

Mapping review of professional development for educators working with children aged 0-2 years: Call for proposals

Background

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is commissioning a team to map the availability of professional development programmes and structured practice support used by Early Years Educators in England.

Specifically, the review should map the professional development landscape for educators working with children aged 0-2 years, encompassing both:

- publicly available programmes
- and less visible forms of structured professional learning delivered:
 - within individual settings
 - across provider groups and networks
 - through membership organisations and childminder networks
 - and via local systems and sector-wide support arrangements.

This may include:

- induction programmes
- in-house training
- Coaching
- mentoring and support with practice
- more packaged programmes.

This work will help to inform EEF grant-making by providing information about professional development that settings are using to support children's educational and developmental outcomes.

EEF Funding Rounds

The EEF regularly launches funding rounds, where programme developers apply to have their programme funded by the EEF and to have an evaluation of their programme commissioned.

These evaluations generate evidence on the impact of programmes on children's outcomes, with a particular focus on children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Each EEF funding round focuses on specific themes that have been identified as priority areas on the EEF's research agenda. Programme providers who have applied for previous funding

rounds include charities, education settings, local authorities, for-profit organisations and academic teams from universities.

Additionally, the EEF funds evaluations comparing the relative effectiveness of different approaches that settings or individual teachers may choose to take.

For example, one previous **setting choices evaluation** compared outcomes in settings who delivered different approaches to interactive book reading. (A responsive/child-led approach compared to a staff pre-planned approach.)

Further information about the EEF's funding rounds can be found in our **Funding FAQs**.

This professional development review

This work extends beyond the EEF's core remit and forms part of a specific project with the Department for Education. It aims to strengthen our understanding of the existing evidence and the practice of educators working with children aged 0-2, generating further evidence to support the sector.

It responds to a recognised gap in the evidence and practice landscape for educators working with babies and toddlers.

The review will help the EEF understand:

- the availability of baby and toddler-specific professional development
- the scale and nature of take-up,
- how provision of professional development varies across setting types,
- and the extent to which existing professional development programmes and structured support appears aligned with features of **effective professional development**.

The findings will inform future EEF evidence generation, programme development, and grant-making decisions. They will also provide the wider sector with a clearer picture of the professional development landscape for those working with children under two.

Scope and research questions

The purpose of this work is to identify professional development and structured practice support used in early years settings in England to support the learning, development, and care of babies and toddlers aged 0-2.

We are therefore interested in professional development used by maintained nurseries, Private, Voluntary and Independent settings (PVIs), childminders and groups or networks of providers, including induction programmes, in-house training, coaching, mentoring and practice-based support, as well as more packaged programmes.

We welcome proposals that include structured engagement with educators and setting leaders to understand demand for Under 2s professional development.

This should include both:

- content priorities (such as the topics, practices, and areas of knowledge educators want support with)
- design preferences (such as format, flexibility, timing, mode of delivery, implementation support, cost, and constraints on participation)

We are particularly interested in identifying the areas where educators and setting leaders report the greatest professional development needs and any apparent mismatch between workforce demand and currently available provision.

Professional development within scope is likely to include:

- structured professional development programmes
- training with implementation support
- coaching and mentoring
- induction packages
- and other forms of sustained support intended to improve educators' knowledge, skills, or practice when working with children aged 0 to 2.

We are interested in the prevalence of educators' access to single session events, standalone webinars or resources provided without accompanying training or implementation support. However, these forms do not need to be explored in depth as it is unlikely to be a focus of our grant making.

Additionally, we expect that:

- programmes that are **not** delivered to educators (such as home learning environment programmes delivered to parents)
- programmes only for educators working with children older than 2 years
- programmes for external specialist practitioners (for example, clinical psychologists or infant health practitioners)

would be **out of scope** for this piece of work.

The term 'programme' is used here to refer to packages of support designed to develop the knowledge, skills and practice of staff in early years settings with the aim of improving children's outcomes. This will usually take the form of a professional development offer supporting educators to adopt behaviour changes or to deliver activities with children that will support their learning and development outcomes.

We are interested in understanding educators' professional development needs and preferences, alongside what is externally or internally available for educators to take part in or purchase. Indicative research questions include:

- What programmes, structured support and professional development activities are currently available to educators working with babies and toddlers (0-2 years) in England, and how do these vary by setting type, target audience, cost and delivery model?
 - In particular, what provision is available to educator's supporting babies and toddlers experiencing socio-economic disadvantage?
- What topics, practices and areas of knowledge do these programmes and professional development packages cover? How are they intended to improve educator practice and outcomes for children aged 0-2 years, including those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?
- How widespread is the use of these programmes and approaches, and how does availability vary by setting type? Additionally, to what extent do they reach settings serving higher proportions of children experiencing socio-economic disadvantage?
- How does the availability, use and accessibility of professional development vary across the early years sector? Including between areas and communities with different levels of socio-economic disadvantage.
- What factors influence educators' and settings' engagement with professional development? Including preferences, priorities and constraints. Are there particular barriers for those working in more disadvantaged communities?
- How is internal professional development designed, delivered and embedded within PVI settings or childminder networks?
 - Including professional development programmes, induction processes, ongoing professional learning, supervision and processes for reviewing and updating training over time.
 - How, if at all, is this provision adapted for educators supporting children facing socio-economic disadvantage?
- What are the professional development needs of educators and setting leaders working with children aged 0-2 years, including:
 - the highest priority areas of practice for improving outcomes for children, particularly those experiencing disadvantage; and
 - the content and design features and how these vary by setting type, role organisational context and the communities they serve.
 - where there appear to be gaps or mismatches between educators' and leaders' reported professional development needs and the provision currently available to them.

We are particularly keen to understand the availability and use of professional development that has the potential to improve the quality of early education and outcomes for children aged

0-2 years, particularly those facing socio-economic disadvantage. Relevant areas may include:

- Responsive interactions and relationships with babies and toddlers
- Communication and language, and other areas of learning and development for educators working with children aged 0-2
- Supporting children's development through routines, play, and everyday interactions
- The environment within, and organisation of staffing of, baby and toddler rooms
- Key person practice, transitions, and continuity of care
- Working with families and external professionals to support children's development
- Supporting children with additional needs
- Foundational care routines where these are directly linked to learning, development, relationships, or practice quality.
- Leadership and management of educators working with children aged 0-2 years.

Proposals should also explain how they will identify educator-led priorities that may not be captured in this initial list.

Method

We are open to different approaches to identifying these programmes and answering the research questions. We anticipate that the work will include a combination of desk-based research and direct engagement with early years educators (e.g. through interviews and surveys) across a range of early years settings providing care and education for babies and toddlers (0-2 years).

Proposals should explain how they will identify educator and leader priorities, compare these with existing provision, and synthesise evidence on any apparent gaps between workforce demand and available support. Proposals should also explain how they will assess, at a high level, the extent to which identified provision appears aligned with evidence-informed features of effective professional development. Inclusion of a dedicated strand to explore internal professional development across medium and large groups of settings may be required comprising direct engagement with relevant organisational leads such as those responsible for training, curriculum, operations or early years practice.

Outputs of the work are likely to include a summary report and a log of the programmes and professional development approaches identified. The report should include a synthesis of emerging evidence, programme, practice, and workforce development gaps identified through the review, including any mismatch between workforce demand and available provision. It should also include a high-level assessment of the extent to which identified provision appears aligned with evidence-informed features of effective professional development. We are open to suggestions on the most appropriate output for presenting findings. We hope to publish the product of this work if it is of high quality.

Early years settings are diverse and many staff in early years settings have not previously engaged with research projects. Where proposals involve engaging with staff in early years settings, we would expect accessibility and representativeness to have been carefully considered.

Research teams should indicate the numbers of settings or educators they would plan to reach and how they would ensure the same reflects the diversity of settings, roles and contexts within the sector.

Terminology will also need to be carefully considered as part of communications with stakeholders. For example, staff in early years settings may not refer to professional development and other support packages they engage with as ‘programmes’.

Budget for similar research projects

We anticipate that most proposals would suggest budgets in the range of £30,000 to £40,000 dependent on the activities proposed to answer the research questions. Proposed budgets should be clearly justified and value for money will be one of the key criteria assessed in the review of proposals. If proposing a budget at the higher end of the range provided here, teams should make sure that the rationale for this is well justified.

What does a successful proposal look like?

Teams should submit a research proposal, which will:

- Indicate how the **research questions** will be answered by the design.
- Involve a **strong team** with prior experience of similar research, including both excellent methodological expertise as well as prior research and/or practical expertise related to the areas being investigated particularly early years, under 2s and socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Please include full CVs of proposed team members, highlighting relevant expertise.
- Provide a **detailed description of the research project**. This should include:
 - A detailed description of the methodology used.
 - Any available background scoping work that supports your assessment of the identified methodology.
- Provide clear **project management plan** for completing the research in achievable timelines, including:
 - An assessment of risks to the completion of the research and how they will be mitigated.
 - Confirmation that members of the proposed team have the capacity and availability to complete the research.
 - A timeline which includes key touchpoints at which the team will brief EEF on emerging themes/findings, as well as a presentation of findings before a final written output.

- Represent **good value for money**. All applications must attach a budget with reasonable disaggregation across cost categories. We recommend using the EEF's **Budget Template** but budgets can be submitted in other formats.
- Be around **2,500 words long**, excluding references (indicative length, the focus should be on quality rather than quantity).

We have set out anticipated timelines for each stage of the project below. These timelines form an important part a successful proposal as they reflect the overall schedule and the points at which outputs are needed to inform subsequent work, including future EEF grant-making decisions. Applicants should therefore demonstrate how they can deliver within these timeframes or identify any aspects of the schedule that may be challenging and explain how these will be mitigated.

What criteria will be used to award funding?

The research proposals will be scored by the EEF under the following criteria.

- 1) Capability and relevant experience of core project team (35%)
 - The proposed team demonstrates experience conducting research using comparable methodologies.
 - The proposed team demonstrates understanding of the evidence/existing research, context and expertise that are relevant to the research.
- 2) Methodology and approach (50%)
 - The proposed methodology is well defined, appropriate for answering the research questions and will provide high-quality evidence.
 - The proposal includes a clear and credible plan for delivering the research within the required timescales, including appropriate risk identification and mitigation.
 - The proposal describes the research team's approach to research ethics and data protection, including but not limited to GDPR compliance and specifying legal bases for processing personal and special category data.
- 3) Value for money (15%)
 - Detailed cost of your proposal and how this demonstrates value for money.

HOW TO APPLY?

Interested applicants should submit their research proposals and budgets via our **proposal form**.

Please direct all other questions and clarifications to **natasha.guy@eefoundation.org.uk** by **Monday 7th September 2026**.

TIMELINE

Deadline for proposals	7th September 2026
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Selected applicants notified	18th September 2026
Deadline for data analysis and presentation of findings	9 th December 2026
Full report draft submitted to the EEF for review	18 th January 2027
Anticipated funding round seeking programmes for educators working with children aged 0-2	Mid-January – Mid March 2027