved?

### **Ongoing support to schools during delivery**

21. What sort of ongoing support do you offer to school staff following NELI training?
22. In what ways (if at all) do you think that the ongoing support provided to school staff to deliver the NELI intervention could be improved?
23. From your experience of the NELI scale-up so far, how would you describe the engagement of school staff with the on-going support?

### **Contact between and management of mentors**

24. How often (if at all) are you in contact with the other mentors?
25. To what extent do you share experiences in how you provide support to schools?
26. Can you tell us how the team of mentors are managed?

## Closing

Are there any other aspects of your role as a mentor or your experience to date of interacting with schools that you would like to mention?

# Appendix H: NELI Theory of Change

## NELI scale-up logic model, draft version 3.0 (dated: 12/02/2021)

